



**ROAD • FELL • TRI
CROSS-COUNTRY**

The complete guide to running with Springfield Striders

written by Kevin Wright

WHAT HAPPENS ON CLUB NIGHTS

TUESDAY

On Tuesdays we meet at the club at 7.30pm and announcements are made at 7.40pm, so we usually leave the club by 7.45pm.

Tuesday night is our effort session and is suitable for all abilities as we jog to where we are going to do the session, do the session and then jog back together afterwards. The sessions are general speed work aimed at improving everyone's pace. In an effort session you will run sections faster than you would normally run, but will also spend plenty of time recovering at a slow or even walking pace.

When we arrive at the field or road where the effort will take place, what the session entails and the number of efforts will be announced. When the leaders have finished their last effort everyone else finishes the effort they are on and we return at a leisurely pace to the club. This means that whatever your pace you won't be holding up the faster runners and the faster runners also have people to chase and lap. If the session was of say 12 efforts and you manage 7 you now have a ready-made target for the next time we do this session.

The sessions generally run on a four week rota with different ones used in the Winter and Summer.

HILLS

Hill training is a form of resistance or strength training and will help you with your climbing and descending. We don't have many hills in Chelmsford but we have four different ones that we use on a regular basis. In the summer we use hills at Sandford Mill Lane and Mill Lane, Broomfield. In the winter we move to Chichester Drive and probably the toughest one which is the bridge by the Rugby Club.

PYRAMIDS

We tend to only do these in the summer as they are over shorter distances and we can run them on an enclosed traffic free grass field. This is a session commonly done by athletes on a running track, but any circular course will do. An example of a pyramid is 100m effort, 100m rest, 200m effort, 100m rest, 400m effort, 100m rest, 200m effort, 100m rest, 100 effort. You can do a pyramid on a straight run maybe by using lamp posts or more accurately time i.e. 1 min, 2min, 3 min, 4 min, 3 min, 2 min then 1 min all with same recovery in between.

REPETITIONS

We usually do either 800m or 1000m efforts and sometimes in the winter with everyone upping their mileage for a marathon 1500m. In the summer we run on grass where possible.

FARTLEK

Taken from the Swedish words for speed and play Fartlek is a session that can be used just as a bit of fun or can mimic race conditions where you have to react to someone else's pace or instruction. This is the only time we split into groups as with all the to-ing and fro-ing large groups are difficult to control. The way we do fartlek is as follows. Each group will have a leader who will choose the route and what you are going to do. He/she will shout out where you are to run to and off you go, when you come back and reform as a group you will be sent off again. Sometimes the leader will give you a lot of short bursts with very little recovery, sometimes it might be a really long effort of over a mile. The whole thing is unpredictable and is the only speed session where you sometimes won't be allowed to get a full recovery as you do in the other sessions.

MONSTER

This is just Fartlek but over a longer period and distance. We only do this in the summer on lighter nights and the top group have been known to cover 15 miles. We usually aim for about 90 minutes rather than the normal 60.

THURSDAY

We now offer a variety of delights on a Thursday.

At 7pm there is another effort session generally over short distances and within a short distance of the club. This is ideal for those that have never tried a full effort session or to those that are new to running. It is however open to everyone.

At 8pm there is a threshold session which is like a repetition session but with the timing and the pace of each effort being strictly set out. Although similar, each week is generally different being aimed at upcoming races etc. The week's session is usually posted on Facebook earlier in the week.

Also at 8pm there is a warm up followed by a run usually of about 5 miles. All the routes are on the club website. Newcomers will be placed with someone of similar pace to show them round the route. Hopefully the newcomer will find like paced runners to run with in the following weeks.

Usually about every 4 weeks also at 8pm there will be an orienteering event where you are given a map and have to find controls.

Every 6 weeks the 8pm sessions are cancelled and we have our 5km timed run. This is a useful indicator of how your training is going.

During the winter there are a few hardy souls who don head torches and run off road in the dark. You are welcome to join them.

After both Tuesday and Thursday nights showers are available and the bar is open for an after effort relax.

SATURDAY

Most Saturdays a group of us meet at Little Baddow Cricket Club at 9am for an off road run in the woods and hills. We usually run for about 60 minutes. All welcome. There are no facilities.

In the summer there is also a group session at a local track. Details are usually on Facebook. There is a charge to run on the track.

SUNDAY

Most Sundays there is a run from the club at 9am. These become quite popular in the months leading up to the London Marathon. Details appear on the Club Chatboard.

WEDNESDAY

There is a group of lucky people who can run in the daytime. They meet at various spots throughout the county on Wednesday mornings. Full details are on the Chatboard.

CROSS COUNTRY

Cross country is a race either from point to point or in most cases around a lapped course, usually two laps sometimes three, maybe only one. The course can be on short parkland grass, bridleways and footpaths, through woods and even bogs and streams. In fact anything, even sometimes including a bit of road. Most courses in Essex are on the flat side, but most organisers try to add a bit of interest with a hill or ditch or three to negotiate. The courses are all marked and marshalled and there will be no mile markers to distract you.

Everyone I know hated cross country, or XC as us professionals call it, at school including me. Being dragged out of a warm classroom to plod round some godforsaken playing field has scarred many of us for life. But for some strange reason when it is your decision to go for a XC run it doesn't seem quite so bad. When was the last time you came home with muddy knees? You probably got told off by your Mum, but now you can go and get as muddy as you like with no-one waiting with a rolling pin when you get home. (Or perhaps you're into that sort of thing.)

The Cross Country season runs from October to March and unlike the road races that we do is in either a league or Championship format. We run in three different leagues and also enter the county, area and national championships. The league formats vary but basically the first runner home is awarded one point the second two and so on. The team with the lowest score wins. The different leagues have different numbers making up a team so for instance in the 53/12 League (North Essex) the first 8 men and 4 women from each club make up the team. If you are not in the top 8 or 4 you are still affecting the scores of other clubs and therefore playing your part in the success/failure of the team.

The three leagues we run in are the 53/12 (North Essex), the Mid Essex League and the Essex League.

The Essex League is thought of as the premier league in the county and certainly is tough at the sharp end but just like any other race there are all abilities taking part. The Essex League is different in that it is run on Saturday afternoons rather than Sunday mornings and the men and women run in separate races of differing distances. All clubs in Essex can be in this league which is why you might see some familiar faces from the Striders running for their first claim clubs. Refreshments are available at this league but there is no official announcing of results afterwards so it is not quite as sociable as the other two leagues. There are five fixtures in this league.

The 53/12 League is the only league where the men's and women's scores are combined to give an overall team total. We are the most southerly team in this league which includes both Colchester clubs, Ipswich Jaffa, Witham, Halstead, Harwich, Tiptree, Great Bentley, Hadleigh Hares, Mid Essex Casuals and 53/12. There are six fixtures throughout the winter (ours is at Hylands Park) and points are awarded at each event. It is important to have a full team of scorers as all full teams are automatically placed above those teams with runners missing. This is why we need as many of you as possible to turn out for these races, to ensure we complete a full team and to push the other teams' scorers further back. There are usually between 200 and 300 runners in this league. Unlike most road races, after the race most of the competitors stay for a cuppa (free) and providing the results are done speedily cheer or boo as we find out how well we have done as a team. The individual results will be published usually by that evening so you can see where you came, although this league is usually not timed. Some of us then retire to the pub for lunch but this is not compulsory.

The Mid Essex League comprises ourselves, Braintree, Mid Essex Casuals, Little Baddow, Grange

Farm and Leigh on Sea and is run on the same lines as the 53/12 except that we have only need seven men and three women to score in this one and some of the scorers have to be veterans. There are five fixtures in this league (ours is at Highwood in January). The fields in this league have risen to about 150 runners, again of all abilities. Again you get a cuppa afterwards and everyone waits for the results. Some of us then retire to the pub for lunch but this is not compulsory.

The courses in all the leagues are generally between 4.5 to 5.5 miles long. The Mid Essex League has the most scenic courses. All the Essex Leagues are run on short parkland grass for the most part and the 53/12 is a mixture of the two. But the weather and underfoot conditions can make the grassland courses just as tough as the others. That is one of the beauties of XC that the same course can give a completely different challenge from year to year.

The Championships are different in that you have to pre enter. You will see and hear the team captains asking for entries throughout the season for championship races. As a club we encourage all our members to run the Essex Championships but the Southern and the Nationals may be a bit more intimidating for the newer runner. The standard in these events is obviously as high as it gets but there are still plenty of slower runners making up the bulk of the field and it truly is an experience to run in the National with a stampede of over a thousand runners at the start.

We ask each and every Strider to give XC a go. In fact the club even pays all the entry fees to encourage you. If you don't like it fair enough, but there is a real atmosphere and team spirit at XC that you won't find elsewhere and you may be surprised that you actually prefer the real mudbaths to the grassy courses.

WHAT TO DO ON RACE DAY

1. Pack shoes and club vest. The shoes required depend entirely on the ground conditions. Early season races can usually be run in your road shoes but most courses will have some soft ground and you will need more grip. Trail or fell shoes are the best all round bet as you can run on any terrain in these types of shoe. Spikes give a better grip in wet and slippery conditions but can cause calf and achilles problems to inexperienced XC runners. You need your club vest or T shirt as all the XC races require you to make yourself known to the other participants.
2. Meet up the club as announced on club nights or on chatboard. Share cars to venue allowing time to suss out at least some of the course beforehand.
3. If it is a league race you won't need safety pins as no numbers are worn, however championship races do require you to wear a number.
4. Run as hard as you can beating as many of the opposition as possible.
5. When you cross the line someone will thrust a disc with a number on it into your hand. This is not a medal to add to your collection but your finishing position. You need to hand this in to our club scorer as soon as you can. The club scorer is usually an injured Strider or partner.
6. Take a look around you at the finish because these are the people you should be aiming to beat next time.
7. Enjoy some refreshments while waiting for the results, usually in a nearby hall..
8. Go home (possibly via pub) and get ready for next week's XC

JUST A FEW RULES FOR CROSS COUNTRY RUNNING

1. Tie up your shoelaces securely
2. Tie up your shoelaces securely
3. Tie up your shoelaces securely

TRAIL RUNNING AND RACING

A large number of club members enjoy trail racing, a few do not and probably the majority have never tried one. This is for those that have never tried the pleasures of unpressurised running in the country.

WHAT IS TRAIL RUNNING?

For 95% of entrants trail racing is not racing at all but a social running exercise through some lovely countryside you probably didn't know existed with a set of results at the end. Trail running in Essex generally uses the narrative route description method and more often than not starts and finishes at a country pub. Some of you will have spotted the first advantage over road races already. The next advantage is the entry fee which is usually £3 or £4 with a voucher for your first drink at the bar. In these days of £15 road races trail running is becoming even more popular. Another major difference is that it is not a mass start. You start when you want (within limits) and run with whoever you want. Newcomers generally run round in small groups. Some people (me included) prefer running on their own, others always run with others. Thrift Green tend to run in large packs, Colchester all start together then split up along the way, the B team run as a pair and the Striders have adopted many different styles from mad keen racer to headless chicken (sometimes being the same person). Several people actually walk them and some take their kids with them on the shorter ones.

DO I NEED SPECIAL SHOES?

Most trail races take place in the summer so in dry conditions road shoes are fine. Obviously our summer weather is pretty unpredictable and there are special trail shoes which have grippier soles. Unless it is likely to be really muddy (when I wear my fell shoes) I usually just run round in an old pair of road shoes.

WHAT SKILLS DO I NEED?

You need to be able to read. The organisers generally try to make the print on the route description as large as possible. Other than that the only other skill is knowing the difference between Left and Right. Some people even write L on one hand and R on the other. No map reading skills or compass work are required at all.

THE ROUTE DESCRIPTION

The narrative route description method is not a form of contraception although they usually come in a plastic bag (ooh er). Narratives are usually a sheet of A4 paper with numbered paragraphs (in most cases each paragraph is roughly equivalent to one mile).

They are likely to read something like this.....Turn right out of pub car park. After 100 metres turn left over stile and follow left hand field edge to field corner. Cross footbridge into next field and follow hedge to road.....

To save space the most common actions and obstacles are abbreviated so that the above might now read..... TR out of car park. After 100m TL over ST & follow LHFE to FC. X FB into next field & follow hedge to road.....

All the abbreviations are explained at the top of the page and you will soon pick them up. HONEST.

RACE PROCEDURE

On arrival at the venue register with the organiser who will give you the route description. You can then read it if you wish, wait for your running mates, limber up, use the facilities etc and when you are ready to go, go back to the organiser and he will set you off. When you get back find the organiser again (they are usually in the pub) and he will calculate the elapsed time of your run. There is usually a container at registration where you can deposit your car keys. To date no-one has gone home in the wrong car.

POST RACE

One big difference between trail and road running is the atmosphere during and after the event. Most people that you overtake or who overtake you will actually speak and pass the time of day. When you finish there will be people there enjoying a pint who have already finished, then you can sit there watching people come in whilst you are sipping your pint. There will be great discussions about where you went wrong or how you misread the instructions turning left at a junction when the instructions clearly said turn right. There will be jolly banter with the organiser (the writer of the route description) but please do not hit him as he has put in a lot of work in on your behalf. In keeping with the low key atmosphere, the winner will probably get a bottle of wine for their efforts although most race organisers are too tight to give prizes at all.

PUB RUNS

Throughout the summer the club organise pub runs which are like trail runs, but they are not races. We usually split into two or three groups of similarly paced runners and go for a five or six mile run. Those that wish to eat at the pub order their food before we go so that there isn't a long wait when we get back. The pub run year always starts with the Bluebell Run at Danbury and then there is usually a run every two weeks.

BAT RUNS

These take place over the winter months and are top secret.

THE ESSEX WAY

The Essex Way on the first Sunday of September is a major event in the club calendar. The 81 mile route from Epping to Harwich is run by teams of ten. We have over one hundred runners doing this event most years. The Essex Way is run on the basis of a trail run with a full narrative route description so the more practice you can get through the summer at trail runs the better.

CLUB CHAMPIONSHIPS & WHAT HAPPENS AT THE DINNER & DANCE

The club organises several different championships throughout the year. Some run for the calendar year and others like the cross country championships cover the specific season.

Other than the Cross Country Championship we also have separate tables for Fell and for Trail, but the biggest trophy is awarded for “The Championship” which is mainly road, but can also include races not covered by any other championships e.g. Round Mersea Island which is neither a road nor a trail race. All the championships have separate male and female sections but there is also another award called the Martini Trophy (any time, any place, anywhere) which is based on good for age times at different distances in official road races which also takes into account gender so that there is only one winner.

There are also five road races at different distances that are nominated at the beginning of the year as Club Championship races. The first Strider male and female at these races become the club individual marathon, half marathon, 10 mile, 10K or 5 mile champion.

“THE” CHAMPIONSHIP

This Championship was designed to acknowledge the efforts of those people who fly the club colours week in week out throughout the year and covers mainly road races although as already stated can include any race not covered by any other championship. Over the years this trophy has been won by the club’s top runners and by some of the club’s slowest runners. Because points are awarded for any race which features 15 or more Striders from 50 for first Strider, 49 for second etc down to a minimum of 15 points for 36th place or below, runners can accumulate a lot of points by doing lots of races. Usually nobody takes any notice of the Championship table which is regularly updated on the website and on the noticeboard until about May when they find themselves at or near the top of the table. This is where your life changes. You will find yourself asking everyone on a Thursday which race they are doing at the weekend and if there are likely to be 15 Striders there. You will find yourself cancelling holidays because it would mean missing some possible counting races. You will be sticking pins in a voodoo doll of your nearest rival and find yourself constantly checking on his or her health status. I’m not making this up, just ask Andy Hind. Just to spice it all up and to ensure good turnouts the five nominated club championship races count in this championship with the added bonus of first being awarded 100 points, second 99 etc. So it pays to do the nominated races. These five races count even if there are less than 15 competing Striders. The Championship runs from January 1 to December 31 and the first three men and women receive prizes. Ian Cardy keeps the tables for this, so any queries to him please.

XC CHAMPIONSHIP

The first Strider (man and woman) home in the XC races will count 100 points, the second 99, the third 98 etc.

All cross country league and championship races will score towards the club XC championship. You won’t have to run every race as your best 12 scores will be the only ones counted.

The first three men and women will be awarded trophies at our Dinner/Dance in March.

FELL CHAMPIONSHIP

Fell runners are a quirky bunch so they have a championship that is almost impenetrable to the lay man. 6 races count for the championship which runs from January to December. 1 Long, 1 Short, 1 Medium and any 2 other races plus the best performance in the Lingwood Time Trial are counted towards your score. Any race that appears in the FRA Fell Calendar can count on production of the appropriate results. Scoring is calculated by taking the winner's time and working out your time as a percentage.

The first three men and women receive prizes. John Williams keeps the tables for this, so any queries to him please.

TRAIL CHAMPIONSHIP

This championship is for trail races that are negotiated by means of a route description. For a race to qualify 15 Striders have to finish. There are no nominated races in this championship but there are plenty of them throughout the year. Kevin Wright is the man to see about this event.

THE MARTINI TROPHY

This is awarded to the best runner in the club. How the hell do we decide who the best runner in the club is? Well it's a lot easier than you might think and is fair to everyone whatever age or gender. Len Clark has a set of tables which can be seen on the website which gives the world's best times for several distances by age and sex (there I've said it). What this means is that if you are a 21 year old male you compare your time for say the marathon with the world's best time for a 21 year old male at the marathon. If the best time is 2 hours and your time is 4 hours you score 50%. A 70 year old female running the same time and distance would compare her time against the world's best 70 year old woman's time and come out with a score in the region of 80%. Therefore the old dear would have a better performance than the whipper snapper. To make it simple for you there is a calculator on the website with the tables. To win the Martini trophy you have to prove yourself over three different distances between 5 miles and the marathon. You also have to prove your claims to Len by submitting official results showing your time. Any queries to Len please.

Important note. For all championships no races organised by the Striders count. The reason for this is twofold; one, the organiser and helpers can't score any points and two, 15 mates can't get together and organise a race between themselves forgetting to inform some close rivals. This may sound improbable but having witnessed the shenanigans over the years anything is possible. The only exceptions to this rule are the Lingwood Common race in the fell championships and the club's home fixtures in the cross country leagues in which all our runners are expected to help before or after the race.

There is no need to tell anyone you want to run in any of the Championships as you will automatically be awarded points in any counting race, but it is up to you to claim in the Martini Trophy.

With all these trophies to award we need to present them so we have a Dinner and Dance.

THE DINNER AND DANCE

This is one of the highlights of the year when we all get to see what each other looks like with clothes on. For the ladies it is a time to show off their new dresses (usually a lot of little black numbers on show) and for the men it is smart but not formal although there are always at least three chavs in jeans or shell suits. Apart from the awards the main object of the evening is for the women to dance the night away and the men to drink themselves to a standstill. Both of these objectives are harder than a good Tuesday night effort session and are both usually achieved.

The evening starts early with drinks and the meal and then it's on to the Chairman's speech and the awards. There are trophies for all the championships and championship races, the two handicaps, most improved runners, merit award and the Golden Boot.

The most improved runners and merit awards are voted for by all club members using an on line survey. The Golden Boot for the most humorous incident in the year is also open to nomination by the members but a winner is selected by the committee.

Then it's a couple of hours on the dance floor. As the "Do" is usually at the County Cricket Ground there are plenty of options for those who wish to carry on the partying a little longer. Whether you've won an award or not it is a great night to come and cheer all the winners and let your hair down.

IMPORTANT DATES IN THE STRIDERS' CALENDAR

Every year we organise two road races. The Pleshey Half Marathon is usually about the third weekend of September and the Friday Night 5 is the second Friday of July. You are welcome to run in these races but obviously we need quite a bit of help as well.

Another date in September is the first Sunday which is when the Essex Way Relay is held.

The Hobble, a trail race of between 11 & 15 miles, is always held on Remembrance Sunday in November.

The Essex Cross Country Championships are usually held in the first week of January.