

ULTRA-TRAIL

AUSTRALIA

UTA100 - Laura Donnan

When people asked why I had signed up for UTA100 I could never give them a definite answer. How does a non-runner understand that for me running is a defining quality of who I am and how I deal with many things in life? It is an avenue where I can channel my stress, anxieties, and worries to use that time of putting left foot in front of right foot to think and solve a problem. It's a feeling of freedom and joy and for as long as my legs will able me, running will be an essential part of my life.

A love for running is what had me consider signing up for the UTA100, I knew that I had it in me to make the distance physically. However, it was the curiosity of my mental toughness that had me without doubt sign up to be on the start line. There were five key moments in my life that I can honestly say tested my mental toughness and finishing this race was my own way to overcome them. With each of the five checkpoints, each of the five life moments would be left behind – I knew the race would be physically tough but I had a game plan to overcome this. I had visualised crossing the finish line, I had dreamed of finishing and it was my goal.

On the start line, I was nervous and over-thinking, however, as soon as I started running a sense of calm overcame me and once I dropped down into the bush I just let the tracks take me. The people I met along the way in this event were incredible and it was a great opportunity to be able to share a laugh, a conversation or an “oh my” when the pain was too much. 29km into the race I was feeling great...at 30km something happened to my knee, it clicked and putting any pressure on it was a pain I had never experienced.

Injury free for all 23 years of my life, the grueling and painful run to CP3 saw me having to walk when I wanted to run and have my speed decrease significantly. I was becoming frustrated and angry and from 40km all I could do was hobble and sob uncontrollably with complete disappointment that I would have to opt out at 46km. Never have I felt such anger in myself of quitting and not getting the job done, then I did in the UTA100.

For me, I did not achieve what I had set out to achieve and that tested me. But a week on, I've come to the realisation that with all things I have overcome in life, you can get through it and it's the lessons you learn along the way that can teach you resilience and make you tougher. Whilst I had set out to overcome five life experiences, the five highlights of my race definitely won:

To the man who leant me his hiking pole to help me get down the hill with my bad knee – thank you!

To the men playing the didgeridoos and making jokes to get a smile back on my face – thank you!

To the lady who offered me support when I was crying – thank you!

To the man at first aid you looked after me – thank you!

To my amazing support crew who welcomed me with hugs and kisses at CP3 when I needed it most – thank you!

I am determined to be on that start line next year and have another go at the UTA100, because I honestly believe the people you meet and the hills you have to climb can teach you some invaluable lessons about yourself.

Running is to me a feeling of freedom and joy and for as long as my legs will able me, running will be an essential part of my life.