

Be inspired by...

SHONA STEPHENSON

From the fashion to the fitness industry, Shona Stephenson is 'runspiration' for all!

We're ten minutes late for the interview with ultra-distance trail runner Shona Stephenson at Sydney's Fitness First Newtown. She's nowhere to be found, but within a few minutes rocks up saying she's been working out on the cable machine. Never one for wasting a moment, Shona is a force of nature, and it's not too long before we're caught up in her enthusiasm for her craft and thinking about how we'd go about running a marathon or two.

At 34 years of age, Shona is a natural at the sport, running her first 'ultra' (an ultra marathon is technically any distance over 42.2km) at the end of 2009. 'I wanted to compete in the world famous 6 Foot Track event so I drove down to the ACT to race the 44km Deep Space Mountain Marathon. I ended up winning this race – that's nuts, winning your first ultra in your first marathon distance race, it's just unheard of,' says Shona.

But after numerous stress fractures and foot pain, road

running became a health hazard so she hit the trails and found she could run 100km relatively pain free. In her first solo 100km event in Katoomba, in the Blue Mountains just west of Sydney, she nabbed sixth place in the North Face 100 against an international field of competitors, clocking in at 12 hours and 50 minutes. Not bad for a first timer!

How does a first timer prepare for a 100km event? Shona insists it was her mental strength and toughness, saying that there's only room for positive thoughts, otherwise 'you stop running and walk'. Breaking the trail down in to two manageable chunks, visualising the terrain and actually running them were her strategies. 'I thought if I can run 60km, I can run 100km.' At last year's event, she managed 3rd place and after a week of post-race wheezing and breathlessness was diagnosed with exercise induced asthma. 'I have been trying to get to the bottom of my condition for three years now and finally I think I'll



be able to manage it,' she says as she taps the ventolin stored in her backpack.

An elite gymnast as a child, a representative netballer as a teenager with a training/competition regime of 20 hours per week, Shona is no stranger to hard work. Her strong work ethic and twice a day training regime shifted 20kg of post-baby fat after the birth of her first child. As did delivering her bootcamps, which are designed to encourage aspiring runners to tackle long distance trails. 'I had the drive to lose the weight and refused to be that person that had let herself go,' she says of her weight loss. 'I am goal orientated and just want to see what I can do. I love to focus on an event or a distance and see how fast I can run it and I love pushing my physical boundaries.'

Switching from fashion to fitness was a necessary transition. The punishing hours that her job as a fashion designer demanded and her weight gain during the first pregnancy motivated Shona to reassess priorities. It wasn't until after her second child was born that friends noticed her amazing weight loss and asked her to train them. Racking up an armful of fitness accreditations, Shona spends her days living the dream, following her passion for health and fitness and ample family time.

Shona says that slow long



distance training sessions are the key to fat loss. 'You have to move for more than 1.5 hours to really see the difference in your weight loss weekly,' and suggests to enter a City2Surf, half marathon or a 10km trail running event to get yourself motivated. Named the race ambassador for the Sydney Trail Series and Mountain Sport Events, she says that the 10km runs are great because they are like a forced speed work session for her.

While she straps on her backpack, we ask Shona for a few parting words of advice before her run home. With a grin, she says 'running is one third ability, one third mental and one third hydration and nutrition – you have to get all of this right to succeed.'

60 SECONDS WITH SHONA

Who are your role models?

My husband, and my training partner, Brendan Davis

What is the first thing you eat after completing an event?

A Hammer Recoverite or Hammer Choc Chip Bar, and a banana or berries

What is the funniest thing that has happened to you during an event?

Busting my shoulder 60km in to a 100km event and not being able to lift my arm to get my water bottle – is that funny?

What's your time for the City2Surf?

57 minutes

What are your passions?

Trail running and teaching people how to trail run

MY FIRST EVENT LIKE MOST PEOPLE WAS THE CITY2SURF. I HAD TO FINISH AS THERE WAS NO OTHER WAY TO GET HOME.

TO GIVE ULTRA TRAIL RUNNING A TRY:

- Join an Ultra Training Australia Camp.
- Believe in yourself.
- Do the training – build endurance, speed and strength.
- Eat right.