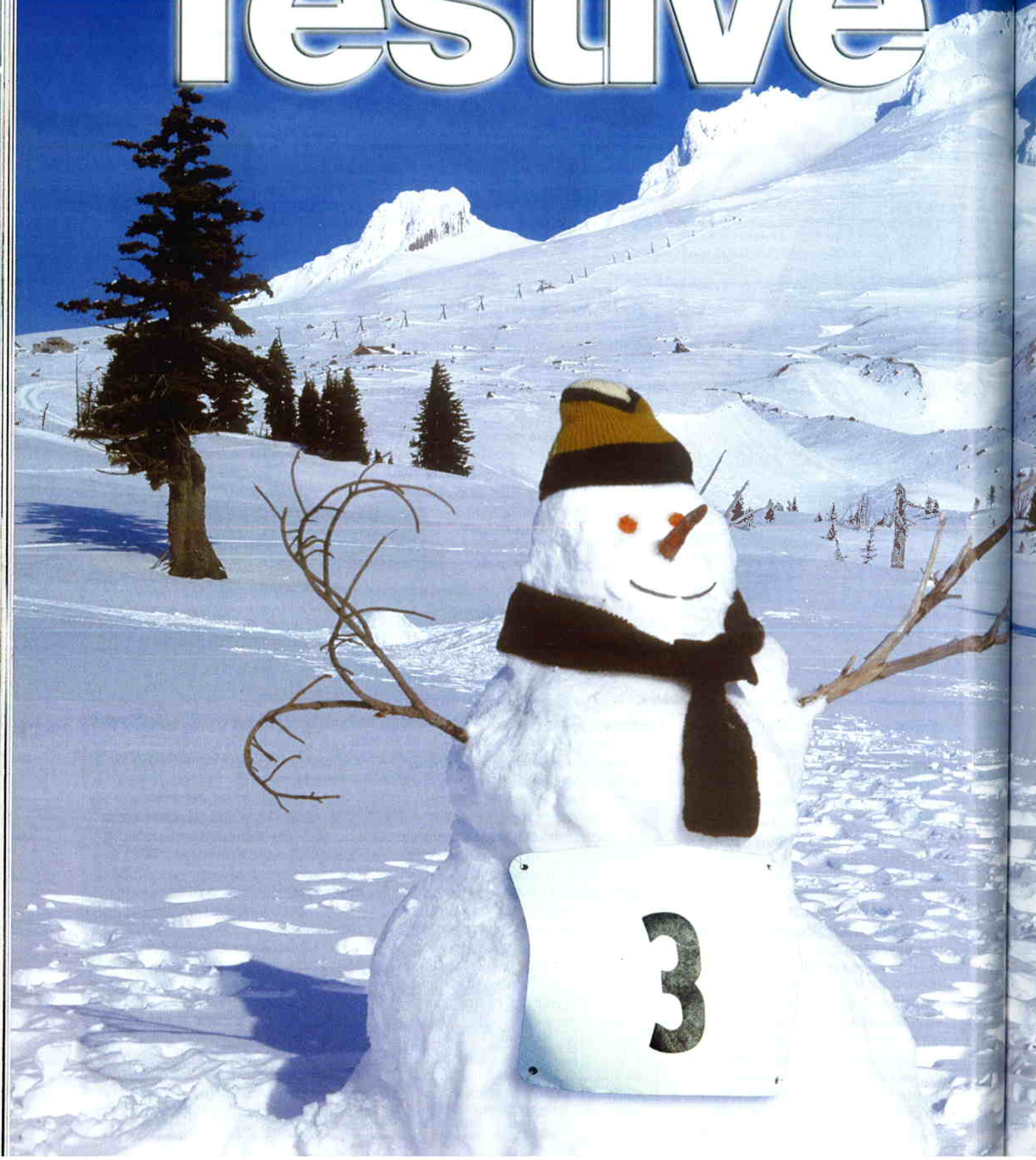




fit runner

# festive





# running

If you thought that Christmas and running were incompatible, it's time to think again. With a little bit of forethought and planning, Christmas can be the perfect time to make real strides in your running program...

By Andrew Hamilton BSc Hons MRSC



## fit runner: festive running

**Many a fitness** routine has been dashed on the rocks of Christmas, and that includes those of runners. Ten days' of gastronomic overindulgence, fitting into your relatives' routines or having them fit into yours, numerous social gatherings lubricated by alcohol – all can combine to stymie the plans of even the most committed runner! But it doesn't have to be this way. It might sound bizarre, but Christmas can actually

be one of the very best times of the year for runners.

There are a number of reasons why this is the case, but the most important is time; most people have plenty of spare time over the Christmas break (especially as many firms and businesses now close from Christmas Eve through to January 2nd or 3rd), time in which extra or longer training sessions can be incorporated. And although it's a very

busy time of year, being freed from the normal constraints of work means that it's normally possible to slot in a daytime run at a time of year when the day-lengths are extremely short.

Christmas is also a perfect time to run as it's the very time when most of us could do with it! As we've said before, hour for hour, running is not only a superb aerobic exercise, it's also one of the very ways of reducing or managing weight,





and as such makes the perfect antidote to Christmas dinners and other calorie-laden treats. If you maintain your running program, you can enjoy all the goodies on offer without the guilt and lethargy that normally goes with them. Then of course, there's the fact that over Christmas itself, the outdoors becomes even more attractive for runners. Take a run through even the biggest city on a Christmas morning and you'll be amazed at just how

empty and quiet the roads are. While everyone is indoors stuffing their faces, you can have the streets to yourself while you blast some clean air down your lungs and build up a real appetite!

### Breaking with tradition

Given the above, why is it that so many runners take a giant step back over the Christmas break? Part of the explanation is just down to the nature of the time of

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year and the fact that our routines are altered to accommodate those around us. Many families end up developing their own kind of Christmas routine, which can lead to an inflexible and immutable series of customs and rituals. You can very easily be made to feel guilty about popping out for that quick 45-minute run, when the rest of the family expects you to be doing something else at that particular point during Christmas!

The key to getting round this and keeping everyone happy is thinking ahead and planning, and this involves talking to your family and friends. For example, if you're thinking of doing a run on Christmas morning, it's much easier to explain the day before to those around you that you'd like to nip out for an hour the next morning and ask what time best fits in with what is planned, rather than to just try and hope the opportunity will arise (because it most probably won't). If your family find this a bit strange or unusual, try to explain to them why running is important to you (eg sense of well-being, a forthcoming event etc.) and involve them generally in your passion for running. When I first started running at Christmas many moons ago, my family thought my behaviour was bizarre. Now they say that Christmas wouldn't be Christmas if they didn't see me lacing up the running shoes and disappearing out of the door on a Christmas morning!

### Mums and some Dads!

Planning ahead is all very well, but as anyone who's ever hosted Christmas for others will tell you, it's hard work with very little time for rest and relaxation, let alone running – ask most mums (and some dads)! If that's the position you'll be in, it's still possible to get a run or two in over the festive season, but you'll need to enlist the help of others. Again, these things are best planned and discussed in advance, so collar your partner or responsible relative and ask them beforehand to keep an eye on the kids, the grandparents, the meal etc. while you take a break from it all and nip out for a run. Although it might take a bit of arm-twisting, it'll be well worth it; it's a perfect time to catch your breath during a hectic time and you'll return home de-stressed and mentally energised. OK, you might not have sufficient time to get in a really long run, but it will be more than enough to keep you ticking over. More than that, it can do wonders for making the rest of the family realise just what hard work laying on Christmas festivities can be!!

### When to take a hard-earned break

If you enjoy your running and can use the spare time during festive break to indulge in a little bit more running, all well and



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good. However, while most people eat far too much and exercise too little, runners who have been training consistently hard shouldn't feel compelled to try and cram in more training, or even stick to their normal training regimes. To reverse the cliché, a rest can be as good as a change! Taking a

complete week off, particularly after a long period of regular vigorous training can allow the muscles some 'deep' recovery and to fully reload with glycogen (stored muscle carbohydrate). Yes, you might gain a couple of pounds and yes, you might feel a little sluggish when you resume. But

after a couple of runs, you may actually feel fresher for it. To really make the most of any such break though, it's a good idea to ensure that consume plenty of carbohydrate-rich foods and don't overindulge too heavily in alcohol, or the 'richer treats' on offer at this time of year!

### Christmas Fun Runs and Events

If you're looking for something to spice up your running over the festive season, why not think about entering a running event? Although UK PLC seems to close down (apart from the shops!) for 10 days over the holiday season, a number of athletic clubs and organisations are busy laying on running events up and down the country (many of which are tailored towards fun running and blowing away a few cobwebs). Listed below are just a few of the more popular events that might take your fancy, but there are dozens more - contact your local running or athletics club for more details:



#### Tuesday, 26 December 2006

'Banks & Taylor (Pirton) Boxing Day' 3.2 miles at Hitchin, Hertfordshire. Includes under-7's fun run, under-11's fun run.  
Details: <http://www.boxingdayrun.co.uk>

'Barrow Boxing Day Handicap' 6 miles, Loughborough, Leicestershire. Details: <http://www.rutlandrunners.co.uk>

'Shell Chester Round-The-Walls' 4.5 miles, Chester, Cheshire. Details: <http://westcheshireac.gq.nu>

'Vale of Aylesbury AC Annual Boxing Day Road Races', Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire. Includes under-13 800m, under-17 2K.  
Details: <http://www.voaac.co.uk/>

'Witham Boxing Day 5 miles', Witham, Essex. Details: <http://www.withamrc.co.uk/>

'Cruim Leacainn Hill Race', 6 miles, Tomacharich, Fort William, Highland Region, Scotland. Details: <http://shr.uk.com/race.php?id=30>

#### Wednesday, 27 December 2006

'Queen's Head 5K', Belper, Derbyshire, Details: <http://www.dcaa.org.uk>

#### Sunday, 31 December 2006

'Cliveden Cross-Country 6 miles', Maidenhead, Buckinghamshire. Details: <http://www.burnhamjoggers.org.uk>

'Ely New Year's Eve 10K Road Race', Ely, Cambridgeshire. Details: <http://www.newyearseve10k.co.uk/>

'Millennium Runs On 10K', Nottingham, Nottinghamshire (includes family run). Details: <http://www.southwellrunning.fsnet.co.uk>

'New Year Sporting Triple Challenge 2K Bryan Clifton Memorial Midnight Run', Belper, Derbyshire.

Details: <http://www.runningwithdavid.com/4682/4871.html>

'Nos Galan New Year's Eve run', 5K, Mountain Ash, Glamorgan, South Wales.

Details: <http://www.runningdiary.co.uk/go/view.cgi/2161>

#### Monday, 1 January 2007

'Bushy Park 5K Time Trial', Hampton, Middlesex. Details: <http://www.bppt.net>

'Race Over the Glens', 5.5 miles multi-terrain, Co. Antrim, NI. Details: <http://raceovertheglens.cjb.net/>

'New Year Box Hill Knacker Cracker', 10K, Dorking, Surrey. Details: <http://www.trionium.com/knackercracker/inmain.html>

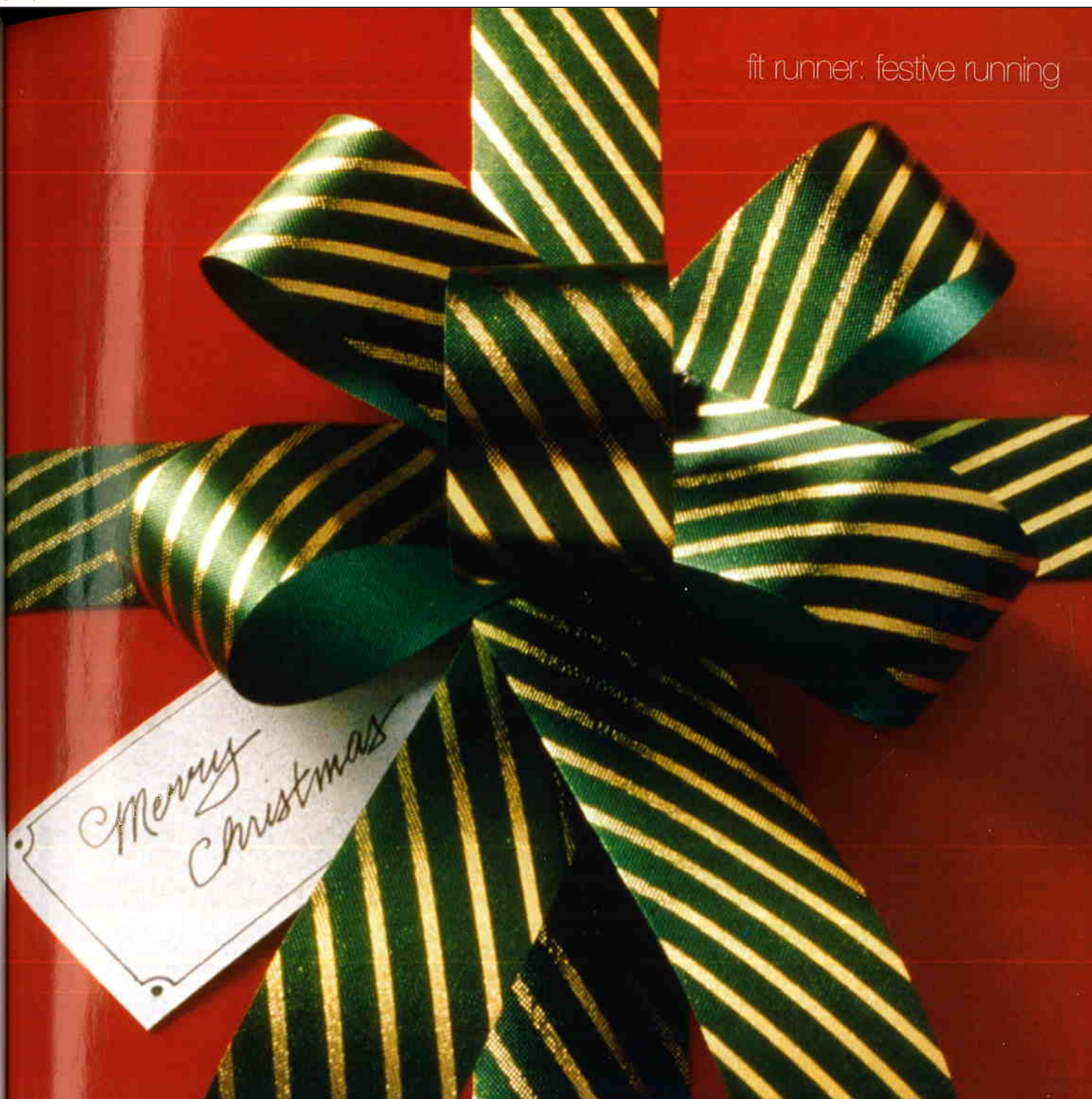
'New Year Sporting Triple Challenge Adidas New Year's Day Hangover', 5 miles, Belper, Derbyshire.

Details: <http://www.runningwithdavid.com/4682/4709.html>

'Serpentine New Year's Day 10K', London (includes 3K fun run). Details: <http://www.serpentine.org.uk/events/hyd10k/>



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### Motivational running presents

If you find it hard to motivate yourself to run over the festive season, you can always resort to some traditional Christmas materialism! Ask your nearest and dearest whether he or she will buy you nice new pair of running shoes or some winter running clothing, such as running thermals or hat and gloves. The mere act of unwrapping a desirable running present is often enough to get you motivated and out of the front door. If you've asked for running shoes as a pressie, be sure that you've done the research and checked a) that the shoes suit your running style/requirements and b) they actually feel comfortable to wear. If you're simply replacing an old pair of shoes with the same brand and model (or direct replacement model), there's no real need to try on shoes in advance – you can just tell your loved one what you'd like and you'll almost certainly be happy with what you get! However, if you want to try a different make/model, your best bet is to take a trip to a running shoe retailer first to check that the shoe you ask for is right for you, before you make any requests. Finally if it's new shoes, remember not to go too mad for the first couple of runs; running shoes need a bit of breaking in, so don't make your first run in new shoes a really long one, even though you feel like getting away from the family squabbles or the same old endless repeats on the TV!