

STEFAAN ENGELS

KEEP ON RUNNING

Running one marathon is hard, as thousands will discover during Sunday's race in London.

But Belgian runner Stefaan Engels ran one every day for an entire year.

Hard? This man's like granite



I'M ALL (HU)MAN

"So am I superman? Certainly not. Rather than having super powers, I suffer from chronic asthma, with lung capacity 30 per cent below normal. And I'm now 50 years old, but I still succeeded. It was an eye-opener to many when I finished. But often, the biggest obstacle is between our ears."

IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED...

"After 19 days of my first attempt at Marathon 365 in January 2010, I slipped on ice and injured my foot. It was not possible to run, but I didn't want to stop the project so I still ran marathons but on a handbike. Two weeks later I could run again, but to make sure the record of running 365 marathons in 365 days was valid, I started again from zero."

DON'T ASK ME TO SMILE

"The mental side was definitely more difficult than the physical side. It's so hard to wake up, look outside when it's really cold and dark and know that still, today, you must run. It's so, so hard. It's not five kilometres, not 10km, it's a marathon. So I cannot say I did it with a smile. I think this was one year of my life that I didn't smile. People would ask me to 'smile please' for a photo at the finish line, but I say: 'I cannot smile, I'm too tired.'"

HOW TO BEAT THE MONDAY BLUES

"I got up and out on those cold mornings because it was my project. In your job, sometimes you wake up and have the Monday blues and think: 'I don't want to go today.' For me, it was the same. But I told myself it's four hours' running, then sleep, recover and eat. So I go and do my work."

THE DRUGS DO WORK

"I used a lot of drugs to help me through the bad moments. Drugs like music. Music

was a really important thing. Without it, it wasn't possible for me to run four hours every day. I just put my iPod on shuffle and it helped me in the bad moments – and there were a lot of bad moments. My mind was in another world thanks to the music."

I WANT TO BE ALONE (SOMETIMES)

"For 99 per cent of my time I had other people running some way with me. Sometimes they'd tell me interesting stories of their lives, and it helped me. They'd talk and two hours would pass, but sometimes I was not talking. Sometimes I was working too hard to be talking with people and I'd say: 'Let me alone with my mind.' Then I'd put my music in my ears."

TOUGH TIMES...

"The toughest time I had was in Mexico. I was running there at 2,000m (6,500ft) altitude, but no one said to me before: 'Be careful, it's not easy running your first days at altitude.' It was really so hard to breathe and I had no energy in my legs – until, after a few days, my body accepted that I was running at 2,000m."

... GET EVEN TOUGHER

"I also ate something wrong in Mexico and my stomach was really bad. It was not possible to eat anything for two days; I had no energy and was going all the time to the toilet so... really, it was... wow. I kept thinking: 'What am I doing here?' But I think that time in Mexico actually helped me because afterwards, if I had a bad moment, I'd say: 'Yeah, well Mexico was really bad, so it's okay – it's not a big problem.'"

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

"A lot of the time when I was running, I'd plan the evening ahead when I'd visit friends or go to a good restaurant in the city

ENGELS' MARATHON FACTS

Engels ran 13 'official marathons' throughout the year (such as New York and Athens)

Guinness Book of Records required that two witnesses sign his diary every day

He had to have a photo taken of each finish, with a clock showing his time

For his record to stand, Engels wasn't allowed to stay still during a marathon for longer than 15 minutes


His average marathon time was 4hrs 15mins

His fastest marathon was 3hrs 23mins (though Engels' marathon PB is 2hrs 57mins)

Got through 25 pairs of Asics running shoes (fresh ones every two weeks)

I was in. I'd think: 'Okay, come on Stefaan, two hours more than you can take a shower and massage, go to a restaurant and drink a good bottle of wine or beer and eat a really good meal.' If you're running a marathon every day, your appetite is really good... pasta pesto was my favourite meal, but I enjoyed the fish and chips in England too."

365 NOT OUT

"I haven't run one metre or one mile since I finished my last marathon in Barcelona. I will give myself two weeks before I run my first kilometres because my body is tired – more tired I think than when I was running every day. It's normal, I think, after such a project. But I must go back to my running shoes and for sure I will run more marathons. It's really important for my mind." 

SARAH SHEPHARD



SUNDAY, BLOODY SUNDAY

Let's talk London Marathon, because yet again it's here. And, while it might be just the one marathon, it's a damn fine one. Three-time London winner Martin Lel will be among the favourites to win the men's race, having recovered from two years of injury worries. The Kenyan will face tough challenges, though, from last year's winner Tsegaye Kebede of Ethiopia – and the fastest man in 2010, another Kenyan in Patrick Makau.

The line-up in the women's race has been called the strongest ever by race director Dave Bedford, giving Brits Liz Yelling, Jo Pavey and Hayley Yelling (sister-in-law to Liz) little chance. But all three will be looking for a good start to their bids for inclusion in the marathon squad for 2012, when London will become overrun yet again with fit and healthy types making us feel bad for putting pies before exercise.

BRITISH EUROSPORT 9AM, BBC TWO 8.30AM 