

Merry Christmas

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RUNNING FREE

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FREE MAGAZINE

WACKY RACES

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more unusual race? P18

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WACKY RACES

Fancy something a bit different from your usual road marathon or 10K? Laura Fountain reports on the current trend of crazy races





FEATURE

PERFORMANCE

Our first experiences of running as a child didn't include a training run, or being in a race, but as part of a game. Whether it was playing tag, British bulldog or just chasing that boy you liked round the playground, running was something that we did because it was fun.

As fun and rewarding as our sport can be, sometimes you might need to take a break from the training and competition of regular road races to get back to that childhood mentality of running because you enjoy it. And there's plenty of running events that can help you do exactly that.

ZOMBIE SURVIVAL

If you're stuck in a training rut, zombies are a pretty good motivator. Christine Prout took part in the Zombie Evacuation Race, a 5K obstacle course infested with zombies. Christine says: "I completed my first half marathon this September at the Great North Run. I enjoyed the race but I wasn't in a rush to do another half. When my sister suggested we sign up for this event it seemed like a fun challenge to keep me running, but without the pressure of

running a longer distance."

The aim of the race is to get to the end without losing lives - you have three of these, which are indicated by tags that are attached to you and which the zombies try to steal. "It's definitely not the sort of event where you're trying to get a good time" says Christine. "Apart from all the zombies, there was a lot of climbing over things or under things and lots of logs to dodge.

"The good thing about this sort of event is that you don't have to be super fit to do it. And I found out that I wouldn't survive a zombie holocaust should one occur, and that I'd get used as a human shield by my friends!"

RUNNING BULLS

As far as the usual trappings of a classic foot race go - race numbers, chip timing, the queue for portaloos - Bulls Run London is pretty much as far removed from all these things as running events can get. It does, however, have a start and a finish point, but both of these are pubs and there's few more public houses (all with a bull-related name) along the way, with the added drama of being pursued by runners dressed as bulls.

The brainchild of James Small, Bulls Run London took place in August with 65 runners stampeding across the capital. James says: "The most famous Running of the Bulls takes place in Pamplona, as part of the festival of San Fermin. We've taken this idea and given it a uniquely British twist. "Instead of bulls, we use hardcore runners in horned helmets and swapped the streets of Pamplona for the pleasant greenery of London's Hampstead Heath. We've taken out the animal cruelty, and tossed in a good old-fashioned pub crawl."

SANTA DASH

There's no better time to get back to your childhood love of running and dressing up than at Christmas. Feeling festive last winter, Laura Stewart signed up to run one of the many Santa Dashes that take place all over the country during December. Laura took part in the 6K run around Battersea Park where all runners were dressed as Santa. Having competed in numerous road races, Laura fancied trying something different. "It was definitely less competitive than other races I've done as you focus more on keeping your whole Santa suit on rather than getting



FIVE RACES TO PUT THE FUN BACK IN YOUR RUNNING

■ **Man Vs Horse**
www.green-events.co.uk

What started as a one-off race to settle a bet over who could run fastest over mountainous terrain - a man or a horse has become an annual event.

■ **Race the Train**
www.racethetrain.com

This 14-mile race sees runners pit themselves against a locomotive - and spectators get to be part of the action by riding along on the train.

■ **Heroes Run**
www.heroesrun.org.uk

Who is fastest Superman or Flash Gordon? Settle it for yourself in a race where everyone is dressed as a superhero to raise money for charity.

■ **Night Terror**
www.nightterror.co.uk

A series of nighttime runs through some of the UK's most frightening forests - definitely not for those who are scared of the dark.

■ **Witches Revenge**
www.getoutandtrain.co.uk

Held near Lancaster Castle, the site of the former prison where the Pendle witches were held after their trial for witchcraft, this 10K obstacle course offers a trial of a different sort.

a good time; only cheaters remove their beards! Everyone really got into the fun side of the run and were taking lots of pictures, laughing with friends, etc rather than stretching, scoffing free bananas, or checking their Garmins."

A keen runner, Laura found the Santa Dash a great way to encourage friends to get involved in the sport. "It's a good way to introduce races to those who think running events are big, scary, competitive, lycra events. Last year my friend Sharon ran her first 6K non-stop at the Santa run. She had never ran regularly before and signed up for the race as something to work towards and she did it. They're also great for organising big groups to come to and go to the pub afterwards. Who can say no to a Santa-themed run and Sunday roast in the middle of December?"

HELLRUNNER

The past couple of years have seen a rise in popularity of alternative running events as Paul Magner of TrailPlus, which organises the Brooks HellRunner series has witnessed firsthand. Paul says: "Our very first HellRunner took place at Longmoor Camp in Hampshire in 2004 with just over 600 runners."

"The Brooks HellRunner series now sees events at three venues (Longmoor Camp, Delamere Forest and, for the first

time next February, Trentham Gardens near Stoke-on-Trent) and attracts more than 8000 runners. Over the past five years there has been an explosion of trail runs and 'copycat' events. Partly because it is so difficult these days to put on new road races and partly because people are finally realising how much fun can be had running off-road and, in our case, 'off-piste' too."

While races with the words like HellRunner, Terror, or Revenge might not appeal to everyone, for a particular type of runner they offer a different sort of challenge.

"These days people do enjoy a challenge and new ones at that," Paul continues. "There is clearly huge satisfaction from completing say, a marathon, for the first time or indeed, beating a personal best time in a race. But the TrailPlus way is to deliver a memorable running experience.

"By all means spend most of your running year seeking personal bests in 10Ks, half and full marathons, but for the Brooks HellRunner you can throw away your watch, GPS or whatever and just enjoy the natural running challenge within a wonderful and shared communal experience. Throw in music, pyrotechnics, The Bog of Doom and the Devil himself and what's not to like?" Visit www.hellrunner.co.uk