Upping the Tempo

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**Previously we’ve looked at interval and hill sessions, now we turn our attention to the tempo run. It might just turn out to be the training element that takes you to the next level...**

Of all the training sessions, the tempo run is, perhaps, the most exhilarating. Run at about 85-90% of your maximum effort, it is the ideal opportunity to test your speed, practise pacing and enhance your aerobic fitness without having to recover from the rigours of a race-paced session.  
Typically, a tempo run is conducted for around 20-30 minutes at a slightly slower rate than your 5k pace – 10-15 seconds slower per km is a good starting point. This allows you to hit a manageable, fast pace and gauge your level of training, safe in the knowledge that you have the potential to reach another gear for race day.  
Perfectly executed, it gives you a great psychological and physical boost by improving your ability to maintain a consistent pace and rhythm - essential attributes for any runner, seasoned or beginner.

**Let's Talk About The Tempo**  
One of the established rules of a long run is that you should be able to hold down an articulate (or coherent) conversation with your training partner - meaning, you should be going below a level of exertion that makes you breathless.  
Tempos, however, should be performed at a level where you can utter some comprehensible words. Perhaps the best description attributed to the session is ‘comfortably hard'.  
Without a heart rate monitor, it can be difficult to directly gauge your perceived level of effort. The word test, while not entirely full-proof, is a great indicator if you’re hitting the correct exertion for a tempo run.

**Science**  
At a fairly high intensity, tempo runs are performed at the upper end of your aerobic level (when you can run comfortably and your muscles have enough energy they require) without stepping into the anaerobic zone (when we begin to use glycogen, rather than oxygen, as fuel - think of the last sprint in an energy sapping, 5k run).  
Tempo runs improve metabolic fitness by increasing lactate threshold (LT) - the point at which the body starts to tire. By running at this level, your performance will become more accustomed to running at such an intensity, and will automatically improved your LT pace. As such, your body will be able to delay both the lactate build-up and the feeling every runner knows too well (when you think your legs are about to spontaneously combust).  
Tempo runs won’t be as beneficial for a 5k race - training above your lactate-threshold pace is the best way to improve your time for shorter distances. That said, its not going to be detrimental, and you’ll feel the full advantages when you start upping the distance.

**The Benefits**  
Outwith the scientific advantages, the tempo session is ideal for establishing a good running rhythm and testing yourself without pushing your body to the limits. This exercises your ability to maintain a consistent and targeted pace - central tenets of any successful performances in a race.  
By hitting your target pace, your body will also feel far more comfortable when reaching race pace. Equally, it will provide you with a fairly accurate gauge as to where you stand with training and give a realistic indication of finishing times.  
Also, even though your body will be feeling the effects of a fairly hard run, the necessary recovery time will be a lot shorter than an intense interval session or after a race. There is a tradition that runners quite often do their tempo run on a Saturday, and follow this up by a long run the day after.

**Stick With Tempo**  
The key to any running schedule is having a nice variety of sessions - interval, hill, long and recovery - that keeps you engaged and ensures your training remains fresh. Tempo runs are ideal in this respect as they are a constant (and reliable) resource for gauging your training, preparing you for race day, increasing your aerobic fitness and ultimately improving your speed.  
Not only will they become a staple in your training schedule, they might just become your favourite session of the week.

Super Sessions

**Tempo run for 10k training**

* 10 minute warm-up
* 3-4 miles at 85-90% exertion at around 15-20 seconds per km slower than your best 5k time
* 10 minute cool down

**Tempo Run for half marathon training**

* 15 minute warm-up
* 5-7 miles at 85-90% exertion, around15-20 seconds per km slower than your fastest 10k time.
* 10 minute cool down