

BLIND RUNNER



Read the article. Some sentences have been removed from the article. Choose from the sentences A-H the one which fits each gap. There is one extra sentence which you do not need to use.

Paul Hardy reports on a blind runner called Simon Wheatcroft who enjoys taking part in marathon and ultra-marathon races, running distances between 42 km and 160 km.

Running marathons, a race of 42 km, has become increasingly popular. This distance poses extreme physical and mental challenges for anyone, but for Simon Wheatcroft there is another hurdle, he has been blind since he was 18 years old.

For the past two years Simon, now 29, has been overcoming his disability to compete in marathons and ultra-marathons by training with runners who act as his guides and also, rather uniquely, by teaching himself to run solo, out on the streets. "I got bored exercising indoors, so thought, 'I'll have a go at running outside', he explains. (1) Then he got bored again and wanted to try running on the roads.

Weeks of gradual exploration followed, walking a route along. (2) It took him along little-used pavements alongside a busy main road. He also recruited technology to help him form his mental map of the area using smartphone app, to provide feedback through headphones about his pace and distance. This information could then be cross-referenced with his knowledge of the route and any obstacles.

Now, having covered hundreds of km alone on the route, Simon has been able, gradually, to phase out the app. "When I first started I had to really concentrate to an unbelievable level to know where my feet were falling. Now, it has become quite automated." (3) "I did make a few mistakes early on--like running into

posts. But you only run into a post once before you think 'Right. I'm going to remember where that is next time', he laughs.

Joining Simon for a training session, it's striking how natural and fluid his movement is; he takes shorter, shallower, more gentle steps than most runners, using his feet to feel his way. His landmarks are minute changes in gradient and slight variations in the running surface. (4) "I have to believe this route is going to stay consistent, and there won't be things like roadwork signs or big rocks," he says.

(5) "I try to concentrate on the millions of footsteps that go right and think positively," he explains. When it comes to racing in ultra-distance events. Simon has to use guides to run sections of the course with him; after all, it would be almost impossible to memorize a 150 km stretch of countryside by heart. However, the physical and practical advantages of training in the fresh air, on his own terms, are vast and have boosted his confidence in his running ability as well as providing inspiration to others.

But for Simon the real thrill and motivation for training come from simply being able to compete on equal terms. (6) "I can't hide the fact I'm blind," he says, "but at the same time I would rather compete with everybody else and not be put into a special group. Being visually impaired doesn't mean you can't run."

A These provide the familiarity and consistency essential for the blind runner.

B Their support gave him extra confidence regarding his changing surroundings.

C Simon believes the feelings of liberation and independence he gets from running solo far outweigh any anxiety over such dangers.

D He began by training on football pitches behind his house, running between the goalposts.

E It gives him a great opportunity to run with everyone.

F That's not to say the learning curve has been without incident.

G As a result of this slow experimentation, he was able to memorize a set five-kilometer course.