

The Running Life: The Techno Life

Running in the 21st Century

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As featured in the July/August 2006 issue of Running Times Magazine

On the continuum of technological expertise I fall somewhere between unremitting Luddite and full-on geek. For many years I had the benefit of a resident I.T. expert living with me. Like many kids of his generation, my son is a computer savant who has taught me everything I know about advanced electronics. This is a kid who, at age 9, got our family's Internet service account suspended when he hacked into the company's private employee chat room. Their representative called me in a state of high dudgeon, intending to terminate our account. He took pity on me when I told him the age of the perp and promised to bring down the wrath of an irate mother on his curly head. Three years ago my e-mentor left for college and since then I have been left largely to my own devices in the cyber world.

In that time, I've dabbled in new technology to enhance my running, with varying degrees of success. OK, if I'm going to be completely honest, dabbling is the best possible spin I can put on this. My success has been, well, unsuccessful at best. Most days I just like to run, free of input and stress from the outside world. I'm just not very motivated to use technology to advance my running. I don't even wear a watch when I run, preferring to let the day and the time take me where it will.

In spite of my resistance to performance-based innovations, in my non-running life I find myself falling for technological advances fast and hard. My laptop goes where I go. My iPod is a fixture on my person, maxing out on memory with a vast music library, podcasts, and novels galore. I use my cell phone with a tiny wireless headset, making me look for all the world like I am having conversations with the voices in my head as I walk down the street. I love the relatively inexpensive connectedness that technology offers, keeping me close to friends and family no matter how distant. I love the workplace freedom of technology that joins me to my virtual office and colleagues any time of the day. And I love the resources I have at my fingertips, courtesy of the Web.

So in spite of my reservations, I decided to spend a week letting technology guide my running life, hoping to discover the joys of hardware and software dedicated to enhancing and improving the way I run.

Sunday: After my weekly long run, I get on my computer and find an on-line training and fitness log. Each day it will greet me with motivational quotes. Not only can I log mileage, I can also record food intake, medical history, goals, and personal diary entries. As I fill in my vital stats, I vow to record my efforts faithfully for the week. I make this vow wondering what the heck I'm going to do with this information down the road.

Monday: I'll start with a running watch. That should be easy. The watch isn't difficult to figure out and soon, I'm finishing 10 vomit-inducing quarters. Each effort is recorded for posterity right on my wrist. I'm feeling studly and tough, except for when I'm feeling like I'm going to yak. Wearing the watch makes me feel like an official runner, like someone who knows the secret handshake. I like that.

Tuesday: It's heart rate monitor day, one bit of technology I'm already familiar with. I ran hard yesterday, so today I'll run easy. It's a gorgeous day, and the running community is out in full force. This is not good in my hilly neighborhood. In order to keep my HRM from beeping furiously, I have to practically walk up the hills. Strolling old people and small children on Razor scooters pass me with impunity. I do not like this. Not one bit.

Wednesday: Icy wind and rain greets me as I open the door. Today is a perfect day to run at the gym. I grab my iPod and get started. An hour and a half later I have hammered a killer workout while finishing up a novel, listening to the new Death Cab for Cutie album and making a dent in my podcast queue. Life is good.

Thursday: Rest. Today I try to meditate with the help of my Buddha Box. Bright pink and about the size of a box of cards, the Buddha Box has 15 loops of ambient "music" or tonal drones that can help facilitate relaxation and deep concentration. Mostly it puts me to sleep.

Friday: It's pedometer day. This high tech, highly calibrated device attaches to my shoe to give shockingly accurate measurements of any route. You know that 8-mile run I've been bragging about for as long as you've known me? It's only 7.43 miles. Tops.

Saturday: The *ne plus ultra* of running technology has to be the wrist mounted GPS with downloadable computer software. Several hours later, I am no closer to figuring it out than I was when I opened the box. Technology wins by default.

In the end, I love running more than I love technology. And I love it differently. Most days I just want to go out there and concentrate on my body and my mind. I want ideas to percolate uninhibited by nagging reminders of time and pace and distance. I want my body to feel real fatigue, not dread mile markers. I might be a faster runner if I trained with technology. But for now, I think I'll keep running the old-fashioned way.

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