

ADD VARIETY TO YOUR TRAINING

BY ALAN CULPEPPER

For some athletes, it can be alluring to run the same three routes day after day—perhaps with some variation for the weekend long run. Training over different types of terrain, however, can spur physical gains and provide mental relief. Consider the following as you train for your next event:

TRAIL RUNNING FOR ROAD RACERS

A lot of runners who primarily race on the roads have an aversion to trails. And with good reason: They can be intimidating! As a competitive athlete, I did not like the idea of running slower but having an elevated heart rate on what was supposed to be a recovery run. There was also the fear of twisting an ankle or looking down at my watch in shock of how slow I was actually running. Eventually, though, I learned that trail running benefited my road racing, largely due to the added leg strength and aerobic gains from training on hilly terrain. Trails, in essence, force you to use more muscles—even though you're running slower. You will also develop lower leg strength from running on uneven footing as your feet, ankles, Achilles tendon and calves all adapt to new stimuli. When incorporated into a comprehensive training program, all of these factors benefit road racing.

ROAD RUNNING FOR TRAIL RACERS

Conversely, many trail racers fear stepping on pavement of any kind since they never intend to race on the roads and/or fear getting injured. While that is a valid concern, it's important to remember that you can only run so fast on uneven or undulating terrain. By strategically including some road running in your training routine, trail racers can become more efficient at quicker paces, hit targeted pace or distance goals and develop better running mechanics—all of which will benefit their off-road racing.

TRACK WORKOUTS FOR EVERYONE

Adding track workouts into your routine is another way to include variety in your training program. Any runner, regardless of what type of event they're training for, can benefit from running some speed workouts on the track. The key is dialing in the right effort level. The biggest mistake most athletes make is running too fast for intervals that are too short, which often leads to injury. Ease into the track workouts with controlled longer intervals over 800 meters, or even a tempo run. The controlled nature of the track leads to more productive workouts. Keeping a close eye on pacing also teaches you how to gauge your effort levels based on how you feel.



Two-time U.S. Olympian Alan Culpepper won national titles from the 5K to the marathon. His first book, "Run Like a Champion," is available at VeloPress.com.