

## **Tips for training for the 24 hours race Stadtoldendorf**

By Michael Irrgang, April 24, 2009

In less than 2 months, this year's highlight (for many of us) will be run in Stadtoldendorf. How can you get in even better shape now? What is still possible to train during the last 8 weeks?

In principle, one should do race-specific workouts in the period immediately prior to the race. Is that true also for 24 hour races? Should you, for example, train race tempo, duration, and/or even distance?

Yes and no. The many thousands of kilometers, which are the hallmark of the excellent 24-hours runner, cannot be made up within 6 weeks. However, there are a few specific workouts and sequences which help to prepare both body and mind for the race. Preparing your mind? Of course, if the outcome is driven by x percent through your mental attitude, you need to train your mind as well. 50%, which I hear very often, sounds a bit high for me. You will not be able to cover a distance for which your body is not really prepared, yet many runners give away numerous kilometers since they are not strong enough mentally. Your mind helps to mitigate crisis situations and to realize your true potential. It does not make you faster, though!

### **General Recommendations**

What are the important specific training units for a 24-hours race?

1. Very long runs
2. Very slow runs
3. Multiday runs

Re 1. Very long means anything between 50 and 100 km. Those who are not able or willing to do that as solo training runs might use ultra races in the spring season. Or run a city marathon with an add-on loop of 20 km.

Does not have to be run weekly, but every other week would not be too bad.

Re 2. The pace recommended for long, slow runs in marathon training plans with its 45 - 60 sec (per km) slower than marathon race pace is still way too fast in preparation for a 24 hour race. 90 – 120 sec slower is adequate here! However, your heart rate is in the correct range already with just the 60 sec slower pace. How to accomplish the trick to run with the correct heart rate and the right pace, I will address below.

I suggest two long runs a week: during the week somewhat faster but on the weekend absolutely slow.

Re 3. Multidays are experiences the body and mind will not forget. Especially when they are great events like the Isarlauf, Baltic Run, or the Swiss Jura where I could participate, and consistently positive memories remain. My experience is that day 1 is a normal ultra race, and nothing out of the normal on the second day: the body may lose its motivation to continue after 2 hours, but running is no real problem. On the third day, getting into gears is increasingly difficult, the energy-deprived legs start asking questions to the brain like: "Already again? Do we have to do this?" The fourth day is the Why-day. You struggle through. On day 5, things are improving, body and mind both get used to the daily challenge. You are of course not fully regenerated in the morning, however you find

your own rhythm pretty soon, and can keep it going for several hours. A 5 to 7 days multiday run is ideal.

### Concrete Training Suggestions

In addition to describing the general training units, I like to offer a few tips how to increase the effect by a clever sequence.

For rough orientation, I would like to define three categories of runners:

A: marathon in 3 hours, 24 hours 240 km; weekly mileage 120km

B: marathon in 3:30 hours, 24 hours 200 km; weekly mileage 90km

A: marathon in 4:15 hours, 24 hours 240 km; weekly mileage 70km

#### 1. Long, slow distance runs

Despite eating and slow running during a 24-hours race you are bound to encounter a phase where power is very low and your legs go dead. At that point, you usually have to run for another 10 to 15 hours! The respective goal for training is to create such a situation and then continue to run for some time.

For this, a marathon raced well rested and with optimal catering is only of limited value. 35 km could however be already sufficient, more of course be better. You can increase the training effect by certain (brutal) measures! As mentioned, you have to get yourself to the “running on empty” status as soon as possible.

Option 1: Running in the morning before breakfast. Of course no gels, power bars, etc. or just to keep your blood glucose level at a minimum to avoid complete energy depletion.

Option 2: Not acceleration towards the end, but at the beginning of your run! If you run the first 10km like in a tempo run, the remaining kilometers become super hard.

Option 3: The night before, run an intensive speed training session. Overnight, your body will certainly not have recovered, and the first kilometers are a powerless staggering – your body cannot find its rhythm, then it is ok for one/two hours, before you are losing it completely.

Option 4: Back-to-back units. A certain combination of training units are especially effective, like Saturday 35 km medium fast and Sunday 35 km slow.

A typical training week could look like this:

Day	Cat A (MRT 4:15min/km)	Cat B (MRT 5:00 min/km)	Cat C (MRT 6:00 min/km)
Monday	Rest or AT	Rest or AT	Rest or AT
Tuesday	30 km at 4:30*, 3 km in 6:00	24 km at 5:15*, 3 km at 6:15	20 km at 6:00*
Wednesday	12 km at 5:30	10 km at 6:00	Rest (or 8 km at 7:00)
Thursday	18 km at 5:00	12 km at 5:45	10 km at 6:15
Friday night	3 km warm-up in 5:30, 8 x 1000 m at 3:45 with 7 x 200 m at 6:30/800 m at 5:30 in between, 5 km cool-down at 6:00 (23 km in total)	3 km warm-up at 6:00, 7 x 1000 m at 4:15 with 6 x 200 m at 7:00/800 m at 6:00 in between, 5 km cool-down at 6:30 (19 km in total)	3 km warm-up at 5:30, 7 x 1000 m at 5:15 with 6 x 200 m walk/800 m at 7:00 in between, 5 km cool-down at 6:00 (17.8 km in total)
Saturday	15 km at 4:45, 45 km at	15 km in 5:15, 25 km at	10 km at 6:00, 30 km at

morning	6:15	7:00	7:30
Sunday	50 km at 6:00	20 km at 6:30	15 km at 7:00
Sum	196 km	128 km	102.8 km

MRT = marathon race tempo; AT = alternative training; \*pace in min:sec per km

This training week has 50% more mileage than the respective average one. It has three hard workouts on Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday. After one week of regeneration, you could manage two of these hard weeks in a row, running 4 or 3 x 2000 m in week 2. Between such two “intensive double weeks” I would suggest a different training regimen for a minimum of two weeks.

The workouts on Saturday and Sunday will feel probably very hard. Adhering to this sequence will train body and mind simultaneously. Mentally it is very important not to short-cut these workouts, even if they will feel very, very hard. Imagine that you will feel like this after 23 hours on your last kilometers. If you are completing the workouts as planned, you will be able to run until the finish signal in the race, too!

## 2. Training the race distance

Again, with these workouts you will train body and mind. It is important to define a realistic goal in the first place.

### 1. Phase

Once in a month you should run the goal race distance as weekly mileage. It is important to see that number in your training records! Do it about three times.

### 2. Phase

Now you condense the training effort! You run the distance in three days! I.e., Category A runners do 3 x 80 km, or 3 x 65 km and 3 x 55 km for Category B and C runners, respectively.

If that works, it is obvious that the next condensation (3. phase) would be compression into 24 hours. And the confidence is there: it is damn hard, but I can do it!

The three days condensation should be possible before the Stadtoldendorf race. Maybe around Whitsuntide?

## 3. Additional training

In the final phase of a 24-hours run, you very often notice (unfortunately) form deficiencies: the runners shrink into themselves or tip over. To avoid this you need strong trunk muscles. There are a variety of excellent exercises, many of which don't need any equipment. You only have to do them – regularly!

Swimming, biking, in-line skating, hiking: there are so many options how to exercise your endurance with little strain – everything is valuable and can be incorporated into a training schedule.

## 4. Conclusion

Training for 24 hours does not adhere to a firm weekly pattern, like fast on Mondays, slow on Tuesdays, repetitions on Wednesdays, etc. Instead, there are weekly programs which need to be combined in a meaningful way. Preparatory races, vacation and public

holidays play a big role in generating a 24 hours schedule as well as other private or professional circumstances.

The typical training week described above, also done as “intensive double week”, and the phase 1 and phase 2 race distance weeks are characteristic for the 24 hours training. However, always schedule weeks for regeneration as well. Also multiday provide excellent training stimuli and should be part of a yearly plan.

Prior to the Stadtoldendorf race, there are several “long weekends” where you can schedule the one or the other “hard week”.

The next article will give you tips about tapering and race strategy and tactics, to allow you to get to the starting line well prepared, with your bags packed with all the right stuff, and knowing how to achieve your best.

Until then, have fun with your training  
Michael