

Fleet street

Road racers in high gear

By Tom Henderson
staff writer

When many of us were teens, we raced through the streets in GTOs, Mustangs and souped-up Chevs. We're still racing through the streets, but we're doing it now in Nikes, Reeboks and Pumas.

Michigan is one of the hotbeds of road racing, lagging behind only a few places such as Boston, Eugene, Ore., and Boulder, Colo.

The state has plenty to offer. The geography and population of southeastern Michigan assure frequent, flat, and easy courses near Detroit. Outstate, such scenic places as Ludington, Traverse City and Munising in the Upper Peninsula give the running tourist an opportunity to combine sport and vacation.

Avid road racers from Michigan can be found at every big race in the country. Nearly 300 from the state ran the Boston Marathon, for example, and even at the small half-marathon in Key West this past winter (total field of 350), there were 13 runners from Michigan.

You may not be so avid as to travel by jet to find a race. You may not think you're accomplished enough as a runner to go to any race, even one just around the block. If so, think again. Reed-thin racing machines, many of whom starred in high school or college, can be found in the front lines of even the tiniest runs. But lining up behind them, at big and small races, alike, are slower, older, heavier runners, joggers and walkers.

For some, running is an extension of a lifetime of competition; for others it's a way of checking their progress at getting in shape; for others it is the fun part of a regular exercise regimen, the dessert to the main course of daily, solitary running; for others it is a way to meet new friends or to people watch.

Here are some upcoming local and state runs you might consider:

MAY 19 — 13th annual Elias Brothers 10K, 9 a.m. Start and finish at the Pontiac Silverdome, with the awards ceremony and gobs of food in the Main Event Lounge. One of the best prize structures in local running. Seven cash prizes in each of the men's and women's divisions with a total purse of \$5,000. Also, TVs to go-go winners and Cello running watches to 51 age-group placers. Many random prizes as well. Register at north gate of Silverdome on race day for \$5.

MAY 17 — 10th annual Chal run. Jewish Community Center in West Bloomfield. One mile starts at 8 a.m. with three, six, nine, 12- and 18-milers starting at 8:30, \$10 by May 6, \$12 after. Children under 12, \$5. For information, call Mary Blanke at 681-1000, Ext. 301.

MAY 23 — 14th annual Dexter-Ann Arbor run. Half-marathon and 10K. One of the biggest and best known runs in the state. Run along scenic Huron River and finish to beer and dancing in a big downtown Ann Arbor street party. For an application, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to: Dexter-Ann Arbor Run, 312 Wilton, Ann Arbor 48103.

MAY 24 — Run for Freedom. One-, three- and five-mile runs sponsored by the Livonia YMCA. Register at the Y. Pre-registration deadline is May 21. Run fee is \$5 and the other runs are \$5. Costs after deadline are \$7 and \$9, respectively. Three-miler starts at 9:30 a.m., one-miler at 9:40 and five-miler at 10. Call 261-2161 for information.

MAY 25 — Memorial Day 10K and one-mile runs sponsored by the Meadow Brook Health Enhancement Institute. Call 373-9131 for information.

MAY 25 — High Tech Run in Auburn Hills. 5K, 10K and one-mile fun run. \$5 for the mile, \$7 for the other runs by May 15, \$9 after. Call 373-7737 for information.

JUNE 6 — Cranbrook 5K and 10K runs in Bloomfield Hills. Call 645-3225 for information.

JUNE 19 — Downriver Treadmill Race. Livonia native Doug Kuris won this five-mile in a field of 3,400 last year. Begun in 1983 by Riverside Hospital in Trenton as a way of publicizing health and giving patients in cardiac rehabilitation a goal, the run is now one of the best in the state. 7:30 p.m. start, with plenty of beer and food at the finish line. Downtown Trenton is closed off, and a live band cranks out tunes till midnight. Call Georgianne Palmer at 875-2220 for information. \$5 before June 14, \$6 for seniors, \$9 and \$8 after.

JUNE 21 — 8th annual Plymouth YMCA runs. One mile, 5K and 10K. Reg-

ister at the Y, with deadline of 5 p.m. June 18. \$5 for one mile, \$9 for 5K and \$10 for 10K. After deadline, \$6 and \$10, respectively.

JULY 12 — Back to Birmingham run. 10K and two-miler. Call 544-9099 during the evenings for information.

AUG. 1 — Redford Roadrunner Classic. The time is right for dancing in the streets! This is one of the great street parties in state racing. The five-mile run begins at 8:30 p.m. with a one-mile fun run at 6. Immediately following the runs — the start and finish are at Veterans' Park in Livonia next to the YMCA — come the food, beer, music and dancing. Because the course is flat, a lot of wheelchair racers come, and it's a kick to see them boogieing in their chairs on the dance floor. \$7 before July 24, \$8 after. T-shirts — they're always classics — are \$4 extra. Not to be missed. For information or an entry, call 689-2231 or 769-5016.

Some tips on running

So, you've put on a few pounds and it's about time to launch the battle of the bulge. Or, maybe your waistline is just fine, but you don't get much exercise, and you're worried about your arteries filling up with gunk and your heart getting soft.

Then running could be for you. It's a wonderful cardiovascular workout and not many forms of exercise burn off as many calories (100-150 calories a mile).

But running isn't as easy as it was when you were a kid, years and pounds ago. You've got to ease into it, both in distance and in speed. Here are some tips:

- Run slowly enough so that it isn't a huge struggle to keep going. If it's too much work, you'll do it a few times and never do it again. Whenever the topic comes up you'll say: "I hate running."

This may seem impossible at first, but the goal should be to be able to talk and run at the same time. Most good runners do many of their training runs at such a comfortable pace, and it's a good rule for novices to keep in mind. If it's all you can do to suck in air and blow it out as fast as you can, slow down a bit. Find a pace where your eyes aren't bulging and your heart isn't pounding, and the wheezing of your lungs isn't scaring small animals and little children for miles around.

- Don't have big goals to start. You might make it through a three-mile run your first time out the door, but chances are it'll give you such a bad impression of running that it will be easy to rationalize going back to couch-potato status. Run a block and walk a block, walk a block and run a block. Take a day off, then go out and try going for two blocks. Run slowly. Soon, you'll be able to do a mile and you'll be on your way.

- Take a watch out with you and learn to monitor your pulse rate. You can find a pulse beat at your wrists or, more easily, under

your chin. Run for a while, then stop, find your pulse, then count how many times it beats in a 10-second span. Multiply by six and that's your heart rate.

If your heart rate is too high, your run will be counterproductive. The point is to run aerobically, which means that you are taking in as much oxygen as you are burning. If you run too fast, you're running anaerobically, which means you are burning more oxygen than you are taking in. This is called oxygen debt. Get into too much debt and it'll feel as if your heart and lungs are being repossessed.

(Aerobics classes are misnamed. They should be called anaerobic classes.)

Training too fast is the most common mistake, even for top-notch runners. Some rules of thumb: If you are in very good condition, a peak of 150 beats a minute is plenty for most training runs. Track work and races will require a higher pulse rate, but that's a subject that won't concern novices for at least the first year. If you're in good shape, a limit of 140 will do. If you're out of shape, limits of 130 or even 120 may be high enough.

Don't be discouraged at how easily your heart zooms, or how slowly you have to run to keep it from zooming. As you get into shape, you'll be able to run faster and faster without your pulse increasing past the limit.

And don't be discouraged by how far it seems you'll have to improve to run a 10K race (6.2 miles) or even, heaven forbid, a marathon (26.2 miles). Ninety-nine percent of the people running marathons don't come from a track or cross-country background. They once walked out the door, out of shape and afraid, and trudged back through it a little while later, wondering why in the world they had gone out the door in the first place. Soon, they were hooked.

Tom Henderson



STEVE FECHT/staff photographer

Randy Step and Donna Swanson of the Redford Roadrunners take advantage of a summertime day for a run in Hines Park. The

two help organize the Roadrunner Classic, a five-mile race and party scheduled for Aug. 1.

Good shoes pay off in the long run

What will you need to take up the sport of running? Not much at this time of year. Next fall and winter you can worry about such things as Gore-Tex suits, polypropylene tops and nylon tights, all of which add substantially to your running budget.

The most expensive item, and by far the most important, is a pair of shoes. Shoes can be bought most cheaply at the big chain stores in the malls. Though shoes are shoes wherever you buy them, service isn't.

Running shoes have gone high tech and vary greatly in characteristics and purposes from shoe to shoe and line to line. Do you need a hard-lasted shoe, or one that is slip-lasted? Do you need a curve last or a straight last? Do you pronate or supinate? Which do you need most, motion control or cushioning? Are you doing low mileage or high mileage? Are you going to be racing a lot, or plodding along?

A LOT of those terms probably mean nothing to you. Unfortunately, they also mean nothing to many of the persons working in the chain stores.

Once I went into a chain store and asked if they had running watches. The salesperson assured me they did, then returned with some half-pound moonroosters. I was supposed to strap to my waist.

A friend from Ypsilanti tells the story of the one time he went into a chain store and told the salesperson he was a pronator. She looked at him as if he had told her he was a child molester, then admitted she had no idea what he was talking about.

("Pronation" is a term applied to landing on the outside of the foot and rolling excessively to the inside of the foot, a mechanical problem that can be corrected with a specifically designed shoe.)

RUNNING SHOES have changed so drastically in recent years, and are so specific to individual needs, that only an expert can fit you with a shoe you'll need. Usually, that means a fellow runner. Fortunately, there are several stores nearby that are owned by members of the running community and staffed by runners.

The Total Runner on Northwestern Highway in South-

field is owned by Dave Howell, an avid runner. Racquet's Unlimited at Newburgh and Five Mile in Livonia is owned by Ben Tasich, who isn't a runner but who is active in the running community and can be found most Saturdays and Sundays at local races.

Running Fit on East Washington in Ann Arbor, which carries a full line of weight machines and equipment, too, is owned by Randy and Kathy Step. Randy and Kathy, Livonia natives, are avid marathoners (both recently ran in Boston) and triathletes who have done the famous Iron Man Triathlon in Hawaii.

Randy is also president of the Redford Roadrunners, one of Michigan's top running clubs, which puts on the Redford Roadrunner Classic in Livonia each summer.

ONCE YOU are fitted for shoes, which can run you from \$25 to \$100, depending on your needs and tastes, what will you need?

- A good pair of blister-free socks. A miracle of modern technology, somehow they prevent you from getting blisters on your run and are a bargain at \$6 to \$7.

- Nylon shorts. They don't get as heavy when you sweat or chafe as cotton shorts. They list for about \$15 but can often be bought on sale for half that.

- Men often prefer to run topless in summer months, to the envy of some women runners, who would love to work on their tans and keep cool, too. The Bay to Breakers run in San Francisco attracts more than 100,000 runners each year, including many topless women. But in traditional midwestern areas, nylon singlets are a must, also in the \$15 range.

- A running watch. It's good to take your pulse periodically, or keep track of how long you've been running. At \$30 or so, these are bargains of technology. A typical running watch has an alarm, a stopwatch and a calendar and can work to depths of 160 feet, if you forget to take yours off while diving.

- A \$2 painter's cap for keeping cool on sunny days, and a \$1 pair of painter's gloves for keeping warm and dry on rainy, cool days.

—Tom Henderson