

NOT JUST FOR LAB RATS

By Sean Molina

Here are your hints: torture chamber device...lab rats...getting nowhere fast. Answer? Yep, you got it...we're talking treadmills. Yeah, I know...Yuck! What crazy person could possibly employ such a device for their training program?

Me! Let me yell it out: I LOVE MY TREADMILL!!! (most of the time☺)

During the winter of 1988 while living with my brother at 7,000 ft in the mountains above Boulder, CO, I was forced onto a treadmill for the first time. During the subsequent months it became very clear that something wonderful was happening to my running mechanics and fitness as a result of my treadmill sessions. Too bad I didn't give it a chance earlier. As I learned later that summer during training runs with world record holders such as Rob DeCastella (marathon) and Arturo Barrios (10,000) among many others, the treadmill had a vital place within the programs of some very successful runners. Certainly their popularity has grown tremendously since that time and people are utilizing them more, but I still think it's good to look explicitly at how this machine can help you move toward your goals. My hope is that you can reap more of its benefits by shaping your perspective a bit.

In general, treadmills have provided me reliability, control, consistency and repeatability.

Specifically, here are 5 ways the treadmill has helped me move closer to my training goals:

- 1) ADHERENCE TO TRAINING PROGRAM- There are three major reasons you're more likely to stick to the program(particularly when you own one):
 - a) Convenience- it's always right there waiting for you!
 - b) Being more "there" for loved ones and important situations (being home).
 - c) Weather and daylight become irrelevant.

- 2) LOWER BODY FAT % -
 - a) Due to all of the above you're less likely to miss workouts, and in fact, you're likely to add workouts! Consistency, Consistency, Consistency!
 - b) Year-round running and fewer injuries (see below) mean weight will be more stabilized. Body Fat% is critical to performance! Consistency, Consistency, Consistency!
 - c) You might also find yourself walking on the treadmill while watching T.V. or for other reasons. Bonus time!

- 3) INJURY PREVENTION-
 - a) The quality of recent treadmill models is usually very good and gives you a nice stable, even and forgiving surface on which to run. Finding these qualities for your outdoor run is almost an impossibility.
 - b) If you are over forty years old, minimizing injuries from running is probably the greatest challenge you face as an athlete. This could make the difference!

- c) I also believe treadmill running can correct improper running mechanics due to the belt forcing you to be more forward and less vertical in your stride.
- 4) IMPROVED RUNNING MECHANICS-
- a) With a controlled environment and the use of a frontal mirror, you can focus very deeply on what you are doing in terms of posture, shoulder placement, arm swing, symmetry, vertical bounce, foot angle and placement, hip rotation, and leg swing.
 - b) As mentioned above, the nature of the belt action of the treadmill really “shows” you how to run in an efficient manner, that is, with your foot strike impact being reduced by moving your legs and feet out behind your torso.
 - c) Here is a nice visual of good running mechanics. The voice reminds me a bit of the voice in the sex ed. movies I viewed in school as a 7th grader which tended to put me to sleep, but I think it could be worth watching. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=90cHm9UO9bs>
- 5) PRECISION OF TRAINING OBJECTIVES-
- a) Maintaining an exact pace and judging the precise distance with precise hill incline simulations at prescribed heart rates are made quite easy with a treadmill. You can carry out workouts to perfection!
 - b) When using a heart rate monitor, the control and repeatability of your effort is a fantastic feature when assessing your progress and looking at your benchmarks.
 - c) All the data feedback possibilities can make your session very interesting and motivating. In this sense, the treadmill is a coaches’ dream.

So now let’s look at 4 ways to make treadmill workouts more enjoyable and successful:

- 1) CREATE A TREADMILL SPACE-
 This could be a bit of a challenge, but if you fortunate enough to have a spare room, you could set things up so that you are more likely to get into a treadmill routine (having routines are vital to my program). Make a positive place that you begin to associate as a vehicle to your dreams and possibilities. The room should take on a mindset, if you will. If you’re crazy like me you could make it shrine-like.
- 2) MUSIC
 This may be more instrumental to the quality of your treadmill workout than you might think. Having a quality mini-system that can pump out the beats will absolutely focus you and bring motivation and interest. If it’s a session that occurs while others are still sleeping, I have found an ipod to work quite well. I have made some very intense and upbeat CDs from my itunes purchases specifically tailored for treadmill sessions. To illustrate this point here is a YouTube video to mull over. You’ll need to take this with a bit of humor ☺ [YouTube - Experiment: Music vs. Treadmill](#). And here is some more info on this point. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/7646370.stm>

3) VISUALS: MIRROR AND A T.V.

Have a mirror in front of you so you can keep your self company (uh oh it's getting late, lol). Seriously though, examining your form and keeping tabs on your body language adds interest and keeps your mind focused and sharp. Another visual attribute, the T.V., is something I use occasionally when I need a change of pace. It works well for many, and it could be particularly useful for very long sessions. Hey, if you're really struggling, go with the T.V. **and** the music!

4) DREAM & VISUALIZE

The beauty of the treadmill is the controlled, comfortable, and safe environment that allows you really take your mind on a journey. You can focus your energy on painting a picture of your performance in specific training or racing situations while listening to accommodating music. There have been moments during my treadmill sessions in which I have had what I would describe as psychological breakthroughs. In other words, once I saw a once unattainable performance happen in my mind during a treadmill run, it soon became an actualized performance! Magical stuff!

Finally, here is one of my favorite treadmill running workouts. Use your imagination and self-knowledge in modifying this workout to your level and needs (i.e. cut everything in half or double the elements):

Time	Incline	RPE
5min- Warm-Up	1%	Very Easy
10min- Aerobic	1%	Easy
2min- Hill	3%	Moderate
1min- Aerobic	1%	Easy
2min- Hill	5%	Hard
5min- Aerobic	1%	Easy
3min- Hill	3%	Very Hard
1min- Aerobic	1%	Easy
3min- Hill	3%	Very Hard
5min- Cool Down	1%	Very Easy