

Bonus

[*An ongoing series of musings that the treadmill is not merely a prison rehabilitation device meant to cause suffering and learning from sweat to mill corn or pump water as a bonus.]

In a prior lifetime, I was in love with mathematics, the theorems, the cosigns, the geometry, all leading to progress. Or maybe I was an accountant, fascinated by the rhythm of addition and division, subtraction, and multiplication, helping economies to grow. All that speculation aside, I do know I enjoy breaking down my runs into logical time segments, be it a track workout, a tempo run, or a treadmill run.

Following my running Boston this year, running on the treadmill twice a week has been part of the recovery. The two runs in the first week were less than 30 minutes. In fact, they were 28:00 each. Just easy jogging, assisting the post-marathon recovery. Since that first week, the twice a week treadmill endeavors have increased by four minutes each week. Next week, I'll be at hour on the treadmill. Tuesday's treadmill run is strictly speed changes every 4:00; the Thursday mill run is a distinct set.

Why increase in four minute increments? Why not? Too many of us self-impose too many meaningless rules in what we do. Can't have dessert until you've eaten dinner. Never understood that one. Gotta run long and slow to prepare for a marathon. I'm fairly certain that one doesn't work for every running at every age. Don't run on ice and don't run in high heat. I respect those two thoughts.

During the fall and spring, I have no real use for the treadmill. The weather is sufficiently temperate. No reason to avoid enjoying a brisk fall day, a pleasant spring morning, or flip those possibilities. I avoid the day in and day out heat and humidity of summer and the seemingly endless subfreezing, windy days of winter.

One running season, I alternated my two weekly treadmill runs in starting at one minute at one speed, raising the speed by one tenth and the time at that speed an additional minute more than running at the prior speed. So, 4.0 miles per hour for 1:00 moved into 4.1 mph for 2:00, and so forth. 12 weeks later, I'd memorized the number of increases to get to just under or just over one hour, the mileage I'd earn depending on when I stopped.

The Tour de France is my daily viewing pleasure every July. I jog on the mill while the Peloton moves swiftly and colorfully through the French countryside and mountain climbs. I don't run a faster pace but I am engrossed. In December, College

football bowl games entertain me during my treadmill jaunts. Those bowl games are televised for my personal viewing while I sweat through a frigid day.

The treadmill is rarely used on consecutive days, unless it is a debilitating heat wave pouring through our region in the summer, and likewise, unless a winter event visits us, depositing snow and ice. No reason to tempt fate when fate is busy elsewhere. Boredom in the form of treadmill running can only be taken so far.

My treadmill – did I mention I own my treadmill – has been my secret weapon for my running in my late 50's and now early 60's. For me, I've adapted to doing 80-percent of my runs at an easy pace, leaving speed for the remainder of the weekly runs. I've melded that percentage into my own version of cross training which is my treadmill.

I've embraced slowing my pace when I run on the treadmill, for the same reasons I've embraced running really, really easy on the days I am supposed to run really, really easy. Running slowly on the treadmill forces recovery, allowing me to run a faster clip the next day. Running fast when recovered pushes open the envelope. The treadmill is part of that plan.

July of 2015, I had an unbelievably bad cold. Too hot and humid to run comfortably outside, I dragged my carcass up the stairs, plugged in the cord, stepped onto the belt, pushed the start button, selected a walk/run pace, and didn't feel too bad. Slowly increasing the pace, I managed to stay on the treadmill for an hour. Dragging myself down the stairs, I took an exceptionally long and hot shower. It does help to have a tankless water heater in a state not lacking for water. I did that routine for a week.

Unlike running on the mill at a gym, where you suspect someone is keeping track of your pace, the joy of treadmill running in your own house is that you know no one is there to watch you. Once you accept that fact, the realization that you can run slowly or as fast as your feet can move on the belt is refreshing. You aren't left behind by faster runners and you don't have to force your pace to keep up.

Today, being the second treadmill run of my week, I tinkered with the time at each selected pace. First, 3:00 for each of the first seven speeds, followed by 5:00 for each of the final seven speeds. This is the 56-minute week. What does it get me? don't know yet. What I do know is a 5km race happens this weekend. And following that week in 2015, training paces picked up and race results improved.

And, most importantly, I was and remain healthy. Ponder that fact the next time you push your easy run just because you can. Runners like me may be gaining and you don't even know it.

Yet.

