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URBAN LEGEND

UPPING YOUR MILEAGE WHEN YOU LIVE IN INNER LONDON IS EASIER SAID THAN DONE, SAYS ONLINE EDITOR RHALOU ALLERHAND

As you may have gathered from my increasingly anxious monthly columns, last year, with the best intentions, I signed up for the 2011 Brighton Marathon. At the time, running a marathon with my colleagues seemed like a great idea – not to mention a very long way off. But with just 11 weeks to go until race day (and even less by the time this hits the newsstands), suddenly the big day looms and my pounding heart has taken up residence in my throat.

Having recently returned from a gloriously lazy holiday in Thailand, during which the most strenuous exercise I did was weight-lift cocktails, I conveniently forgot I'd agreed to run a marathon. When I returned to work, the office was a flurry of pre-race activity, with the scent of anticipation (or is that fear?) permeating the air, as the team feverishly discussed marathon plans, training tips and concerns about race-day parking. I tried to ignore them, but then one of my colleagues gently reminded me that I'd better get a move on if I wanted to make it round the course alive.

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INNER CITY PRESSURE

To get started, I printed off a 12-week training plan, stuck it on my fridge, and thought long and hard about running a marathon. Sadly, thinking really hard makes sod all difference to your ability to run 26.2 miles, so after a week of stalling for time, I started training like a woman possessed.

Running several times a week with a gradual weekly increase certainly sounds doable, but the practicalities of going any further than a few miles when you live in one of the most densely populated cities in the world is easier said than done. There just aren't big enough green spaces in London's Bethnal Green to run that far! And as a lone woman runner, the last thing I want to do is hit the mean streets of London after dark.

After a few Saturday afternoon runs, I realised that unless I repeated the circuit of my local park ten times, I was going to have to come up with an alternative plan to up my mileage. The treadmill was an obvious substitute, but being cooped up in the gym with nothing but MTV for company didn't appeal and I could only manage an hour before keeling over with boredom.

ROAD RUNNER

The only other urban running option was to man-up and take to the roads. The fact that I live in Bethnal Green but work in Hammersmith presented the ideal opportunity to test myself on the streets of London town, so I ran all the way home. But the entire breadth of the city still only amounted to nine miles, the pavement was murder on my shins and running down swathes of tourists along the way was rather trying. Arguably there are plenty of different routes across London, but my lousy sense of direction means I'm not taking my chances.

I can officially confirm that training for a marathon in the city is bloody hard. After several attempts, I gave up and hopped on a train to visit my sister in Huntingdon, where I ran like a bat out of hell around the fields near her home. Have I upped my mileage sufficiently enough to survive race day? Probably not. But I've certainly seen some new sights! Any tips on inner-city running gratefully received... ☺



Have you encountered any setbacks while training for a race? Share your problems – and solutions! – on our online forums at www.womensrunninguk.co.uk