



**BEGINNERS  
GUIDE TO  
ULTRA  
RUNNING**



**LEE BRADBURY**

# Introduction

My name is Lee Bradbury and I've been a running coach and strength coach for over 10 years. Alongside that, I've amassed my own ultra experience through completing races such as Marathon des Sables and Winter Spine Challenger. These experiences have allowed me to develop training methods that help aspiring ultra runners achieve more than they thought possible.

This guide is an overview of all those years of experience, both coaching and racing. It covers the key aspects of training and mindset that I feel will get any runner, of any ability, over the finish line of their first ultramarathon. With so much confusing information out there, I wanted to keep this to the basics. if you want to expand your knowledge further, tech out the link at the end.

Thanks for taking the time to read this guide.

Lee Bradbury  
Coach  
Runner

# MY MISSION

To help runners unlock their true potential.

I achieve this through expert coaching, focusing on smarter training, developing a robust mindset and overcoming injury to give you the confidence to train and race year round.



# GOAL SETTING

### **Establish Your Why**

Understanding who you are as a runner and understanding on a deeper emotional level, why you run can have a profound effect on goal setting. It is important that you truly resonate with the races you choose to enter, rather than simply choosing races because they are popular or for the benefit of others. This means when times get hard, or consistency is in jeopardy, you can fall back on your 'why' to get you through the them and stick to the plan.

### **Give Yourself Time**

It's easy to get excited and book a race straight away. However, one of the biggest issues I've seen is that beginners do not give themselves enough time to adequately prepare. I'd recommend giving yourself at least 12-16 weeks to train for an ultra. You'll turn up to the start line knowing you are fully prepared, giving you an instant confidence boost before the race has even begun.

# MINDSET

### **Mental Toughness**

When people see social media personalities or athletes, a throwaway comment that is often used is that they have 'mental toughness' as though it's something they were born with. Mental toughness is developed over time by continuing to expose yourself to hard things and overcoming them or learning from them. Just by signing up to an ultra, you are building mental toughness. Your training will build mental toughness. You can be just as nails as those people who do big things.

### **Growth Mindset**

There will be tough times in training and perhaps your first ultra may not always go as planned. This is life, and unfortunately some things are out of our control. We should embrace this and understand that using energy up on the 'what ifs' or things that we have no control over is a waste of your valuable mental and emotional capacity. Instead, realise that these incidents are opportunities, not failures, and they are a chance to learn and grow. To improve and keep moving forward. You'll develop resilience and self confidence that can overcome any speed bump thrown at you.

# BUILDING AN ULTRA RUNNER

### #1 Fitness Matters Most

This should be your number one priority when preparing for an ultra. Get fitter. Whilst you can achieve this in many ways, a beginner will see huge gains just from increasing weekly distance/time gradually and remaining consistent. This will build an aerobic system that can handle the distance.

As a guide you should aim for the following:

50k Race: 30 miles (48km) per week for at least 3 weeks before tapering

50 Mile/100k Race: 40 miles (64km) per week for at least 5 weeks before tapering

100 Mile Race: 50 miles (80km) per week for at least 6 weeks before tapering

These are the MINIMUMS I'd recommend to be successful. Whilst you can still complete an ultra on less, it will be more of a struggle come race day if you haven't at least hit the above. If you can fit in/handle more volume, then you should. As mentioned, a beginner will see huge gains in fitness just from this concept without even having to do much speed work. This also links back to the justification in giving yourself time when choosing your race.

What pace should I do these runs at? At least 80% of your weekly run distance/time should be easy to moderate in terms of effort. This means you should feel comfortable and even be able to talk without pauses. Initially this may be slow and you may even have to walk, but stick with it and the fitness gains will follow. Also remember that this effort must stay consistent regardless of terrain. So if you go uphill, your pace will be slower than running on the flat for you to stay in that easy to moderate effort zone. I would encourage you to forget about pace and heart rate in training. Effort is what the body recognises and this also accounts for the fact that most ultra marathons are off-road and on hilly terrain.

### #2 Build a Nutrition Strategy

After failing to prepare, a lack of a nutrition plan on race day comes up second when reporting a reason for DNF'ing (did not finish) a race. So now that you know how to build fitness, you need to develop a race nutrition plan to allow you to continue to express that fitness. Find a variety of foods that you enjoy, take them out on your long runs and practice eating/drinking. Monitor your energy levels and see if your stomach is affected. It doesn't have to be just gels! Any type of food will work. The key is that you eat little and often from the start of the race until the end. Nutrition is so individual, you need to find out what works for you in training, so you have a solid plan come race day.

### #3 Replicate the Demands of Your Race

One of the final pieces to building an ultra runner is to prepare specifically for the event ahead. You achieve this by understanding the terrain, elevation and environment you will be racing in which you can usually get from the race website or emailing the organisers. Obviously the gold standard to this preparation is to train on the route itself if you live nearby, however, getting out on similar terrain or using a treadmill for your hill sessions can still do wonders in helping you prepare for your event. You also want to train with all the mandatory kit you might have to carry too. Make sure it sits right in your vest or pack, as well as get the body used to the extra weight. This work should be carried out for at least the last 6-8 weeks of training.



# STRENGTH TRAINING

## Why Should You Lift Weights?

Strength training has been shown to help reduce the risk of injury, improve resiliency and even increase performance. The body can absorb upto 6x your bodyweight with each foot strike, so strength work needs to be more than just some resistance bands to be truly effective. Lifting with challenging weights can build a runner capable of anything.

## What About Getting Too Big?

It still amazes me that this is still a concern for runners, despite the reported benefits of weight training in the mainstream media etc. To get bigger or heavier, you need to be in a calorie surplus (eat more than you burn) which is unlikely for most runners due to the amount of running training they are doing. Add to that, it's really hard to build muscle like you see with traditional bodybuilders, where they will be in a calorie surplus for months and months. I promise as a runner, lifting some moderate weights 2x per week won't suddenly turn you into Arnie.

## How and When?

2x 30 minute sessions per week can do wonders for a runner. Full body workouts that includes at least 1 squat movement, one single leg movement, one hinge movement and some kind of heel/calf raises will hit all the major areas. Add in some direct core work and you have a great program. You want to do your strength sessions on hard running days, if you have speed work in your program or on your normal running days if you don't. This means your rest days are dedicated to rest. Again though, this is the gold standard, if your lifestyle doesn't allow for two sessions per day, then fit them in when you can, it's still better to do them than not.



# FOOTWEAR

### Keep It Simple

Your priority when choosing a pair of shoes should be fit and comfort. Take the footbeds (insoles) out of the shoes and stand on them ensuring you align the heel with the back edge as accurately as possible. Now look down and see how your feet fit in those insoles. Are they hanging over the sides? Do you have adequate space in front of your big toe or longest toe? This gives you a good indication of fit. Obviously trying them on and walking around the house in them for a few days will help with the comfort side. In terms of what brand; what the latest influencer is wearing, or your mate down the road, has no bearing on what will work for you.

### Grip

Ensure you have the grip to do the job you want. Deep (5mm and above), spaced out lugs on the bottom tend to be better for muddy and boggy terrain, whilst shallower less spaced out lugs tend to be better for rock and smooth surfaces. You don't need to over analyse this. In my experience, a good all round shoe will have 3-4mm lugs that are good enough for grip and bog. You can always get a specialist shoe to rotate into the mix if required.

# GEAR/KIT

### Stick to the Basics

Running kit doesn't need to be elaborate. There are plenty of options out there, including Decathlon and Alpkite which are a little more affordable than the big brands. I will personally vouch for Alpkite as I've used their stuff on most of my latest ultras. I'd say the main things you may want to spend that bit more on are a decent vest/pack of 10-12l to comfortably fit mandatory kit in and a quality lightweight, waterproof jacket.

### Poles

Poles can be a game changer. They're not cheating and are widely embraced, other than in some American races. If you're new to ultras and certainly if you're new to hilly/mountainous terrain, get some poles. They don't need to be the top brand ones, any reasonable aluminium walking poles will do the job.



## FAQS

### **What if I'm struggling to fit everything in, what sessions should I prioritise?**

Life will inevitably get in the way of training, whether it be family, work or just getting sick. DO. NOT. PANIC. Remember race preparation is the sum of ALL your training, not just a few missed sessions here or there. It certainly won't be broken by missing a singular long run.

So, what if you can't follow the program as it's laid out in a particular week? First of all, don't then try and squeeze missed sessions in. Accept that you can still remain consistent which is your number one priority. If you have speed work in your week, try and prioritise that. If you don't have speed work, but have a long run, try and prioritise that. Can't get your long run in all in one go? Can you divide it into two shorter runs, one in the morning and one in the evening? That will still work.

### **What should I eat pre and post workout?**

The key thing with nutrition is that it's individual. So I'm going to keep this simple. Eat enough! Eat enough calories to support training and recovery. Have a meal or snack before you run and after you run. Ideally, these pre/post workout meals/snacks should have some carbs in. Drink 2-3l of water per day. Take food and water with you on long runs to practice as per earlier advice. It doesn't need to be more complex than that to begin with.

### **What to do if I'm struggling with motivation?**

Again, this will happen. It's normal, even for those who seem highly motivated. So first up, don't make yourself feel guilty for it. The best way to overcome this is to have a strong 'why' to fall back on and develop routines and habits around your training to make it as easy as possible to stick with it. This discipline will mean you will do the thing regardless of how you feel.



# FINAL THOUGHTS

You may be looking back at this guide and thinking, is it really that simple to prepare for an ultramarathon? The answer is, yes. Will it be easy though? That's the rub, you can see it takes time, commitment and practice.

However, that is where the magic lies. Understanding that an ultramarathon isn't just the focus, but the journey to get there is too. It is the journey and the training that truly unlocks toughness, confidence and a hunger to find out what you're really capable of. The race result is the icing on the cake. Remember, whilst this should be challenging, it should also be fun along the way. If it's not, perhaps reassess your goals and your 'why'. You signed up for this and so should embrace the ups and downs that come with such an epic goal. The journey is just as important as the end result, so ensure you take some time to soak it in and big yourself up as you start to run more than have done before.

I've kept the principles to be successful at your first ultra simple for a reason, because I've dealt with hundreds of people in the same situation as you. Time constraints are one of the biggest barriers, not which speed session should I be doing. Eating enough calories so you don't get beaten up too badly in training also seems to be a common issue. Fretting over missing a few runs can cause instant panic, despite the runner having being consistent for months and months before that. This guide shows you what you should focus your energy into for the best results.

- Consistent running that ideally hits the minimum weekly mileage mentioned, building to it gradually
- A solid nutrition plan for race day and eating enough day to day
- Try and replicate race conditions as best you can
- Have the right gear that works for you
- Ideally lift some weights from time to time

That's it. Don't worry about speed work at this time unless you really want it in your program. If you do, any form will help, don't overcomplicate it.

I really hope this guide instills some confidence that actually an ultramarathon is achievable. Because I promise you it is.



# **MASTER EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO BECOME AN UNSTOPPABLE ULTRA RUNNER**

The Ultramarathon Masterclass is more than just a program. It's the training methodology that I have used with all of my 1 to 1 athletes to help them successfully complete ultra marathons from 50k to 100 mile races all across the world. I'm a big believer in giving the athlete the tools for success and helping them become self sufficient, competent and confident in tackling any ultra. That's what you'll get from this course.

I've taken the knowledge and experience from almost 20 years as a coach and athlete myself and put it all in an easy to follow 12 weeks course to help you understand your training program in more depth.

The Ultramarathon Masterclass will give you all the tools to successfully complete your first ultra marathon as well as any ultra you want to take on in the future. This is the course I wish I had when getting my running coach qualifications.

Alongside this you will have bespoke training plan created to suit your lifestyle and goals as well as plenty of contact time with me to have your questions answered and save you valuable time around training.

Want to find out more? Click the link below to Break Your Boundaries and unlock your true potential.

[Ultramarathon Masterclass](#)

