

Dear Marathon Runner,

Following swiftly on from week 3 is the snappily titled week 4 – and for those of you who are flagging a bit, there’s good news – if you’ve been training well for the last three weeks, you’ve earned a bit of a lighter week. Yes, it’s time to talk recovery weeks, and their importance in any good training schedule. My cold is a lot better now thank you, although I didn’t run for seven consecutive days.

Review time – lets see how we all did this week. We’re up to 590 Fetchies listed for VLM now – and 430 of you ran – that’s 73% of you – nice! Median mileage was 27.74, a nice gentle increase on last weeks 27 (the weather’s been more consistent I’d reckon). Median long run was 12 miles, up by 1.75 miles on last week – sounds like you’re all upping the ante.

I had some nice remarks about the breakdown table from last week, so I thought I’d do it again (although this is just for the week, and not the overall totals):

Week 3	3:00	3:15	3:30	3:45	4:00	4:15	4:30	4:45	5:00
<i>Race Pace</i>	6:52	7:27	8:01	8:35	9:10	9:44	10:18	10:53	11:27
Total Mileage	50.6	32.9	30.5	31.2	26.4	23.4	26.2	20.9	15.8
Pace (mins/mile)	7:31	8:17	8:16	8:29	8:54	9:42	8:50	9:49	12:33
Longest Run	14	13	13	13	10	9.1	10.4	8.1	8.2
Longest Run Pace	7:50	8:25	8:17	8:15	9:13	10:22	9:32	10:30	10:46

Of note, it seems like the 3:00 team have started recording their mileage properly – yay! Longest runs at the faster end of the scale are around a minute slower than race pace, but the rest of the field may well be doing their long runs too quickly – save that pace for your midweek effort sessions folks!

It’s time to talk about recovery. Let’s chill out for a bit, and take some time to think about why it’s important. Think of your entire life, and how the pace varies. Ad breaks, coffee breaks, lunch breaks, sleep, weekends, holidays, school holidays, half terms, bank holidays, annual leave, career breaks, years out, and motorway services – everything we do is punctuated with a little bit of time to get over it. Evolution itself is designed around breaks – the fish that first climbed out of the water and strolled about probably stopped at McDonalds for a coffee before learning to drive. I think that’s how it happened.

There’s a wonderful “self-similarity” about training for running – you have bouts of effort and recovery in a speed session, hard and easy sessions during a week, hard and easy weeks, and hard and easy periods during the year. Or at least, that’s how it should be! I started a thread during the week, to see if people would describe their experiences, and a common theme was that it was all too easy to scrub a recovery week when things were going well. Another thing that often happens (I’ve just experienced it), is that life gets in the way, and you end up having a lighter week before your running feels ready for it.

It might be easiest to think about your running in blocks of four weeks, with the fourth week being a recovery week (you might find 5’s or 3’s work for you – so just experiment with what feels right). It doesn’t mean you have to stop completely – just try shortening your longest run, and reduce the number of speed sessions you do. Keeping moving is good, but give your body a chance to repair itself and adapt to the demands you are increasingly putting on it. It’s *so* tempting to keep driving forwards, but there are bigger goals beyond the coming week, beyond the race, and beyond running (see that self-similarity in action again?). This week, enjoy running for its own sake, and be nice to fish.

Of course, I can’t really resist a bit of a play with the numbers, so I looked at how I could work out how many recovery weeks each runner had included in their plan (whether by choice or circumstance). I took each runner’s total mileage over the 16 weeks, and worked out an average weekly mileage per runner. Then I counted the number of weeks, per runner, that contributed less than 80% of this weekly total. So for example, if a runner ran 480 miles in the 16 weeks, that’s 30 miles per week, so I’d make a count of all the weeks with less than 80% of 30 i.e. less than 24. With me? This is a very sketchy analysis for a great number of reasons, but it gives a flavour of what I’m trying to show – that a training plan is not all about pushing yourself week after week – and that improving as a runner is *not* about eradicating easier weeks.

	3:00	3:15	3:30	3:45	4:00	4:15	4:30	4:45	5:00
90% or less	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
80% or less	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
70% or less	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
60% or less	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3
50% or less	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2
40% or less	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
30% or less	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Next week we'll be back to gradually building mileage, and looking at how your training volume should ramp upwards in weeks 5-8. If you're enjoying the newsletter and the whole Fetch marathon experience, you could do some or all of the following:

1. Send this newsletter to friends and club mates, post it on your club forum (might give some of them a laugh if nothing else), and tell *EVERYONE* about it.
2. Add a prediction of your VLM time, even if it's just an estimate, and keep logging your training – I hope to squeeze plenty of motivational stats out for you.
3. Let me know if there's anything you'd like me to try to cover in future weeks.
4. Join our Fetchpoint groups as a runner (<http://www.fetcheveryone.com/groups-view.php?id=697>) or as a supporter (<http://www.fetcheveryone.com/groups-view.php?id=698>) – more information on Fetchpoint to follow in coming weeks.

Happy Running,
Ian Williams aka 'Fetch'
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