

ULTRA-TRAIL

AUSTRALIA

UTA100 - Natasha Sekulic

After a terrible start to my training year, losing my confidence, focus and attention to a work place bully, I considered withdrawing from UTA, but I didn't want to. Ultra-running was the one thing I had over this bully. Every time she made me feel inadequate – I knew I had her. I knew she couldn't run 100 km in the Blue Mountains. She wasn't better than me at all and she wasn't going to take this from me. So off I went to the Blue Mountains.

From the start, I walked the hills. My approach was to take it very conservatively until Nellies Glen then I would give the race everything I had. This was working quite a treat. I was feeling really fresh and enjoying myself until lunch time. Then I realised I was really hot and wasn't wearing a hat. I could have fried an egg on my face it was so hot – why wasn't I wearing a hat?

This feeling that my face was frying continued most of the afternoon until Check point 3 when I decided I would wet my buff to cool down. Brilliant decision, except the sun was going down and I only packed one buff and I would need it going into the night to keep warm. Great thinking! Checkpoint 3 to 4 felt good. My knees were making a strange sound as I climbed but there was no pain so I just turned up the tunes. If you can't hear it, then there's no problem (a little something I learned from years of driving a 30 year old Datsun).

Leaving Checkpoint 4, there was a noticeable chill in the air as the sun was beginning to set. I was off my goal time, but there was nothing to cry about as this part of the course passes through numerous look out points into the Blue Mountains. Running under a red sky was absolutely magnificent. I thought about taking a photo, but then I remembered that they still haven't invented a camera as powerful as the human eye and so I absorbed it. I let it fill my soul.

From Checkpoint 4 to 5 I took the hand break off and let the legs role. I was having a wonderful time flying up and down the stairs. From Checkpoint 5 to the finish it was just about gutting it out. I moved at snail's pace but I wouldn't stop, no matter how slow I had to go. I had given up on beating my 2014 time, but I knew I could still finish within 20 hours to get the buckle. 19 hours and 11 minutes after I started, I crossed the finish line. I've never been so emotional crossing a finish line before. This wasn't my fastest race but it was my most meaningful for a number of reasons.

I had lost my love of running and training for UTA brought it back. Racing UTA made that love stronger. I had lost confidence - UTA reminded me just how strong I am. I really suffered out there. I acknowledged it. I embraced it. I kept moving. I did not give up. In the lonely hours, I craved company and support and then I found the words of strength I needed within myself.

I set myself some goals and targets that had nothing to do with my finish time – run (not hike) from 95km – 99km, climb the Golden Stairs with joy in my heart, acknowledge the sections of the course that caused me fear (not deny the fear) and continue to move steady. I did all these things. I feel like a new person post UTA. I found myself and I found my people – a community full of crazy ultra- runners who will always offer one another unconditional support and encouragement – to keep going, to finish – and to enter again next year.