



MARK GREGSON, PRESIDENT OF THE FOOTHILLS WANDERERS ORIENTEERING CLUB, PRACTICING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY.

Xtreme Orienteering

BY NICKI REHN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY NICKI REHN

Tired of interval training? Take up Sprint-O instead.

Imagine running at maximum speed through an amusement park while navigating your way to a specific park bench located among the rides. Your heart pounds at anaerobic threshold as you leap over garden beds, power up steps, weave around fences, and make decisions that might give you a split-second advantage over a competitor. This was Charlotte MacNaughton's experience at the recent World Sprint Orienteering Championships in Denmark. A two-time Canadian National Orienteering team member, MacNaughton has journeyed across the globe and navigated and sprinted her way through the world's most thrilling urban and forest terrain. For MacNaughton, sprint orienteering offered a fantastic way to improve her running speed because she was able to run in some incredibly interesting places.

"The championship race in Denmark was staged across

manicured parks, city forest, a horse-racing track, and through an amusement park," recalls MacNaughton. The chance to take your speed training away from the track and out to such fascinating settings is what draws many runners into the sport. MacNaughton is currently training for the inaugural GORE-TEX™ TransRockies Run in September, a six-day stage race in Colorado. Her fifteen years of experience in orienteering will help her running strength as she negotiates the high-altitude trails.

Sprint orienteering is a relatively new form of orienteering. It was developed in the mid-1990s as the "Park World Tour," a means to promote orienteering around the world. Traditionally, orienteering is staged in forests or natural areas, where spectator and media involvement is limited. Competitors use a detailed map and compass to find points, or controls, on the course. Sprint orienteering brings the sport out of the wildness

and into the city. With many top orienteers from around the world and the International Orienteering Federation advocating for its addition to the list of future Olympic sports, sprint orienteering's rising exposure and popularity excite competitors like MacNaughton.

Adrian Zissos, an elite orienteer with the Foothills Wanderers Orienteering Club in Calgary, takes advantage of the fact that map symbols are internationally standardized to travel the world in search of exhilarating places to sprint. He has raced in Istanbul's Grand Bazaar, or Kapali Carsi, the streets and alleys of Venice, and the old walled town of Obidos in Portugal. Zissos, who has been orienteering for twenty years, describes sprint orienteering as the "intelligent sport," combining athleticism with intense concentration. "It is imperative to use every second to its full so that you can prepare for what is coming. You must always know what you are

going to do next so that you can do it without stopping to plan. This requires constant mental activity so that you can maintain a consistent top running speed." Hesitation may cost you the race, a strategy that Zissos put into practice when he won the sprint orienteering event at the 2006 Croatia Open with just five seconds to spare over the competitive European field.

Marion Owen, an active member of Calgary's ski racing community, uses sprint orienteering to improve running speed and prefers it to interval training in the skiing off-season. She comments that "sprint orienteering is a high-intensity workout that provides more interest than running around a track. Because your mind is fully occupied, you are less aware of the pain and can often push harder as you try to beat your competitors or your own best time." Orienteering has also taken Owen to Europe. Last year, Owen placed second out of one hundred competitors in her age group at the Swiss Orienteering Week sprint in the village of Zermatt.

Sprint orienteering draws people from diverse athletic backgrounds, and Jen Silverthorn is no exception. Silverthorn, a successful ultra-marathoner with a long list of podium finishes and equally impressive half-marathon and



SPRINT ORIENTEERING EVENTS LAST ONLY TWELVE TO FIFTEEN MINUTES.

ten-kilometre finishes, uses sprint orienteering to add variety to her training regime. "Sprint orienteering is a terrific way to work on agility, plyometrics, hills, and speed in a tight compact package without having to worry about repeats." Silverthorn believes that speed work has paid dividends for her long-distance running too. "I'm a fan of interval work, but as an ultra-marathon runner, I dislike the track. Sprint orienteering is a quick, fun way to work on speed with a low risk of injury and little time outlay." Silverthorn recently won the Mitsubishi City Chase in Edmonton and will be off to the Nationals in September. Her capacity for short bursts of speed aided her win. "In any running race, there are times when you need to elevate your speed for a slight moment, in order to move past a competitor or to sprint for the finish. In sprint orienteering, you are often forced to add a burst of speed to your already one-hundred-per-cent effort as you try to beat a competitor to a control. This trains your body to know it can put a little extra juice in the tank, even when it feels like you can't."

As a long-time marathoner and triathlete, I can attest to the benefits that sprint orienteering bring to running speed. Traditional interval training, although important, is often agonizing. In contrast, it's fun and easy to show up at a local park for a Wednesday night sprint orienteering event and reap the benefits of twelve to fifteen minutes of anaerobic running. For this reason, sprint orienteering has become a regular part of my train-

ing. Intense mental concentration does a profound job of masking the pain. When you consider that most 'sprint-Os' include a practice or warm-up course, the race itself, and a cool-down, a sprint event makes for a quality forty-five-minute session. Over the last eighteen months, I have attained significantly faster personal best times in my marathon, half-marathon, and ten-kilometre races, with sprint orienteering taking the place of most of my interval and fartlek workouts.

All major cities in Canada, including Calgary, Edmonton, and Vancouver have orienteering clubs offering regular events, clinics, training camps and coaching. Calgary alone has six sprint venues, and two more will be added in the Canmore area before the end of the year. Charlotte MacNaughton enjoys racing locally because results at most events count toward the North American sprint series, an annual competition allowing runners to compete against their counterparts throughout Canada and the United States.

Sprint orienteering provides a new and exciting way to train your run. It is an enjoyable alternative to those painful intervals, which is a claim worth investigating by even the most dedicated lactic acid-lovers. ■

Nicki Rehn is a Calgary teacher and member of the Foothills Wanderers Orienteering Club. Rehn was the 2006 Alberta sprint orienteering champion and will represent Canada at the ITU World Long Distance Championships in Lorient, France, in July 2007.

GET STARTED

For more information and links to the Web sites of local clubs, contact:



Alberta Orienteering Association
www.albertaorienteering.ca

British Columbia Orienteering Association
www.orienteeringbc.ca

Canadian Orienteering Federation
www.orienteering.ca