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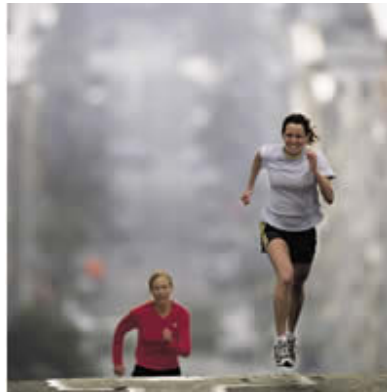
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Hill Training As Alternative To Track Work

If you can't go flat, go vertical instead...

Every runner knows that you can't improve without some measure of interval training. According to well known coach, Bob Glover, in his extremely readable book "The Competitive Runner's Handbook" to engage in interval training is to "run at race pace or faster segments that are much shorter than your race distance, with recovery breaks to minimize the stress on the body". He further sees interval training as the "heart and soul of most competitive training programs". Jack Daniels PhD, coach to luminaries such as Joan Samuelson and Alberto Salazar among others, views intervals as a form of "VO2 max interval training".

My running friends have relied on such workouts to great success. One of them, [Azwar](#), improved his race times by leaps and bounds and ran his first marathon under 4 hours. Another, [Ronnie](#), have been pestering me to join him for this track workouts. I've known for years that there's no other way to improve - it's either the track or remain stagnant and not realize my best. I've had some basic knowledge of training on the track having treaded on the rubberized surface many years ago. I know for a fact, that it's boring and...painful. For newcomers to the sport, running intervals involve doing repeats usually at 85% effort. Even when I managed to coax myself out of the said apprehension and fear, work and personal schedule just would not grant me the leeway to get to the nearest track. There has to be an alternative.

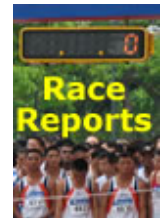


While queueing up for refreshments and feeling sorry for myself after a recent 10K race, I had the fortune to meet [Gavin](#). I've always had the utmost respect for him, as a runner and a person, so I felt compelled to pick his brain for tips on how to improve my times. With no beating around the bush, he uttered 4 words: "Train on the Hills". Gavin mixes hill training with Yasso 800s for his speedwork. So I decided to read up more about hill training and the answer was literally there on my lap, in the form of coach Glover's book.

According to the coach, hill training is "speedwork in disguise" because one doesn't need to run fast to work hard. If you're thinking that hill training is easy and allows you to escape the intensity of track intervals, think again. It's tiring and painful - the coach uses this on his students who missed their track workouts. However there's one advantage the hills have over track and that's the reduced poundings on the legs - at least on the uphill portions. If done sensibly the downhills need not bash up your legs either. In his book, coach Glover mentions that there are 2 types of hill training: repeats (long and short) and continuous runs (long climbs and rolling hills fartlek or speedplay). More in the [table below](#), the gist of which is extracted from coach Glover's book.

In terms of specificity, hill training beats weight training because, while also building strength and resilience on the legs' muscle fibres, hill running resembles more the actual act of running. Like track intervals, it forces you to run with a good form. Your arms get a good workout too, their pumping action in sync with your stride. So will your chest and shoulders with all that movement. Doing hills builds confidence and no longer will you groan seeing a hill looming up in a race.

Hills can prevent injuries by strengthening the quads when going uphill and hamstrings when coming downhill. A study by Tom Clark at the Nike Research Lab found that running a 7 minute mile pace up a steep hill produced only 85% of



the shock felt by the same runner at the same pace on the flats. However, if one has persistent lower leg injuries, hill training can exacerbate the problem. Recovery periods have to be factored in, as in track intervals.

All these are good news to me since I have access to a hilly stretch of road a stone's throw away from my home. If the weather's bad, I can always run up to my office gym for a good treadmill workout (to up the intensity, I use the 6/6 formula - incline 6, speed 6). That said, the one thing that I feel hill running won't be able to give me is pacing. To work on the important art of pacing, you need the track or the flats. But that's another story. Now I have something to dig into while trying to figure out when I'll be able to pay the track a visit next.

Hill Repeat Guidelines

- Work the hills hard to improve both strength and speed
 - Exaggerate form and effort to increase efficiency
- As with all training ease into it gradually - progressively increasing the grade, speed and number of repeats
 - Warm up with 15 to 30 minutes of running
 - Don't sprint - run a fast but controlled pace
- Emphasize good form - push off your feet, drive the arms, lift the knees
 - Run through the top
- If pace deteriorates badly or form and breathing becomes ragged, reassess your speed

Long Hill Repeats

- 400 to 800 metre inclines are just nice, else the descent/recovery period will be too long
- Moderate gradient of 3 to 4 degrees and quarter to half a mile long
- Should take about 2 to 5 minutes to run up at race pace effort or faster
- Particularly good at building strength and endurance for races of half marathon to the marathon

Long Climbs

- Not recommended for Novice, Intermediate runners due to it's high intensity, usually tempo or race-paced effort
- Advisable to be adequately warmed up - 4K at least
- Can last from anywhere from 40 minutes to 1.5 hours

Short Hill Repeats

- Used to sharpen speed for 5K to 10K races
- Pick a hill that's 50 to 200 yards in length with 7 to 9 degrees
- Should only take 30 to 90 seconds to get to the top
- Maintain form. If form fails

Downhill Training

- Relax and run down gently - important to approach with care
- If you have to walk down all or part of the way, you've run up too fast
- Cease downhill training 2 weeks before race day to allow healing
- As a general rule, do only once a week
- If quads are sore, it may be that you're braking too much - don't. Rather lean into the downhill.
- Downhill training increases recovery time and reduces post-race muscle soreness

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