

Watch your Gauges!

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All the training is now done; you've built the engine up over the last 3-4 months through regular long runs. Over the last month you've hardened the chassis for the rigors of the trail; strengthened and conditioned muscles through specific running workouts and bodyweight exercises and you've even added the icing on the cake by pushing up your Lactate Threshold just that bit more via some faster and more intense workouts. You're ready to Run the Great Whitsunday Trail!

All that's left now is to execute the race on the day and experience the satisfying rewards of achieved goals and a job well done. All you have to do is go out and run and it will just happen right?

Unfortunately it doesn't work this way, and in my long distance running career I've seen, and experienced myself, the undoing of month and months of good training by reckless race execution. This is usually due to not paying respect to the conditions of the day, or the demands of the course and the bodily requirements to get through a race. So if I have one motto for you to take into the race, it's 'Watch your Gauges'!

The Engine Temperature

An event in North Queensland at the end of September? What conditions come to mind? Yes, of course, it's going to be hot and humid. There could even be rain but the conditions aren't going to be easy under the canopy of the rainforest. It's important to factor this into your race plan, not just when you start to feel it, but from the very beginning. Your core body temperature must be managed.

Running near threshold intensity will send that engine temperature up, and if you couple that with the humidity, you will soon overheat and it will be a slow and lonely limp home. So be wise, don't race from the start above your expectations or what your training allows. Monitor your heart rate, your breathing rate and your sweat loss. If you are unable to talk to a fellow competitor in sentences, if you are feeling very huffy and puffy, even on the flats, you are no doubt working too hard.

The Water Level

The heat and humidity is going to have an impact on your sweat rate – you will all finish drenched and drained and will be inevitably in some state of dehydration by the end. It's important to manage this as best as we can en route. While we can never really replenish as much liquid as we lose, we can minimise the impact this has on our performance by keeping liquids coming in on a frequent basis. As a rule, I would be attempting to consume at least 600ml to 1L of water per hour of running, done by drinking moderate amounts often.

If you intend to be out on the trail a long time between aid stations, a small hydration pace, some hand held bottles or the like is recommended.

The other important consideration is considering electrolyte input to your hydration plan. While there is debate over the role of salt plays, or lack of, in the onset of cramping, I've always believed that for proper muscle functioning, electrolyte is crucial. Adding some salt and essential minerals such as potassium and magnesium can't hurt.

The Fuel Tank

We are talking nutrition here folks, and as important as the previous two gauges on race day performance. Race day nutrition should be kept simple with the motto of 'little bits often'. Whether you're a whippet racing over the course of those that are planning to be out on the trail longer, fuelling of some sort is essential.

The body has enough stored glycogen for roughly 2hrs of energy – this differs of course, and burns at different rates in all of us. We need to keep 'topping up the tank' in order to feel sustained and energised from the start to the finish. I recommend a breakfast at least 2h before the start containing a mix of complex carbohydrates such as oats, cereal or toast which will fill the tank, adding to the days of stored glycogen to give us a great baseload.

As we exert ourselves, the tank will gradually drain. Efforts on hills, or working out of your sustainable zone will increase the burn rate but as a general rule, I recommend consuming around your bodyweight in carbohydrate grams per hour. What that actually means you digest is up to you. Could be gels, bars or fruit for example.

Post race, don't forget to replenish too! See you on race day!

