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## 25 Running Books You Should Read

In spite of all the running information being zapped around the Internet, the best way to get good information on running is from books. The Internet has no editors corralling what you get, so in most cases you're getting exactly what you pay for. Books go through numerous editing stages on their way to putting ink to paper and are typically many times more reliable than Internet sources.

Over the years there have been hundreds of good books written on running—on every aspect of running you can think of, from biography to novel, training to inspirational essays. The following 25 titles would make for a solid library on the sport and lifestyle of running.

1. Beardsley, Dick, and Anderson, Maureen. ***Staying the Course: A Runner's Toughest Race***. University of Minnesota Press, 2002, 203 pages. The “toughest race” the subtitle refers to is not a running marathon, but rather the marathon battle Dick Beardsley has been waging since 1996 to stay clean of prescription pain pills, to which he became addicted in the wake of several very serious surgical operations. “The Beards” comes across as humble and likable, which he is. He also comes across as an unfaltering inspiration, which he also is.
2. Benyo, Richard, and Henderson, Joe. ***Running Encyclopedia: The Ultimate Source for Today's Runner***. Human Kinetics, 2002, 417 pages. You're right—this does look like bare-naked self-promotion. It is and it isn't. To get the most out of any hobby or lifestyle, you need to know as much as possible about it. Although, like any encyclopedia, the book carries its listings alphabetically, the authors attempted to make every listing readable. Let's face it, if you're talking to other runners and they mention *fartlek* or *Zatopek*, you want to know what they're talking about, and you want to be able to be conversant on the subject.

3. Burfoot, Amby. ***The Runner's Guide to the Meaning of Life***. Rodale, 2000, 150 pages. For many years, Amby was the executive editor of *Runner's World*; he's now editor-at-large. He won the 1968 Boston Marathon and is one of the really swell guys in running and one of its best chroniclers. In essence, the style of the little stories in this book captures well the guy who is Amby, and that's seldom been accomplished in so few words.
4. Christman, Paul. ***The Purple Runner***. Highgate Lane Press, 1983, 229 pages. There are a goodly number of running novels (and novels that include running), but this is one of the best. It is a fantasy in which the characters are very much alive. Its primary plus is that Christman lived in England where the novel takes place. He does a good job of capturing the London locale, the weather, and the inhabitants, from chilly gloomy days to foul exhaust from passing cabs.
5. Costill, David. ***A Scientific Approach to Distance Running***. Tafnews, 1979, 128 pages. Dave Costill sat down with every scientific report he could find, stirred them into the pot where he was brewing his own research, and came up with a landmark book that still stands up well today. A lot of people have since written a lot of books aimed at studying the runner and coming up with a scientific approach to training the runner, but this is the one where it all started, and it remains a very readable tome.
6. Derderian, Tom. ***Boston Marathon***. Human Kinetics, 1994, 1996, 635 pages. In preparation for the race's centennial run in 1996, longtime hard-core runner and writer Tom Derderian took on the daunting task of putting down on paper a century of Boston history. But the words are not the only fascinating thing about the book; it features a collection of priceless photos, going all the way back to a group shot of the Boston Athletic Association's 1896 Olympic team.
7. Galloway, Jeff. ***Galloway's Book on Running***. Shelter Publications/Random House, 1984, 287 pages. Jeff Galloway, a 1972 Olympian at 10,000 meters, breaks the book into eight sections: starting, training, racing, tuning, injuries, food, shoes, and start to finish. There's nothing very complicated about the book, which is what makes it noteworthy and charming—that and the fact that Jeff's buoyant and always-encouraging personality comes through. It would work perfectly well to introduce a novice to the various stages of running.
8. Henderson, Joe. ***The Long Run Solution***. World Publications, 1976, 182 pages. This book is a 182-page poem to the glories of

long-distance running and has very few references to anchor in the reality of time and place; it is more philosophy for the ages. Joe (editor of *Runner's World* from 1970 to 1977) has written more than two dozen books, but this is the one I keep coming back to, reading it every five or six years.

9. Higdon, Hal. ***On the Run From Dogs and People***. Regnery, 1971, 239 pages; Chicago Review Press, 1979, 223 pages; Roadrunner Press, 1995, 240 pages. This book is a delightful mix of information on running, observations on running's place in the world (and in 1971, there wasn't much running to make an impression on the world), and humor at the absurdity of it all. The humor makes the book a classic.
10. Jordan, Tom. ***Pre***. Rodale, 1977/1997, 168 pages. Steve Prefontaine, thanks to the two feature-length films made about him (*Pre* and *Without Limits*), is firmly anchored in the legends of American runners. Tom Jordan knew Pre and closely followed his career. In this book he captures one of the most legendary of all runners. A bonus is a scrapbook of photos of Pre's career.
11. Kardong, Don. ***Thirty Phone Booths to Boston***. Macmillan, 1985, 179 pages. When Don failed to make the cut for getting onto the press van at the Boston Marathon, he drove along the course in advance, hopped out at 30 pay phone booths, and wrote down their phone numbers. Then, from his hotel room in Boston, he called the phone booths in sequence during the race and took down reports of the race from whomever answered. It's probably the most hilarious race report ever written.
12. Krise, Raymond, and Squires, Bill. ***Fast Tracks: The History of Distance Running***. The Stephen Greene Press, 1982, 282 pages. This book chronicles the sport all the way up to 1981. Krise (an English major) and Squires combine their talents and considerable knowledge to produce an eminently readable book that literally covers it all. Especially interesting is the interwoven history of the fabled marathon.
13. McDougall, Christopher. ***Born to Run: A Hidden Tribe, Superathletes, and the Greatest Race the World Has Never Seen***. Knopf, 2009, 287 pages. Stripped down, the book is about a race nobody saw between the legendary long-distance gods, the Tarahumara Indians of the Copper Canyon in Mexico, and a handful of colorful ultrarunners from the outside world. Most running books are either how-to, biographies/autobiographies, or essays on the joys and tribulations of running long. McDougall's rich-textured narrative contains a bouquet of those types woven into the ongoing story.

14. McNab, Tom. ***Flanagan's Run***. Morrow, 1982, 443 pages. This novel follows the bright idea of Charles C. Flanagan, an opportunistic sometimes-flimflam man, to stage a great footrace from Los Angeles to New York for the sole purpose of making a boatload of money. Flanagan is, of course, based on the real-life C.C. Pyle (The "C.C." often referred to as "Cash and Carry"), who put on the first (take a deep breath to get this all out) "C.C. Pyle's First Annual International-Trans-Continental Foot Race, Los Angeles to New York—1928." I won't spoil the plot(s), but the always-resourceful Flanagan bonds with his charges, and together they weave a story of courage and camaraderie that is entertaining while still being edgy and warm.
15. Moore, Kenny. ***Bowerman and the Men of Oregon***. Rodale, 2006, 432 pages. This is a biography of one of the seminal figures in the original running boom written by one of the seminal scribes. It doesn't hurt that Kenny Moore was also coached by Bill Bowerman.
16. Noakes, Tim, MD. ***Lore of Running: Discover the Science and Spirit of Running***. Human Kinetics, 1991, 804 pages. The book is divided into three sections: the physiology of the exercising body, the training of the human body wishing to run long, and health and medical considerations. There is little more a runner interested in the science and art of running could need. It is all here in minute detail, presented in prose that makes the science available to the layperson.
17. Osler, Tom, and Dodd, Ed. ***Ultra-running: The Next Challenge***. World Publications, 1979, 299 pages. This book, by two of the greats in the ultra world in the 1970s, is actually two books in one. In the first half, Ed Dodd gives a detailed history of ultrarunning, with special attention to the six-day races. In the second half, Tom Osler, a math professor and AAU 25K and 30K champion, deals with the how-to of ultrarunning.
18. Robinson, Roger. ***Running in Literature: A Guide for Scholars, Readers, Runners, Joggers, and Dreamers***. Breakaway Books, 2003, 304 pages. This book would be of value to runners interested in expanding their enjoyment of the sport if it contained only the chapter on debunking the myth of Pheidippides' death at the gates of Athens and the chapter picking the best running novels of all time. But it provides much more, going all the way back to the ancient world, oral cultures, and the Bible, and coming all the way to the present with two new poems about running. In between, Roger introduces the reader to the running footmen, the sport of hare and hounds, and even the runner as villain.

19. Sachs, Michael L., and Buffone, Gary W., editors. ***Running as Therapy: An Integrated Approach***. Jason Aronson, Inc., (1984) 1997, 341 pages. This book is one of those rare scientific texts that is eminently accessible to the lay public. It contains 17 selections that address everything from running and depression to running addiction. Scientific writings often have massive footnoting, but in this book, each chapter has references nicely laid out at the end. And the references provide a virtual data bank of sources you can scour and use in your own research.
20. Sandrock, Michael. ***Running With the Legends***. Human Kinetics, 1996, 575 pages. Mike's premise in this book is that if we study the best, we can become better ourselves. Although the book is huge, Mike's writing style is very accessible—painlessly narrative rather than didactic. He teaches lessons through stories rather than through lecturing, and in the process weaves marvelous profiles of astonishing runners.
21. Shapiro, James E. ***Meditations From the Breakdown Lane: Running Across America***. Random House, 1982, 237 pages. Jim Shapiro set off to run across America pretty much unaided (except for being accompanied by a car crossing the desert so he could get water when he needed it) from California to his native New York. He set out to see America, up close and personal, and thanks to Jim's writing skills, the book never slows.
22. Sheehan, George. ***Dr. Sheehan on Running***. World Publications, 1975, 205 pages. This is the book that launched Dr. George Sheehan, a Red Bank, New Jersey, cardiologist, on a parallel career as the guru of running. Joe Henderson, former editor of *Runner's World*, persuaded Doc Sheehan to pen not one, but two columns in *Runner's World*: one a question and answer column in which The Doc answered runners' medical questions, and the second a sort of philosophy-of-running column that soon blossomed into the most popular page in the magazine. After several years, Joe gathered the best of the columns and put them together in this book, and Doc Sheehan's second career soon outpaced his first career by miles.
23. Switzer, Kathrine. ***Marathon Woman***. DaCapo, 2007, 418 pages. When this book first came out, we praised it in *Marathon & Beyond*, calling it "The most important running book of the last ten years." On a second read, we second that praise. Kathrine's personal story is fascinating, and her recreation of some of the behind-the-scenes politics and dealing derring-do is compelling and often reads more like a novel. The fact that Kathrine is an accomplished writer makes the stories even tastier.

24. Ward, Michael. ***Ellison “Tarzan” Brown***. McFarland & Company, 2006, 443 pages. Tarzan Brown was one of the most colorful men to ever line up in Hopkinton to race to Boston. A Narragansett Indian, Brown earned his spot beside other outstanding Indian athletes such as the runner Tom Longboat and the astonishing Jim Thorpe. Michael Ward, a musician by trade, scoured every source he could think of to come up with tidbits of information, which he wove together in this lengthy but fascinating biography that dispels much of the myth surrounding the athlete.
25. Yasso, Bart. ***My Life on the Run: The Wit, Wisdom, and Insights of a Road Racing Icon***. Rodale, 2009, 270 pages. Bart Yasso had a fascinating life, spending some of it as a ne'er-do-well before finding running—or before running found him. Since then he has served as a cheerleader for the sport like no one else ever has. In his autobiography, he brought it all together: all the ups and downs, all the trips down blind alleys, and the trips he was ill-advised to take, from running too close to rhinos to running nude. Bart's story is inspiring and entertaining. He occasionally takes himself seriously, but he never stays in that state of mine for too long. He's always moving.

I chose the 25 books reviewed here for their readability and their impact on the world of running. This explains why there are precious few how-to-run books on the list. Books that teach runners to run or that teach runners to run better are a backbone of the sport and lifestyle, but let's face it, they are primarily technical . . . and page after page of training programs do not great literature make.

Without training books by the likes of Jack Daniels, Joe Henderson, Hal Higdon, Jeff Galloway, Bob Glover, Pete Pfitzinger, Arthur Lydiard, and others, the sport would be a bumping-into-walls kind of place. The value of the how-to-run books cannot be emphasized enough. But they are seldom a compelling read, whereas these 25 books are.