

Secrets for Running Indoors

Mikael Hanson

The New York area has so far been blessed with what can best be described as a mild winter, meaning many of us have not yet abandoned running outdoors. However, the recent snowstorm reminds us that winter is far from over and as endurance athletes we must not fear bringing the workout indoors (like so many of us do).

I will be the first to admit that the thought of running on the treadmill used to send a chill up my spine. Let's be real, on a scale from one to ten, the boredom factor is quite high for a treadmill run, especially when compared to the alternatives. But if you think about it, what separates the treadmill from say swimming laps at the pool or riding your bike indoors? Both offer little in the way of engaging scenery (let's be real, that blue line at the bottom of the pool is not going anywhere or even leading you someplace that can be deemed appealing), yet we tolerate these activities as part of our winter workout regimen. So then, why do we all approach running on the treadmill with such trepidation?

Perhaps we need to look at how we approach the other two indoor workouts. When faced with a session in the pool, most of us do a good job of breaking it into smaller segments. A casual opening warm-up, followed by some technique drills, followed by kicking, finishing with the main set of our workout and a cool down. As for riding indoors, we adopt many of the same principles here as we do in the pool (see my article 'Tips for Riding Indoors' December 2003), with the aim of keeping it all 'fun' by adding variety to your workout.

So I ask, why should running on the treadmill be any different? The answer is: It shouldn't. Instead of climbing on the treadmill with the aim of slogging out 30 minutes before succumbing to boredom, plan your workout in advance, making sure you have all of the necessary tools to assist you. As ventilation is always a concern indoors, make sure you are equipped with a towel and water bottle (especially for those excessive sweaters like myself and I apologize to anyone who has climbed on a treadmill after I have used it - there is only so much wiping down I can do!) Then there is the entertainment aspect of the workout. Part of reason we all loathe the treadmill is being forced to stare at the same spot on the far wall or tiny TV monitor for a prolonged period. Unlike riding a bike trainer, where your bike is fixed to the unit, a treadmill does require a certain amount of attention in order to maintain your place on that moving black carpet (and no, I have never fallen off a treadmill or at least there are no living witnesses to such an event). While following a TV show on the treadmill may prove disorienting, listening to music can be your savior. With the introduction of the Ipod, you too can program the ultimate run mix to help carry you through the workout (mine is called Big 80s Wave 1).

Now that you are properly equipped, what do we do for a workout? With the ability to manipulate not only your speed, but also your incline, the possibilities are literally endless. Keep in mind to always try to keep a modest incline on the treadmill (say .5%) to better simulate actual outdoor running conditions, which we all know include wind and rarely a perfectly flat road! Here are a couple treadmill workouts I enjoy doing:

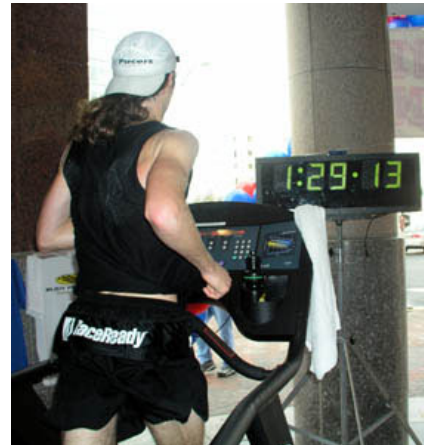
The first one is a modified ladder with changes in both speed and incline. After a 1-mile warm-up (can be done with no incline), pick a base speed to run at (say 7.7 to 8mph for 8min milers and faster or 6.7 to 7mph for those who run slower than 8min miles when training). At your base speed, run a ¼mi at .5% incline, then ¼mi at a 1% grade, then ¼mi at 1.5%. After those 3 quarters, drop the incline back to .5% and inch the speed up by .1 or .2 mph and repeat the progression. See how long you can do this for!

The other workout is a pure incline ladder. Begin with your 1-mile warm-up. Then pick a speed just below the base speed used above (if you used 8mph above, try 7.6 here). Every ¼mi up the incline by .5% until you reach say 2.5 or 3% (if you reach 3%, you would have run 2.5miles). After reaching your max incline, start moving back down, dropping the grade by .5% every ¼mi (2.5%, 2%, 1.5%, etc.) until you reach zero grade. End with a casual 1-mile warm-down at zero incline. For those looking to spice up this workout, try increasing your speed on the way down the simulated hill. For

instance, if you are running at 7mph at the 3% incline peak, try 7.2mph at 2.5%, then 7.4% at 2%, and so on.

I guarantee, you will get a great run from either these workouts and keep in mind that one of the benefits of the treadmill is the 'boredom factor'. You, alone with your thoughts, kind of sounds like a triathlon to me and as multi-sport athletes, learning to deal with the mental side of racing and training is of utmost importance. Use these sessions to work on building mental toughness, as that is what often separates first from everyone else.

PS: For the ultimate treadmill workout, look no further than what elite US marathoner (and recent Bachelorette contestant) Josh Cox accomplished in April 2004 when he briefly set the world record for a marathon done on a treadmill (2:31:04). This world record would later be beaten by 30-year old Michael Wardian (photo to the right) who ran a 2:23:58 and stated, "it's the longest I ever ran without going anywhere."



Mikael Hanson is a long time member of the New York Flyers running club, a USAC certified cycling coach, certified Schwinn indoor cycling instructor, and soon will be completing his USAT triathlon coaching certification. Mikael recently founded Enhance Sports, a multi-sport coaching and racing company based in New York. Mikael is the ultimate multi-sport junkie, competing in numerous cross-country ski races, bike races, running events, and duathlons/triathlons during the calendar year.