

ULTRA-TRAIL

AUSTRALIA

UTA50 - Leigh Roden

September 2015 I shoot off an email to my trainer.

I'm 64, retired, train outdoors with a fitness group 6-7 times a week. "Hi Justin, I'm thinking of doing the UTA 50km. What do you think?". He replied "ony, go for it". Then emailed 70+ members of the group looking for training partners. 9x50km, 8x22km accepted challenge. 20 year olds, 30-40 year olds with kids, work commitments and a home to run, others working 60+ hours a week, a couple of friends and this old retired guy.

I set up a group Facebook page, added to it over the 6 months of training, trail articles, training run weekend plans, which physio we were seeing for our injuries. It was all fun learning about trail running, 15-25km trail runs every weekend when most of us would have considered a 10km road run a challenge. Learning about our own limits, and growing friendships, we ran, walked and fell along the trails. 5am starts on a Sunday morning became the norm. Gear, food and hydration all new. "What shoes do you run in", "how's your new pack", "my ankle still hurts", became our conversation.

Our non-trail and non-fitness friends just didn't get it or understand it, or will ever do it. Lycra and compression clothing took over washing days. Run day arrived. I woke early, 3.30am an hour before the alarm. Get up, body feeling great, knees ok, ankle feels strong but still wear strapping. Pack, clothing, food, hydration ready, don't forget the banana to eat before the race.

I left home at 5.30am with the most supportive wife anyone could ask for who will spend the day following me around, encouraging, worrying and comforting. No nerves at the start. Go over plan with running buddy Jenny, no running up hills, take our time, eat, drink, take checkpoint lollies. Wave 5 gets called up; on a high lapping up all the atmosphere. We're off, turn left up the hill, Jenny I say "don't forget if you want to go ahead I'm ok and will do fine", she reciprocates and immediately I'm away. That confirmation was all I needed. 6kms and back down past start area and I'm already over 10 minutes in front of my planned time, feeling great and around to the Giant Stairway, now 15 minutes up.

Everyone else now took on some food. Why couldn't I? Down into Leura Forrest and up Leura Cascade stairs. Bang! I stopped half way up out of breath. Eat, couldn't as stomach not interested, try some electrolytes, almost throw up, so hard up the stairs, much worse than training. Somehow got to the Fairmont checkpoint without food, couldn't even eat a chip, 1 chip, then off to CP501 to try and work some things out before Kedumba. Brain and stomach gang up on me, it's all going south, bad cramping, head spinning, I can't go on like this, why? Trained for 6 months on the course and today the body goes on holidays.

I get to CP501 still ahead of planned time by almost 1 hour, no food taken along the section. Ran the last 200 metres to the crowd, family and friends and through the timing device to register my 28.4km time. I'm out, spent, no energy, head a mess, legs a mess, I'm out. What do I take away from this successful run - listen but don't try and copy, do whatever works for you, stick to your plans and don't let the emotion of the day get to you, eat, drink and be happy. I challenged my fitness-training friends to train with me. 12 of them started and finished.

Their success this year is my success. All have signed up again. Me, lots of discussions and sole searching. Will I do it again, absolutely, many demons on the course needing to be exorcised.

"50 at 65" has a good ring to it.