

by john burfitt

Take the experts' word for it: there's more to running than "just doing it." If you'd rather run like the wind than a blowhard, school is in.

the run down

swinging down around my crotch? "Fool," I countered. "Don't you realise this is exactly the style that swept the great Robert De Castella onto the world marathon stage and into the record books?"

My friend shook his head. "No wonder you look like you're about to collapse with a hernia."

I was stung. Swift re-evaluation of running style followed. And as much as I hated to admit it, I fast came to the realisation that Deek didn't have all the answers. If I wanted to improve as a runner, I'd have to ditch his style and go to the textbook. I got my arms working like pistons. I got my nose in the air. Suddenly I felt I wasn't running through sludge. I was *moving*. Entire minutes fell from my best times.

Lesson one in running: forget everything you've taught yourself. There's a lot more to this game than copying the televised styles. The philosophies on running, as in any sport, are evolving all the time, but there's a good stream of common-sense running through them which is too easily ignored once the feet start pounding the pavement.

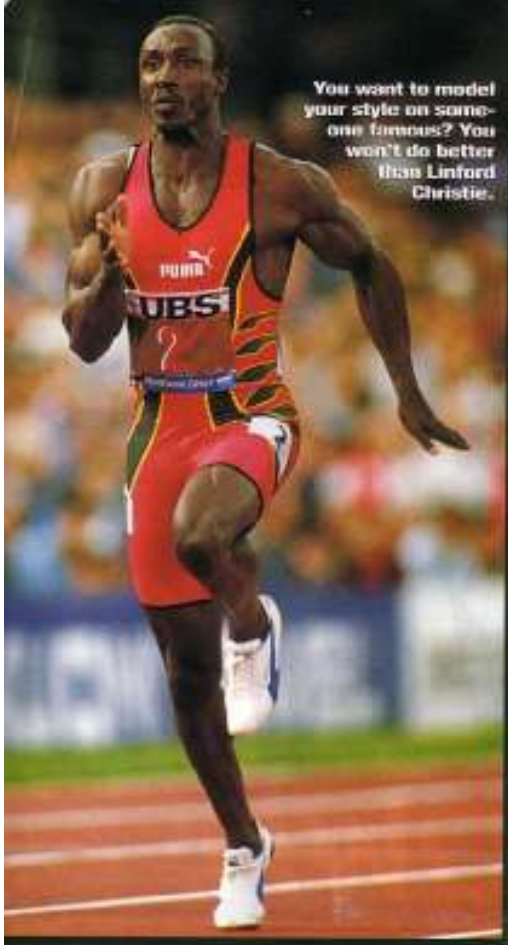
Former champion runner Clayton Kearney has identified this lack of fundamental knowledge about running and has turned the knowledge he gained from years of training into a thriving business, holding How To Run clinics. Kearney, the former world beach sprint champion and one-time holder of the 200 metre Australian track crown, was generally astounded by the lack of form shown by countless runners. He now offers his course to groups all over the country.

According to Kearney, it all comes down to posture. Every area of the body needs attention. "So many people get injured

It was all Deek's fault.

As he ploughed from one marathon win to another back in the early Eighties, this devoted teenager was glued to his TV set, going to school on that uniquely goopy style. My logic was pretty reasonable: if it was good enough for Deek, it was good enough for me. Who could argue with the world champion?

Sixteen years later, as I ran with a friend of mine, he finally plucked up the courage to quiz me. Just why was it that I ran with my elbows pointing out like taxi cab doors and my hands



You want to model your style on someone famous? You won't do better than Linford Christie.

braking motion, while putting strain on weak muscle groups. This is the type of strain that leads to bad knees and other problems later on. "You can't get away with it for long," says Kearney.

Hips and butt

Sounds kinky, we know, but Kearney firmly believes in the \$100 bill rule. "When you run, imagine that you have a \$100 bill between the cheeks of your butt – and you want to keep it there," he says. With a little buttock tension, the hips tend to stay underneath the torso and in line with the rest of the body. This posture keeps the power of the body flowing into each stride. With the butt trailing behind you, power is lost. This correct posture also protects the lower back from jarring and places the effort on the stronger muscle groups of the lower body, so the glutes (butt) and the quads work together. This adds heaps of efficiency to the way you run.

Stomach

To keep the rest of the body's posture in line, a strong mid-section is essential. "Do this and your body will always be protected," says Kearney. The abdominal muscles must be held in when running. Obviously, at the same time you must still be able to breathe to keep the oxygen flowing. But this isn't as hard as it sounds, even though it does require some work to get it going. This posture is essential to keep the power line of the body – from the top of your head to the end of your toes. It also protects the lower back. Kearney also promises this provides a terrific stomach workout that beats sit-ups.

Shoulders, chest & back

Here's the idea: shoulders should be back, chest held high, with the back as military straight as possible as you lean

slightly forward. With all of this in place, every other area of the body goes about the business in full motion. The head should also be held high and not allowed to flop all over the place once the going gets tough. Keep the chin up and eyes ahead. "Hold yourself tall at all times," says Kearney. "Slumping over and losing form as you tire doesn't make the going easier. In fact, it makes it twice as hard."

Arms and hands

In sprinting, the arms are held at a firm 90 degree angle at the elbows, with the hands coming up to the chin and then driving back. In distance running, however, the movement doesn't need to be quite so sharp, nor does the angle of the arms have to be held so strictly; the arms should be held at a lower carriage. But the same rule applies to the elbows no matter what the distance – they drive the movement. "It's the

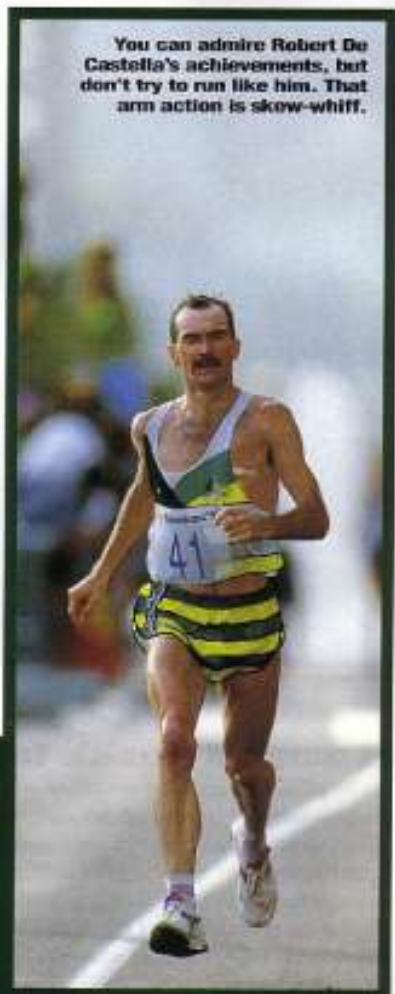
because they don't know how to run," says the 34-year-old from Sydney's northern beaches. "People will tell you that running is a natural thing. It isn't. You have to learn."

The feet

The most important rule about the feet is the placement of the toes. They should be slightly raised (lifted up) between 20 and 45 degrees, which ensures the correct positioning of the foot as it lands on the ground and assists in the drive of the stride. If the toes point down, as if you're clawing at the ground, they engage the hamstring, so you're actually working against your own leg. The toes-down position also lands your foot in a

See how they run

Clayton Kearney reckons that watching the masters at work isn't a bad way to learn how to run – provided you choose your masters carefully. For A1 sprinting style, he believes Linford Christie is as close to perfection as you'll find – "His style is smooth and tight with an easy-flowing form." A runner for the ages? Try Sebastian Coe – "He makes brilliant running look effortless. There's no strain, but so much power." Also of late, the Kenyans have really impressed Kearney with the way their arm techniques have borrowed from sprinters – tight arms which touch the chin and then push all the way back, but supremely relaxed.



You can admire Robert De Castella's achievements, but don't try to run like him. That arm action is skew-whiff.

On the beach

As a past national beach sprint champion, Clayton Kearney knows a thing or two about soft sand running and the adjustments in technique required to go the distance. He also agrees it's probably the hardest surface anyone could choose to train on. "Essentially the driving motion of the arms comes in for a massive increase in work, as they have to get the legs through the sand. You have to work on leg speed rather than the push-off from the ground that you're used to on a solid surface," he says. "The power comes from the lift of the leg and this changes the system of running, so it offers good variety. Add this to a regular routine and you'll notice your running strength improve dramatically."

elbow action that counts," says Kearney. "The arms control what the legs do. When the arms stay neat, the legs stay in alignment as well." The secret is to find a rhythm that works for the individual, but the arm movement should be strictly forward and back – no sideways wobble, a la Deek. As for hands, they should simply face each other and stay relaxed at all times. Rest the thumbs on the index fingers to minimise tension.

Moving right along

Now comes the stride. Here we're looking for balance. Avoid shuffling, but

don't attempt to cover 50 metres with each stride, either. "The secret is in the push once the foot hits the ground," says Kearney. "By this point, the body should be leaning slightly forward so that as you push off, the mid-section of the body is already in front of the foot. You're then headed in the right direction."

The kick up at the back as the leg follows through should have the foot aimed at the butt without touching it. This move is important as it stretches the length of the stride. As the power generated from the push off from the ground is increased, so will the pace at

which you're running. But this doesn't mean a higher impact. Rather, it means more lift from the ground and more work from the hips. It also requires an increase in the work of the arms, which is where around 30 percent of all the power comes from. Faster arms, faster legs. Simple.

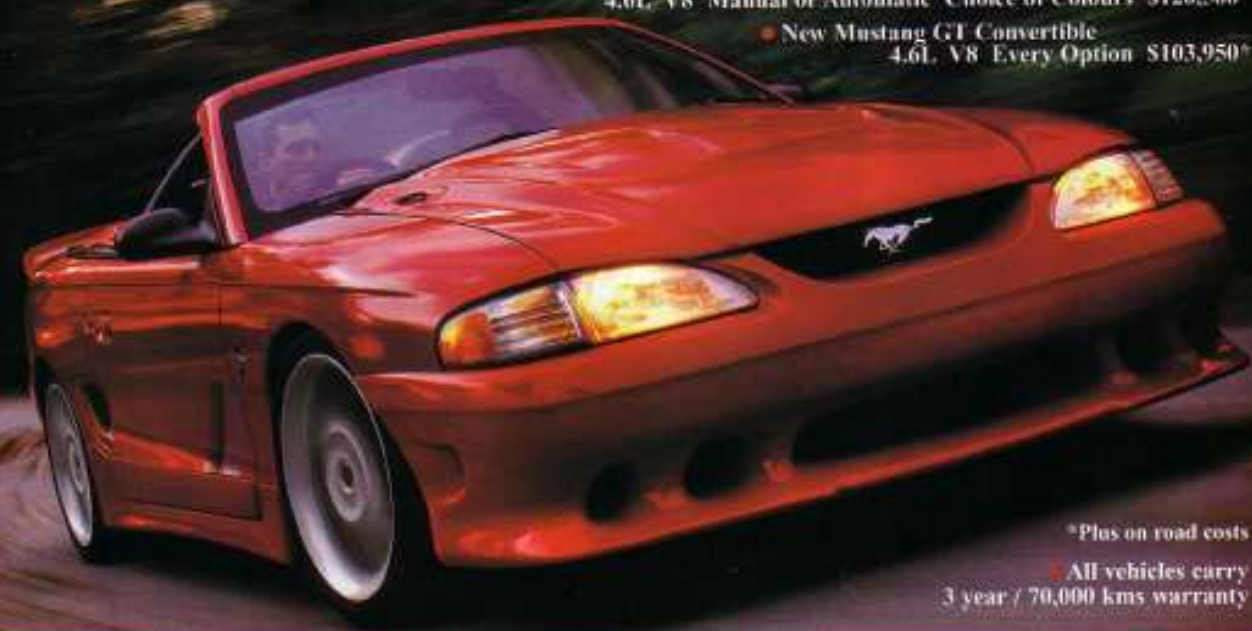
Relax

In time, all these new habits will become second nature. That's when you can really concentrate on being relaxed. "If you're tense, you're fighting yourself – like trying to accelerate with the hand-brake on. It's tense muscle working against running muscle and it just doesn't work." Kearney suggests that as you run you repeat this mantra to help you hold form and stay smooth: "Relax, more power." It'll have your engines running on all cylinders. •

Clayton Kearney is a fitness consultant and teacher who runs his own company, Fitness Bound. He's available for running and fitness coaching, and takes individuals and groups around the country. You can contact Fitness Bound on (02) 9975 5614.

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