

6 Races, 5 Weeks, A Kaleidoscope of Races

It is as simple as I like running. Running is such an eclectic creature.

Langdale Half Marathon provided the opportunity to fell race on the road with its 1 in 3 climbs, incredible scenery and a tarmac guide map from start to finish. Enjoying the knowledge that those hammering the first climb will come back to me soon and then fall away. The HRM packs in so it is time to enjoy the freedom that brings, going with the flow, breathing in the race, creating a last 3 miles where I will be capable and strong and happy.

Enjoying the recovery sessions then **4 days later** it's the traffic filled urban environment of the **Ron Hill 5k** less than a quarter of the distance. Quick, intense, sharp. Running internally, it's a treadmill of a race with that burn at the end from the end of the lake to the finish. Accepting the pain as part of the pleasure, just keep moving forward to the finish line - simple as that.

Enjoying the recovery sessions then **4 days later** it is **Edale Skyline** a different running planet, getting on for twice the distance of Langdale. No tarmac in sight, studded shoes, 2 pairs of socks, vaselined feet. I want to enjoy this and comfy blister free feet are a key component of achieving that. Recognising early on that I am working too hard, dropping back through the pack, telling the ego to be still. Establishing the rhythm of the race, keeping to its beat. It unfolds and eventually I leave the fog of getting the first 2 hours out of the way and the race is revealed. Good fortune today, a couple of right decisions, picking the right guide over the last part of the race. Laughing at the failure of my brakes and suspension on the last descent. A little feeling of pride at my first English Fell Championship points.

Enjoying the recovery seasoned with a little bit of work then **7 days later** I am a world away from Edale. **Blackpool to Fleetwood, 10 miles** in a straight line along a concrete promenade and not even a pimple of a hill. A different atmosphere to the seriousness of the English Champs. It's Blackpool after all, with its holiday vibe, its Pleasure Beach and Pier. We're on a double decker bus, top deck, memories of the journey to school, party music blasting out, surreal. We are on view, a bit of a spectacle for the holiday makers. They ask what's happening. Keep the sea on your left and run to Fleetwood. Run my race, see what unfolds, the eventual winner looks good, drop him from the equation. The guy in 3rd, he'll come back to me. Run my race, the pack of 6 sat on me eventually erodes to nothing. The gap to Robin remains fixed, if it remains that way at 7 miles then I have a chance. It does. The work begins. Do I really want to work this hard? Part of me, outside my control, decides yes. I join Robin then open a gap so small that we both have to work very hard all the way to the finish. The hardest I have ran this year and for years. Here they come PB after PB rolls over the line from fellow Toddies, pained expressions slowly becoming smiles.

7 days later it's nice and local, **Withins Skyline**, your typical fell race, like going home. Familiar faces. Familiar weather (does the sun ever shine and the wind stop howling up there?) Another different challenge, boggier, wetter underfoot. Mixing it

up with Paul and Craig. A third of the way through I am stuck behind a group who are paying for running too hard too soon. No room to pass, but I try to pass and end up in a ditch. Patience for now, enjoy the fact I don't have to work, just bob along, the freedom of Blackpool To Fleetwood comes to mind. Free again, but the running is not as free as on the roads. I have to concentrate on where to place my feet, anticipate the structure of the ground below my next step. It is quick, it is a mind-body game, not so much about running. A mile or so to go, the group is way ahead. Surely impossible to catch, but I remember that many times it has appeared that way and occasionally they have come back. Drop the mind-body game, just run, take risks with the terrain and suddenly the gap concertinas and I am amongst them. Do I really want to bother running this hard? Oh well, I pass a blood soaked ghoul. What to do about Paul? I go past and he does the last thing we want any runner to do in this situation. He reacts, he fights back. Groan! I feel sick. First to the little drop will take the mini-victory. Was this harder than last week? Only briefly at the end, last week it the pain/pleasure was sustained.

7 days later, the last leg of the journey. A park filled with runners, many at school, many drawing a pension, many in between. There's a buzz, flags fly, club tents pitched. It is hot, a summer's day in October. **Red Rose Cross Country Chorley.** A true club event. Race after race flies in and they certainly put more into a finish in Cross Country than anywhere else, every place counts towards the club's success. Everyone making their contribution. Great to see young people enjoying exercise in the open air. I didn't intend to do this race until I realised my planned training session mapped perfectly onto the race. 2 aerobic laps and 1 anaerobic lap. Hard to keep the pace down, to stick to the plan, but really great to be able to watch the race from the inside. Take it all in. Lap 3 begins and I go, all guns blazing for 12 minutes.

This is the journey that Tod Harriers Grand Prix can take you on. Fantastic! I am grateful to be able take that journey.