

Richard Neill finds elliptical training has helped his running



Richard Neill began training on an elliptical because of a sore knee about five years ago. He logs most of his miles on the machine rather than the roads. So, how has his running fared? Well, how about a 16:34 PR in the 5K, which he ran at the Fireman's 5K on May 26, at age 50. So, how does he do it? Well, let him tell us.

``I've had people ask me that a lot. And I'm sort of surprised myself that it works. I've had weeks where I have done everything on the elliptical. The key is getting an elliptical that has a long enough stride length to simulate actual running. Most ellipticals do not do this and are basically sort of worthless for a competitive runner.

"The one I use is no longer on the market, but the stride length will go all the way to 31 inches in length. This becomes very similar to running. Most ellipticals will go only to around 18-21 inches, which really does very little good for a runner, in my opinion. I've researched this and the only one I know of on the market that will adjust to a long enough length to allow a competitive runner to actually get a good run is the Nautilus EV 7.16 Pro Series Elliptical. The problem is these are not cheap. I think James Newsom (one of Richard's training partners) is thinking about getting one. They are around \$3,000.

"I never hold onto the handles. I just get on the machine and hammer it like I'm running. Takes a week or so to get used to it so you won't fall off, but now I don't even think about it.

"I do all my training with a heart rate monitor, and you really need to wear one on the elliptical so you can get your heart rate up to the same range as you would for each planned run. In other words, you try to simulate your running routine as closely as possible. The best heart rate monitor training book by far is "*Heart Rate Monitor Training for the Compleat Idiot*" by Parker. I would say that anyone that is going to try this method of training must get this book. This is what I have followed for the past five years, and it works.

"I have a different goal heart rate depending on my particular workout, whether it is a long run, recovery run, or lactate threshold tempo run.

"For my interval workouts, I still go to the track once a week. This is the fast, really hard workout and you pretty much have to run these eventually if you are going to be competitive in 5K races. In other words, I have to run a little bit, but it's not much at all. It is sort of a joke with the guys at the Tuesday night interval workouts (I run with James Newsom and about 10 other guys at the TCU track) because I tell them the intervals are

my long run for the week. You can't run everything on this elliptical, but you can do 90 percent of the workouts on it.

"Back in the old days, I was running 60-80 miles per week and doing no cross training. I would run some fairly decent times, but I was getting hurt all the time. Now, I'm running 10-12 miles per week and doing probably 50 miles on the elliptical. I'm also doing Yoga and Pilates to get more flexibility. This is the other thing that has helped tremendously and has allowed me to avoid injuries. After starting the flexibility exercises, my knee soreness has pretty much gone away. I was scheduled to have orthopedic surgery on the knee, but I canceled it because I'm not having pain anymore.

"I would never have thought this would work, but it does. Boredom will definitely be a factor if you don't have a TV in front of the machine. I usually put it on a recording of a marathon or 10k race. There's something about watching other people hurt that makes the pain easier to bear.

"This is my basic workout. It does vary from time to time depending on if I am racing, etc.:

Sunday - 90-minute long run on elliptical machine at longest stride length (31") at long run heart rate.

Monday - 60-minute recovery run on elliptical at recovery run heart rate.

Tuesday - Interval workout at TCU track.

Wednesday - 60-minute recovery run on elliptical at recovery run heart rate.

Thursday - Tempo run either on trail or elliptical. Either way, the heart rate goal is the same and the workout time is the same whether I am on the elliptical or actually running. 20 minutes warm-up, 20 minutes at tempo run pace (lactate threshold heart rate), 20 minutes cool-down.

Friday - 60-minute recovery run on elliptical at recovery run heart rate.

Saturday - 60-minute recovery run on elliptical at recovery run heart rate, or a 5K race."

And that's it from Richard. For some of us who have had knee problems, this might be the training regimen that will work. It hasn't slowed Richard, for sure.