

Gill Laithwaite

In this edition of the Member Insight the spotlight is on Gill Laithwaite, a 10k to Marathon competitor, here's what she had to say!



What first inspired you to get involved in Sport?

Having to complete the bleep test when I joined the police in 1994. I was shocked how hard I found it – and as we had to do it regularly I started running every day at police training college in order to get better. Ironically, eight years later I left the police for teaching because the shifts were interfering with my training and racing too much.

What keeps you motivated?

It used to be the possibility of pb's – especially at improving my marathon time. pb's are now a thing of the past but I'm so conditioned to training I can't not do it. I sometimes wish I could take a break from it without feeling guilty.

How much training do you do each week?

I usually train 6 days a week in 2 sessions a day. This used to be all running but over the last couple of years I've struggled to recover sufficiently between runs so now do one run and one bike. I always have Friday's off.

Do you enjoy training and what is your favourite session?

I love training (mostly), more than racing now actually. My favourite session is the long run – especially 20+ miles if I'm marathon training. Our group two lap run at Gelt Woods on a Saturday morning is always good too.

Do you follow a healthy diet, or are you a junk food addict?

I'm pretty healthy. Well, to be honest I'm very careful about what I eat, though I do have a liking for coffee and scones. I never eat fast food and steer well clear of ready meals. I really like to know what's in my food if possible. I'm sure I drive Mike (my boyfriend) mad at times.

How do you prepare mentally and physically for a competition?

For my marathons I've followed strict programmes. I need to know that I have done enough long runs and enough marathon paced runs. If these fall into place then I'm generally happy mentally and ready to run. If I have to miss some of these sessions I start to doubt myself.

What is your training / competition nightmare?

My race nightmare was at the Amsterdam Marathon in 2006. Although I ran a pb in this race it was slower than I wanted and I lost a lot of time in the 2nd half. I pride

myself on good pacing in a marathon and have sometimes managed to negative split. On this occasion though I missed an energy gel early on in the race and didn't eat as I should have done the night before. I had insufficient energy in the final 6 miles and lost three minutes on my target time. I was in the best physical shape I have managed to achieve and was furious at myself for getting it wrong. That's the problem with marathons, you can't just have a go at another one a couple of weeks later. I never quite regained the same form again, that was my one chance.

What is your training / competition heaven?

When I get it right in a marathon and I'm passing lots of people in the final few miles. I'm not very fast but I'm good at not slowing down. In my head I liken it to a battle field where I'm passing the dead and the dying at the side of the road (a slight exaggeration but anything to help keep the legs going!), I'm hurting too but I'm still strong and those miles in training are paying off.

How do you relax?

This is something else I find hard to do though I'm taking tips from Mike who has the art mastered! I'm a bit of a fidget and can't keep still for too long so watching films doesn't always work. I do like to read and the aforementioned coffee and scone at a café always goes down well.

What is your next goal?

I don't do many standard distance races at the moment because I find it hard to stop comparing my present times with past ones! I like the long tough races now like The Newlands Round in February. I got the course record there in 2008 and would love to better it next year. I've got some hamstring niggles that are hampering my mileage at the moment but I'm hopeful of resolving the problems and getting in some solid hilly mileage over the winter.

Are any other members of your family into sport?

Not really. My brother is an avid Liverpool fan and my twin sister keeps fit but none of my family are into competition. In fact my mum used to despair of me – she thought I allowed running to take over too much of my life. She's okay now about it, I think she's admitted defeat.

What is the best part of being a member of the Border Harriers?

Being part of a long-standing traditional running club with a history.

Which sports do you enjoy watching?

The mountain stages in the Tour de France, the cross-country phase of three-day eventing and the closing miles of big city marathons.

Which athlete do you most admire?

I really like Jo Pavey. She hasn't won any really significant medals but she has slogged away at the sport for years and always runs herself into the ground at races. I also admire Jenny Meadows. She used to train at the same track as me when I lived in St Helens. She is another athlete who has slogged for years before achieving the recognition.

What advice would you give to newcomers?

Make running part of your routine. Remember – if you're too busy to run then you're too busy! If you struggle to find the time during the day then set your alarm 45 minutes earlier. I love running to start the day.

Have you a top tip that you could pass onto your fellow athletes?

If you want to run a marathon well then there is no substitute to running miles on the road. A lot of people think they can achieve their marathon goals through speed work and off road running. These can have their place in a program but you need to harden physically and mentally to miles of running on roads.

If you could have one sporting wish – what would it be?

My goal was always to gain an England vest for the marathon. I never quite managed this so that would be great – but if this is really a wish list then I'd have to saying winning London!