

Don't Be So Quick to Hit the Road, One Program Says

MOST pared-down marathon programs promise only to get you to the finish line in one piece.

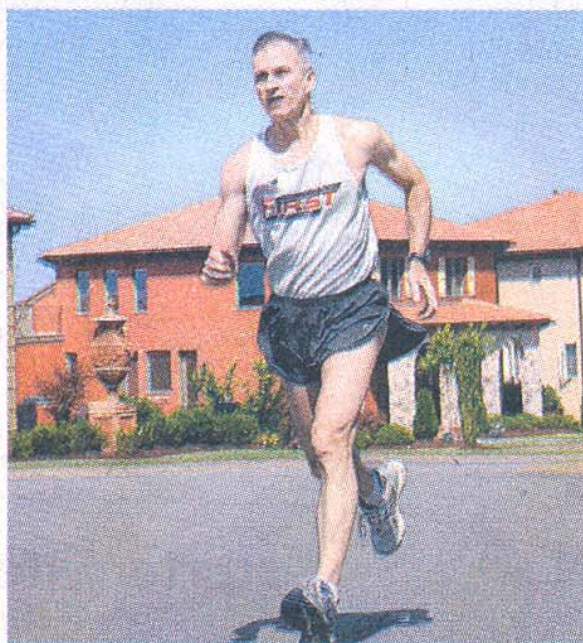
The First program claims you will get faster, too.

The catch?

"It's a 'run less,' not a 'train less' program," said Bill Pierce, one of its creators and an exercise scientist at Furman University in Greenville, S.C. "First" stands for the Furman Institute of Running and Scientific Training.

The streamlined regimen requires three workouts that many coaches say are essential to marathon success: a long run, a medium-distance run at a faster pace, and a speed session on the track.

But two or three days of cross-training — be it in the pool or on a bike — is also key to speed, proponents say. The thinking is that minimizing mileage reduces injuries, while participants receive the maximum



Emily Horos for The New York Times

NEW SCHOOL Bill Pierce subscribes to alternating running and cross-training.

physiological benefits of the plan's strenuous speed-oriented running.

The First regimen is the subject of a new book, "Run Less, Run Faster," by Mr. Pierce and two colleagues.

Some coaches argue that biking for an hour is no substitute for time on your feet. "The key to running the marathon is feeling comfortable on your legs for four or five hours," said Toby Tanser, a Manhattan running coach. "It takes the body a long time to get used to that. I don't think that cross-training prepares you for it."

Still, the idea that minimal running might be rewarded with a personal best attracts followers. One letter to Mr. Pierce reads as if he had told the student he can do half the reading and still earn an A in the course: "Thank you for showing me that 100 to 120 miles a week is not required to reach my running goals!"

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