

**Grin and bare it:** It was a rough neighbourhood, Ted started this run with all his clothes on





# Super Ted

He's the shoeless runner made famous by the book *Born to Run* and he was in the UK recently. *MR* entered the weird and wonderful running world of Barefoot Ted to find out what it really means to free your sole

## **Ted, when did all this barefoot running malarkey start for you?**

I was trying to crack the nut of running, my 40th birthday was approaching and I wanted to give it one last try to see if I could figure out how to run well. I couldn't run for more than an hour without pain and suddenly running barefoot seemed like a viable option, particularly when I cross-connected the fact that one of our most fundamental human capacities is the ability to run.

## **So you just went out and gave it a go?**

Well, I just came to the conclusion that if our ancestors could do it and the places and materials where they were running were hard, rocky and difficult, that was a clue. I found a website where a guy was writing about barefoot running, I read everything on there and then went out and ran in the style he was talking about. It was instantly obvious this was the right way.

## **What was it that was giving you grief before you lost the shoes?**

It was mostly just the feeling of being beaten up and worn down. In my case, it was in the lower back. Just a jarring experience. I made the assumption that I needed more padding but I couldn't have been further from the truth. The more we get disconnected from the way our body was actually designed to operate, the more we get into movement patterns that are unnatural and jarring.

## **So you didn't get any calf pain to start with?**

Yeah I did actually, particularly if I did more than I was ready for. But those aches and pains, they're signs of something strengthening.

There are two significantly different types of pain: pain from doing something well and your body getting better and stronger with use, and then pain that comes from things breaking down.

I think the style of running that running shoes encourage people to use is the type of movement pattern that leads to injury. In other words, you're more likely to damage your knees. I think a foot is so vulnerable and prone to

difficulties that it takes a very prescient, mindful kind of being to operate this vehicle well, but we've been very good at it.

In our bare feet or minimally clad feet, we've gotten to every nook and cranny of this planet before the invention of the wheel. I think the foot is better than we thought, than we think.

## **Not sure our feet would have lasted long barefoot on a Friday night in Romford, but we get your drift - you love feet.**

They're ok, they're good. I'd say without them it would kind of suck, because pretty much every interesting human movement pattern requires access to your legs.

I mean, you can have a compelling life without your legs or your eyes or your ears or a variety of other things. However, if you have a

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choice - for example, you were blind and you suddenly had the opportunity to see, you would probably accept this opportunity.

## **Right you are. Erm, what sort of distances do you run every week?**

Not very far, I don't even keep track of it anymore. I have two Siberian Huskies and for me, in this latest iteration of my running in the last couple of years, I really don't even care.

The way runners have become narrowed down to times, distances, speeds, races - that is new and furthermore it's unbalanced. It's not that those things are wrong themselves and those people shouldn't shoot towards excellence. The problem, in my opinion, is relying on an inhumane tool that's disconnected

from the body, from feeling, from sense, from tuning in.

## **Shoe companies have certainly tuned in to barefoot running though, haven't they? And those shoes are often more pricey than the more conventional shoes.**

They're much more complicated to manufacture. The reason these shoes exist only now is because they couldn't be made until recently, they're a high technology. The difference is they're going to last a lot longer than traditional running shoes because you don't have to run a set number of miles in them before you trade them out.

I was particularly uncomfortable when I realised barefoot running worked for me because having footwear to do it in wasn't even on the palette of choice for people in my generation.

People would interview a barefoot runner for the eccentric aspect of it. I'm so glad it's become part of the consumer world. I think it's necessary; it's a way to bring it into the dialogue of everyone.

## **Do you think it's a lot to do with books like *Born to Run*?**

I like to say this book is the quirky PhD thesis I never had to write. It's had a profound influence in the running world. It's created a paradigm shift. Really this is not a fad, this is not going to go away.

The more this is investigated, the more it is perfectly clear we were going down the wrong path. But without money being made, without products being sold, you don't have a story to tell in this world. Now I'm happy it's become part of the mainstream. I have a *Born to Run* footwear store, I'm the spokesman and I have a sandal company that's reviving old designs of footwear.

## **So the book has changed your life?**

Absolutely. It's given me a place to do what I'm best at and that is be myself. It's given me a stage to be able to be the most authentic me I can be and tell the story. I'm not a doctor or a scientist, I really see myself as a story-teller.