

The Stage Race Handbook *Preview*

A Comprehensive Guide on How to Train, prepare for and Complete Multi-Day Races Including: 4 Deserts Series and Marathon des Sables

Thomas Watson

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Special thanks to all the runners who have run with me over the years and informed the content of this book. Extra-big thanks to the following individuals who reviewed and contributed directly to the book you're now reading:

Tony Brammer

Rory Coleman (*trademark used with kind permission*)

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Ash Mokhtari

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Sarah Sawyer

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FOREWORD

Running is my passion. Not just running, but running far.

It wasn't always like this, though. There was a time when I was, like many people, caught up in a busy life. The busy trap. I had a great job, fancy car and was deep into the 'rat race'. On the night of my 30th birthday I realized this wasn't the life I had planned, so I ran 30 miles. That night forever changed the course of my life.

I began signing up for weekend races – before I knew it, my calendar was full, and I found myself traveling to ever more extreme and exotic places to run.

This is where stage races come in. They combine a lot of my favorite things – running, adventures and travelling to amazing places. When I completed the 4 Deserts Grand Slam back in 2008, those races took me to some of the wildest environments I've ever run in – whether it was the vast emptiness of the Atacama or living aboard a boat in Antarctica.

These races tap into that primordial feeling, which is the reason I run. They allow you to spend a long time out in the wild with nothing but your backpack and your running buddies. They have reminded me

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that there is magic in misery. When you're out in the desert, be it the Sahara or the Gobi, all you have is your own fortitude and willpower for company. What's not to love about that?

And the other thing about these races is the people you meet. They're not always what you'd expect. I've seen grandmothers and college professors, war veterans and people who have never run farther than a half marathon all line up at the start line of stage races. And they make it through. They survive and endure and their stories are some of the most inspiring I have ever heard.

I hope that this book serves to inspire you to push yourself, test the impossible and persevere. May you run far!

- **Dean Karnazes**

4 Deserts Champion & TIME '100 Most Influential
People'

www.ultramarathonman.com

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PREFACE

When I lined up at the start line of my first 250 km stage race, I had the wrong shoes, a backpack that chafed and was filled with the wrong types of food - which I struggled to eat over the next six days. That was in Madagascar, in September 2014. Six days of discomfort later, I managed to get myself over the finish line – and immediately began to take notes of what had worked and what hadn't.

Despite months of preparation and testing out equipment prior to that first event, I realised there were still several big gaps in my approach and knowledge of the most appropriate gear and strategies for stage races. During that race (and the four other stage races I have participated in since) I began speaking to other runners, both the novices and the veterans, to extract their preparation and training advice, strategies and gear recommendations.

After each subsequent race I made notes, solicited feedback and refined my approach. I've learned that while there's no 'one size fits all' approach to stage race preparation, training and running, there's a lot of solid steps you can follow from those who have gone before. That's what this book is – it's my distilled collection of notes, recommendations and advice.

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As testament to the information and strategies inside this book, I went from being a 'middle of the pack' runner (I came 100th out of 230 runners in that first Madagascar race) to getting two stage race podium places within two years – I came 3rd out of 220 runners in the 4 Deserts Namibia race, only 20 months after that first race in Madagascar.

That isn't to say this book is aimed at making you *win* a stage race. The intention is to give you the advice and information you need to make the stage race as achievable as possible – to get you to finish comfortably, and maximise your enjoyment of the stage race. After all, something like a chafing backpack or the wrong food choices can have an immense impact on your experience of a week-long event.

So this book is really written for me – it's the book I wish I had back in early 2014, when I was preparing for that first event in Madagascar.

And keep an eye on marathonhandbook.com – I like to share as much advice and race reports as possible. If you want to get involved and write about a race you've done, or an aspect of stage racing you feel compelled to write about, let me know.

Enjoy, run far, and email me with any questions – I'll do my best to help you out.

- **Thomas Watson, Marathon Handbook**
hi@marathonhandbook.com

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Here's what to expect in the chapters which follow:

- **An Introduction to Stage Races.** What is a stage race, how do they differ from other races, what different elements may be involved? What are some of the most popular formats and races? What's the difference between self-supported and supported? Why do people do stage races, and what type of people actually sign up for them.

- **Researching Your Race.** This is the first step in stage race preparation. There are several important areas of information you should research early on in your planning, in order to guide your training and gear purchases. These include: environmental conditions, course features, levels of support, race format.

- **Training.** Training for a stage race is a huge subject, with no 'one size fits all' approach. In this section, I'll focus on what the typical training regimes are, which areas of training are important – and which are not. I look at the various building blocks that should make up your training plan, and give my own training plan as an example. But this section is more guidance than prescriptive. If you asked the 100 runners about their stage race preparation, you'll get 100 different answers. I share the best and most proven training methods.

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- **Gear and Equipment.** In this section I break down every item you might want to take with you on a stage race, from shoes to sanitary wipes, both mandatory and optional items. For the most part, I have discussed what your selection criteria should be, rather than just give explicit recommendations. I have broken things down for both self-supported and supported races. Also included are two example equipment spreadsheets, as well as guidance notes. Keeping your pack as light as possible is important during a self-supported race, and should be considered for every piece of gear you intend to take. Here, I'll show you techniques to ensure your pack is practical and light (no pack needs to be over 10kg).

- **Nutrition and Hydration.** Food is your source of energy, so it's critical to find types of food that deliver that energy to you effectively, while being practical for your race. In this section I explore the various options for what to eat in a stage race, and look at what to eat before each stage, while running, and after you finish running each day. Hydration is another area you need to be aware of – how much you need to drink, why it's important to replenish your salts – and the best ways to do all this.

- **Preparation.** There's a lot more to stage race preparation than simply doing training and ordering all your gear online. Here, I explore many of the practical aspects of preparation you should consider – this can include a lot of logistical planning

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(especially if your race is in an exotic location), as well as testing your gear. There's a degree of mental preparation too – this means preparing for various scenarios, and knowing how to deal with unexpected setbacks such as blisters or other injuries.

- **The Stage Race.** Finally, it's here. In this section, I look at what things will be like during the actual race. After all your preparation, what you should actually expect and prepare for. I've included several tips on how to cope and strategise when things get tough. This section essentially walks you through each stage of the race.

- **Conclusion.** Here I've pulled everything together - a quick re-cap of the key points that you will want to take away from this book.

Runner Profiles

I've also reached out to some of the stage racers I respect the most or feel have a compelling story to tell, and have included 'Runner Profiles' with interviews and tips from them between each chapter. They include some of the fastest and most experienced runners, as well as one of the most experienced race volunteers in the game.

End of Preview – download the full book on Kindle or at www.marathonhandbook.com