



There is a great atmosphere and camaraderie within the group

Born from a love of running on one hand and a love of a beer in the other, the Gunn Runners' formula has won many friends and supporters over the past three-and-a-half years.

As running clubs go, many would view the Gunn Runners as a bit of an anomaly: no track work; no elites (although some have been seen loitering); and a very healthy social club. It all seems a bit odd. Scratch the surface and a completely different picture appears.

The idea for starting the Gunn Runners happened during a particularly hard series of training sessions that Alan FitzGerald was doing under the watchful eye of his running coach Sue Grayson. Sue certainly knows how to get the best out of her charges: in 1996 she represented Australia in the Atlanta Olympics women's marathon and has

twice won the Rialto Tower (Melbourne) and Empire State Building (New York City) stair climbs. She is on the fitness squad for the Coburg Tigers - a feeder team for the Richmond Tigers - in addition to being a PE. teacher and running a dedicated women's fitness group in Melbourne!

During a business trip to New Zealand, Alan found himself in a pub in Auckland; there was a big bunch of runners about to set off on an organised 5 km run and then come back for a social beer. What a way to mix two loves! He put the idea to the back of his mind, until during the aforementioned coaching session, and in an effort to get a break from an intensely

grueling fartlek session (let the record book show the diversionary tactic didn't work) he mentioned what he had seen in New Zealand to Sue and wondered if she thought such an event would be popular in Melbourne.

"Yes, let's do it...now lift your knees!" was the



Gunn Runners taking the time to stretch and catch up after a run

reply (Alan notes that at the time, this answer was not exactly the desired outcome).

Several weeks of research followed including location and venue scouting. A name was chosen: 'The Gunn Runners' (after Gunn Island,

the small swan nesting island in Albert Park Lake, as well as the obvious play on words).

Sue and Alan approached the management team of the Gunn Island Hotel, who embraced the idea of hosting the event.

Sue and Alan continued to go to the Gunn Island Hotel at the same time, and to their surprise more people started to show up than in summer!

The marketing effort began with posters around the St Kilda area as well as postings on the Coolrunning website (www.coolrunning.com.au) (Alan's handle is 'FitzCameron' for regular readers). The inaugural run was mostly friends keen to support the concept but also a few new faces; in total the event attracted 21 runners. Following a few months of increased numbers, daylight saving finished and winter set in, and continuing through in winter posed its own challenges: (a) would anyone show up; and (b) where would they run? Sue and Alan continued to go to the Gunn Island Hotel at the same time, and to their surprise more people started to show up than in summer! This is a trend that still continues today.

In 2004 in an attempt to encourage new runners to get involved in the great sport of running, the Gunn Runners set up a 3 km run. Many 'newbie' runners had approached Alan and Sue but felt they may have been too slow for 5 km and did not want to be the last one home. The 3 km course is always an out and back circuit as this allows 3 km runners either to finish first and cheer on the faster 5 km runners, or filter in amongst the arriving 5 km runners.

The courses differ from summer to winter based on the time of year. In summer time, the course

Winners are grinners. Celebrating after the 2004 Relay for Life



includes a loop of Albert Park Lake, starting on a service road to make up the distance (the lake track itself is 4.73 km). In winter, there is an 'out and back' course along lakeside drive that ensures maximum runner safety. All of the distances are measured with a calibrated Jones Oerth counter following the guidelines of the IAAF.

In regards to times, Gunn Runners can be as competitive as they want to be for the 5 km. Some run as fast as 16.46, whilst others jog and chat for over 35 minutes, all are welcome.

During the summer months the Gunn Runners also hold a 1 mile challenge. The idea came about in 2004 celebrating the anniversary of the 4 minute mile. Runners are broken into groups of approximately five, based on their average minute per kilometer pace, and set off every 30

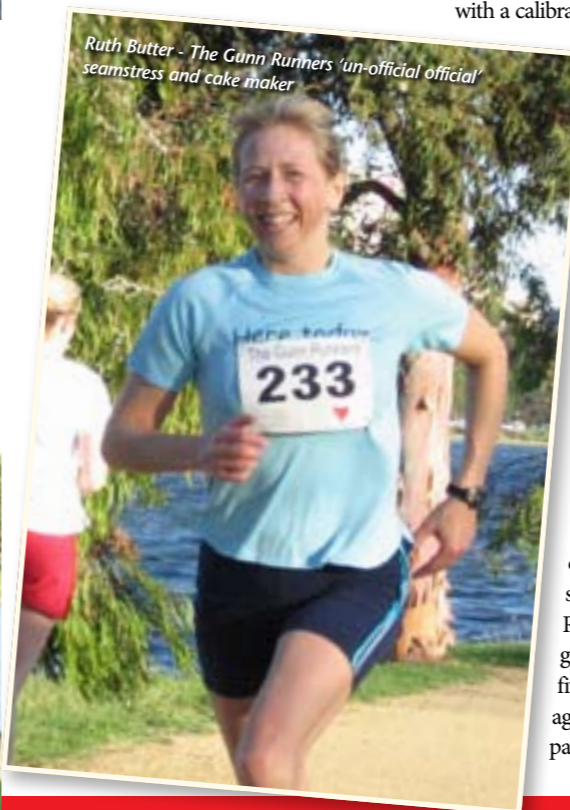
seconds. Most had never run a mile (1.6 km), and to be able compare their time against the famous Roger Bannister and John Landy has opened their eyes to this remarkable achievement. For the record, Mark Hughes (now back in the UK) at 4.45 and Sophie Hetherington at 5.45 were the fastest times thus far recorded for the men and women, respectively. There is an occasional handicap timed run

where runners are set off on a staggered start based on their PB.

In 2004, Parks Victoria approached The Gunn Runners to assist with planning an upgrade to the running track surface. The group was asked to answer a simple questionnaire and many of the perceived problems areas identified were upgraded, providing a direct benefit to the entire running community of Melbourne.



Having fun is a must!



Ruth Butter - The Gunn Runners 'un-official official' seamstress and cake maker



The Christmas dress-up fund raiser

KEY POINTS:

The Gunn Runners offers an opportunity to run, regardless of ability in a safe, incredibly friendly and supportive atmosphere up to 47 weeks in the year.

The group meets at the Gunn Island Hotel in Middle Park every Tuesday evening. A \$6 entry fee covers the securing of valuables, timing of the run, a beer/soft drink and a small spot prize during Alan's regular short (well, most of the time) speech.

The club sends out a weekly e-mail received by over 300 Melbourne runners with information on upcoming events, club activities, as well as many other topics.

CONTACT DETAILS:

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Gunn Runners indulging in a post run drink at the Gunn Island Hotel

Social functions are always well attended



By far the most popular regular activity is on the last Monday of every month called "The Last Monday of the Month" (that name took days to think up) or simply the 'LMM'. The LMM concept was brought to the Gunn Runners by two regular runners (John & Sonia) and has been adopted as the de-facto Gunn Runner tradition.

Each month, a small team searches out new and interesting pub venues around Melbourne's CBD and inner suburbs; all of the venues

Getting famous on Channel 9

Channel 9 approached the Gunn Runners in March of 2006 to do a 10 minute segment on the weekly "That's Melbourne" Postcards show. Hosted by AFL legend Dermot Brereton, the runners got an inside taste of how television programs are made with multiple angle re-shoots, albeit requiring a lot more running than previously anticipated! The segment was well received and a lot of fun to do.

Training sessions

Through Sue, the Gunn Runners have organised dedicated training sessions typically taking place on a Saturday morning near the Tan (contact the club for more information).

Through their supporters, the Gunn Runners hold information sessions by podiatrists, physiotherapists as well as a fantastic motivational speech by Lee Troop in the lead up to the Melbourne Marathon in 2005, which was well received by all.

Supporting runners

The club has organised cheer squads at major Melbourne runs.

Their banner created by the most talented Ruth Butter for last year's Melbourne marathon was a welcome sight for all runners approximately 4 km from the finish line. It will be back there again in October on the corner of Fitzroy and Grey/Canterbury Road, St Kilda, so keep an eye out for it. The banner is well traveled having been seen at numerous other events including the Portsea Twilight and King Island runs.

Honourable mentions

At every organization, you'll find standout people that simply make a difference. Within the ranks of the Gunn Runners, key people that deserve credit are Anthony Ditchburn, Jane Cameron and Ruth Butter. For the times that neither Alan or Sue can get to the run to organise it, Anthony & Jane, often at very short notice, take the reins of organising the runs. In case you are not aware, runners, like cats, are often very difficult to herd. Anthony and Jane's effort, input and assistance is highly appreciated by all. Ruth Butter is the 'un-official official' Gunn Runner seamstress and cake maker who regularly amazes everyone with her creations.

THE GUNN RUNNERS would like to acknowledge the support given to them by several organizations. The most obvious are:

- The Gunn Island Hotel (www.gunnisland.com.au)
- Brooks Australia (www.runhappy.com.au)
- Active Feet (www.activefeet.com.au) ensuring the health of the Gunn Runners' feet
- Parks Victoria (www.parkweb.vic.gov.au)
- UHJ DiMarca (www.uhj.com.au) who greatly assisted with a new unique logo and branding

>> Charity fundraising

The Gunn Runners are actively involved in raising money for charities such as the Relay for Life and Sacred Heart Mission in St Kilda.

The Relay for Life is a 24 hour event where runners take it in turns to run. In 2006, over 247 km were run! Anybody interested in joining or creating a team for the Relay for Life, please see www.relayforlife.com.au for details.

During the Grand Prix when the lake circuit is closed, the Gunn Runners venture to Melbourne's famous Tan track, where a series of time trials are held. There is a nominal entry fee for this, 100% of which goes towards the Relay for Life fundraising effort.

The Sacred Heart Mission serves over 400 meals every day to those less fortunate. For that past few years, the Gunn Runners have held a Christmas fancy dress run: all runners are encouraged to wear fancy dress and all proceeds go to the SHM in St Kilda. In 2005, 61 runners in various costumes ran as a bunch around the lake circuit, much to the amusement of passers by!

In total the Gunn Runners have raised over \$11,500 for these charities in the past few years.



Celebrating three years of Gunn Running

Extra Curricular activities

Ironically, the Gunn Runners are not all about running: the regular social activities are enviable to say the least. In the past 12 months, there has been two skiing weekends, surfing weekends, three winery expeditions, several theatre nights and lots, lots more.

have full access to public transport, as the Gunn Runners encourage responsible alcohol consumption. An itinerary is then drawn up so that if you are late to any of the venues, you can go with confidence to the next venue, happy in the knowledge that 20 or so people will walk through the door at the appropriate hour.

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