

BY AMBY BURFOOT



## WHAT'S THE PERFECT 30-MINUTE WORKOUT?

**The Curves fitness program is fast and effective. Can the same formula work for runners?**

UNTIL A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO, I had never heard of a Curves fitness gym for women. Now there's one just a half mile from my small-town home in Pennsylvania, another less than two miles up the road, and probably others nearby that I haven't spotted yet. All told, the folks at Curves say they've grown to 8,000 outlets, and are still expanding fast.

I'm sure there are many reasons behind the Curves success story, but I bet one towers above the rest: The promise that you can get and stay in shape with just three identical 30-minute workouts a week. I'm not generally a believer in Ultimate Simplicity As the Solution to Everything, but it has an undeniable appeal in this overweight, overstressed, underexercising world.

And the Curves formula appears to work. The Curves people have collected plenty of testimonials from happy customers. In addition, well-known exercise physiologist Richard Kreider, Ph.D., chair of the Exercise & Sport Nutrition Lab at Baylor University, has found that the Curves program helps women lose weight, especially hip and waist fat, by boosting their metabolic rate.

Recently, after deciding that we runners need a similar program, I contacted a couple of Ph.D.s, and gave them this assignment: Construct a training plan that requires just one 30-minute workout that is repeated three times a week. I even came up with one on my own.

Below, you'll find the three workouts we devised. I tested each of them on a treadmill (for pace accuracy) while wearing a heart-rate monitor. All three are tough, and any of the three will work great the next time you've only got 30 minutes to spare.

### The Furman Total Fitness 30

This workout comes from the brain trust behind the Furman Institute of Running & Scientific Training, Ray Moss, Ph.D., and Bill Pierce, Ph.D. Pierce is a runner in his mid-50s who still churns out 3:10 marathons on just three running workouts a week.

Of course, Pierce does long, nasty, killer workouts, not the kind demanded by the Curves assignment. So he balks, protesting that "you can't shortcut things to death," yada, yada, before he and Moss come up with a nice mix of running, strengthening, and stretching.

1. Start with 5 minutes of calisthenics that include pushups, pullups, crunches, and lunges. Pierce suggests 25 to 50 pushups, 10 pullups, 25 to 50 crunches, and 10 lunges with each leg.
2. Run 5 minutes very easy to warm up.
3. Run 15 minutes at about your 10-K race pace.
4. Finish with 5 minutes of cooldown stretching of the calf muscles, hamstrings, and quads.

"I've designed this program for total fitness and running performance," Pierce says. "Too many runners neglect muscular strength and flexibility, and get injured as a result. The lunges help you run smoother. To get enough intensity from the 15-minute run, you have to get your heart rate up to 85 to 95 percent of maximum. That's about your 10-K race pace."

I did my five minutes of calisthenics in the bushes behind the gym, where no one would see me collapse after single-digit pushups and pullups. The running went better, though I

found the 15 minutes at 10-K pace rather monotonous. My heart rate climbed to 159, about 88 percent of my maximum.

## The Progressive Acceleration 30

If exercise physiologist Jack Daniels, Ph.D., worked for an automotive company, he'd be the guy building a car that gives you great performance and great gas mileage at the same time. In his coaching of runners, Daniels, author of the best-selling *Daniels Running Formula* (newly updated this month), aims to produce the best results with the least effort.

Given his background, Daniels doesn't flinch when I lay the Curves assignment on him. He quickly comes up with a workout that's varied, innovative, and easy to tailor to your individual needs. One day, you feel tired, you ease off. Another day, you feel like a Wheaties champion, and you bust a gut.

1. Run an easy 6-minute warmup.
2. Do eight 30-second pickups with a 60-second jog after each. Run the pickups at about your 5-K race pace. After the last 60-second jog, you will have been running for 18 minutes.
3. Do a 10-minute acceleration run, starting after your last 60-second jog (above). Do the first 2 minutes at half-marathon pace, then increase your pace by about 20 seconds per mile every 2 minutes. By minutes 7 and 8, you should be running close to your 5-K race pace. The last 2 minutes, you'll be going even faster, which you'll recognize by the tongue hanging from your mouth.
4. Finish with a 2-minute cooldown.

"The pickups should be quick but comfortable," Daniels says. "They only last 30 seconds, so you're not running long enough for them to get hard. And the 10-minute acceleration run is a subjective effort. As you get fitter, you'll run faster. I'm sure this workout could lead to decent performances in the 2-mile, 5-K, and even the 10-K."

I enjoyed this workout, perhaps because I was changing pace and had to do a certain amount of math in my head (which might not be attractive to everyone). The last two

minutes of the acceleration were hard, but not so bad, because of the gradually increasing pace. I was surprised that my heart rate soared to 169, about 94 percent of my max, near the end of the 10-minute run.

## The One-Mile Threepart 30

I began thinking about the Curves challenge at about the same time that I started training for my first serious (extremely relative term) triathlon. Before long, the two merged. To add swim and bicycle training, I cut back on my running, but still wanted to maintain quality. Hence, a solid 30-minute session had a lot of appeal. It also made sense that I should simulate running workouts that started at a modest pace, and then got faster and faster. In my triathlon, that's what would happen (I hoped) after I finished cycling and began running.

I came up with a mile-repeat workout that utilizes the paces of three of the most popular road-racing distances: the half-marathon, the 10-K, and the 5-K. You can squeeze this workout into 30 minutes, and at the same time train for three real-life road-racing distances.

1. Jog 2 minutes.
2. Run 1 mile at your half-marathon pace.  
Walk or jog 2 minutes.
3. Run 1 mile at your 10-K race pace.  
Walk or jog 2 minutes.
4. Run 1 mile at your 5-K race pace.

If you can run a half-marathon in two hours, this workout will take you almost exactly 30 minutes. If you're faster than that, the workout will take less time, so do a longer warmup and cooldown. If you're slower, skip the walk/jogs, and run continuously from one mile repeat to the next. I did this one day, and felt masochistically marvelous.

I like the way this workout gives you three clear starts and finishes. Most runners find that their races and training sessions go easier when broken into small chunks. At the end of the third mile, my heart rate reached 164, about 91 percent of my max.

Now, if only I could learn to swim and bike, I'd be ready for a good triathlon. **RM**