



Running for my own reasons

Whit: I should probably get a cab, I've got a big run in the morning.

Dennis: A big what?

Whit: A run, I'm training for the Nike River Run next month.

Dennis: The whaty, what, what?

Whit: It's a marathon race along the Thames River.

Dennis: Why would you do that?

Whit: It's a charity thing. Plus I love to run. I ran the London marathon a while ago.

Dennis: Oh, that's a coincidence.

Whit: How's that?

Dennis: I watched it on the television, well, the last hour. I sleep in on a Sunday.

From Run Fatboy Run, 2007

Let's get one thing straight right off the bat. I'm not pretending to call myself an actual runner.

That title is reserved for the men and women who bound past me in their tiny (sometimes too tiny boy's) shorts with iPods strapped on to their arms and an "it's not a big deal" air about them.

The really serious ones have the mini water bottles in some kind of holster around their waists, as if they might be on a trip to the Great Victoria Desert. You can identify the real runners by their physique and demeanour cultivated through hours on the pavement. They're lean-limbed, strong-legged and armed with unfazed expressions.

So, just like the people who do stand-up shouldn't always call

themselves comedians and open-mike-night performers don't get a singing licence, I'm loath to label myself an athlete. I'm a Dennis, not a Whit. I'm more the kind of girl who should be getting a sticker for having a go. I feel a fraud when I complain about sore shins.

I'm not all that sporty. The fact I was tennis captain at school says more about the talent pool and my standover approach in getting people to turn up at matches than my serve.

I'm not exactly built like a runner and I'm not graceful either, despite my best efforts. I've also got the attention span of a goldfish — which makes the mental discipline and concentration required for running more than 100m challenging.

Running's not a flash-in-the-pan affair: you need to put the effort in consistently — the kilometres in the legs, if we're using running parlance.

What I do have on my side is determination, and stacks of it. Once I've got the inspiration to do something it's difficult, nigh impossible, for me to give up on it.

Which is why I should never have picked up novelist and marathon runner Haruki Murakami's book *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running*. The title's not a metaphor — the book is a memoir on writing and running. Murakami made it sound a noble, honest and beautiful pursuit, not the damned hard slog it is. I was so suckered in by Murakami's elegant prose and musings, I believed that maybe becoming a runner was in the realms of possibility.

Full of optimism and naivety, I laced up my joggers and set off down the road. About four minutes later, I

was a red-faced sweaty mess, struggling to breathe and convinced I'd never lift another foot off the pavement. Several people stopped to make sure I wasn't in some kind of cardiac arrest.

That it was late January and the height of a WA summer didn't help.

But once I got past the first few weeks of struggle town (mostly a self-indulgent invention of my own mind), I started to look forward to my runs. I quit feigning asthma attacks, crying, feeling sorry for myself and hurling abuse at friends, passers-by and fellow runners.

I swallowed my pride. Realising the marathon was out of reach, I revised the goal down to next week's 14km HBF Run For a Reason.

I can tell you now that the first kilometre or so after turning around from fighting the sea breeze to having it behind you is probably the best part of the run. For me it's normally just north of Scarborough, just past the 5km mark.

I might sound like one of the converted, but having the wind at your back and the splendid Indian Ocean curving around in front of you and the endorphins kicking in is the kind of feeling you can't cheat your way to.

There's glory in sticking at something you're not naturally good at. Last weekend I made it through 13km, so I think I'll be OK.

We've all got a column of can-dos and can't-dos. Things we secretly wish to do but are afraid to try. Running was in my too-hard, only-for-other-people basket.

I'm still pretty slow and if I saw myself lumbering along, even I'd laugh at me. But if I can do it, trust me, anyone can.

