

Beast of the East

This workout has been used for years by elite triathletes and is based on threshold pace. I first read about it in an article by Karen Smyers, and have subsequently heard many references to it (I came up with the name). Done properly, the athlete will reach, or slightly exceed threshold multiple times, and will recover with moderately paced running that is slightly below threshold effort. The benefits are many; getting the body used to threshold efforts, training it to process lactic acid more efficiently, promoting quick recovery from threshold efforts, and working efficiently at a moderately fast pace.

The workout is not long, but is very taxing, and should not be done on “tired legs.” Ample recovery afterward should also be planned. This is also not a workout that should be done every week, but used only in the proper phase of training, such as in late build, and only for a few weeks in a row.

The athlete must be fully warmed up and ready for hard efforts. Sean’s pre-track-workout regimen is perfect for this. The workout consists of continuous running, alternating fast and less-fast (not slow) 400 meter segments (one lap around the track). A sports watch with split timing is a must, and heart rate monitoring is strongly recommended. The goal is to run the fast 400s 10 seconds faster than the less-fast ones. An ideal duration is 3 miles total, or 12 x 400m, running the odds at fast pace and the evens less-fast. The fast intervals should be at or around threshold pace.

Correct pacing is extremely important for this workout. Done properly, you probably won’t hit threshold on the first two or three fast intervals, but will on the subsequent ones. The fast intervals should feel fast (duh), but are not run all out. The less fast ones should feel easier, and your heart rate should come down during them, but you will still be running at a crisp pace, definitely not at a recovery jog. If you’ve gotten it right, the last two odds will be difficult, but doable, and the evens will allow recovery but remain only 10 seconds slower. If you can’t complete at least 2 miles total (8 x 400m), then you’re probably running too fast. Three miles is the goal, but it may be wise to start at two build up to three if you haven’t already been doing interval work, or decide after two or two and a half if you’re going to continue. Regardless of total distance, you should always do an even number, finishing with a less-fast interval.

In my experience, this workout brings rapid improvement, not so much in the times, but in how it feels, particularly the not-fast intervals, which can feel awkward the first time or two. I normally do it two or three weeks in a row during late build, and by the last time out, the “slow” intervals feel very comfortable, like I’m just cruising, yet I’m running at about my triathlon 10k race pace. For reference, I run an open 10k in about 40:00 minutes (6:27 pace). My target times for the fast and less-fast intervals are 92 and 102 seconds respectively, which equates to 6:08 pace for the fast ones and 6:48 pace for the recoveries.

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