



# BOOT CAMPS: THE ULTIMATE CROSS-TRAINING FOR RUNNERS

**It's 9:15** on a weekday morning and a dozen women are gathered at a park along Ottawa's Rideau River. They're here to meet fitness instructor Tanya Robertson who will have the women doing dips on picnic tables and bunny hops over hurdles. The exercises change every week, but one thing is always the same - she pushes them to do things they would never do on their own. That's what boot camp is all about.

Robertson's class is just one of the many "boot camp" style fitness classes springing up in city parks, green spaces and gyms across the country in recent years. From sun up until sun down you'll find women and men swinging kettle bells, lunging their way across soccer fields and even flipping tires. But the types

of boot camp classes are as diverse as the people who sign up for them - and some classes are definitely better than others. **Whatever the class, the idea of a boot camp is generally the same - to get people working their entire body with a circuit workout.** David Brooks teaches a boot

camp class specifically for runners in Guelph, Ontario. Every week, he builds his workout from a list of 100 different drills: everything from dreaded burpees, to suomo squats, to more running specific exercises such as ankle flicks or backward running. "This is something you do

every week, year after year. It is part of your routine," says Brooks, who's attracted a loyal group to his Runners Boot Camp since he started it back in 2007. "It is what you add to your routine to make you a little tougher, less injury prone, have better form." Brian Williams is one of the loyal runners who's

## Off to Runner's Boot Camp I went

BY KAREN KARNIS

The first time I went to Runner's Boot Camp, the advice I got from a veteran was the very logical "just be sure to go at your own pace." After all, David Brooks had been instructing the Boot Camp two to three times a week for years, not to mention hosting bike trainer workouts and being a pretty darned fast runner himself.

The workout incorporated a selection of exercises from the "Runner's Boot Camp 100" including drills with specific focus on form, core-strength, overall strength, flexibility, anaerobic fitness and active stretching. Brooks was using the concept of 60-seconds work, 30-seconds rest long before videos like P90X made it cool.

Halfway through that first workout I remember thinking, "I don't think this is for me." I kept forgetting to breathe, I felt a little sick and mostly I felt overwhelmed by the burning and my inability to keep up. I don't know if I was able finish the full 60 seconds of any of the exercises and I was sure I was in way over my head.

But I stuck with it and managed to find a rhythm that worked - I was easily the slowest person there, but at least I was able to hold on for the full minute. Over time I got better at the exercises and started to feel like 30 second rest-intervals might be enough after all - at least some of the time.

After five or six weeks, at one of my regular "tune-ups," my physiotherapist commented that my hips had become much more stable and remarked that I was looking slimmer. Blushing, I replied that I hadn't lost weight, but that I had been going to Runner's Boot Camp, to which she gave me a knowing nod.

In my first 5K race since starting Runner's Boot Camp, I was startled by how much the experience had changed. I felt stronger, of course, but I also had a noticeably higher tolerance for discomfort. When I got to difficult points in the race, I could pull the benefit from specific strength drills to keep focus on the muscle groups I needed most at the time. I found myself calling on the exaggerated motions used in the form drills to keep my form from deteriorating as I got tired; and I could hear Brooks's voice calling, "Last little bit! Make it count, don't let up now!"

When the ten week session was over, I was again chatting with my physiotherapist who said I would be able to maintain the gains I had made by doing just a few of the exercises from each category two to three times a week following a run.

As you can imagine, that didn't happen. I knew the benefits, I had seen the results, but I simply lacked the discipline to continue when no one was watching. Misery loves company and I needed structure. And that, my friends, is why Boot Camp exists.

been doing sumo squats and burpees at Brooks' command for over five years. Since he added the boot camp to his three runs a week Williams has consistently shaved time off his personal bests.

"When I first went out to boot camp David guaranteed you'd do a PB at the end of it. For me it has been a series of PBs," says Williams. He used to run 10K in the high forties, and even fifty minutes. This past April, he finished in just 43:50. "I fully credit the boot camp."

The benefits of adding a boot camp to your running routine are undeniable. The high repetition, low load workout can enhance endurance needed for long distance running. The focus on flexibility, as well as core and joint stability, can also prevent injuries says physiotherapist Jen Schori, co-owner of the Petawawa Physiotherapy

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and Sports Injury Clinic in Petawawa, Ontario.

Schori's partner and fellow physiotherapist, Kristen Whitney, says runners are sometimes prone to injury because they are always moving in one direction, using similar muscles. "In boot camp you are often

turning to the side. You're rotating. You're bending backward. You're running sideways. You are doing different movements, so you're helping to even out those muscle imbalances you may create by doing only one activity."

Though the benefits are clear, the workout isn't without its drawbacks. At their clinic in Petawawa, Schori and Whitney see plenty of injuries from boot camp style movements - low back and rotator cuff injuries being the big ones. Moves like "dead lifts, clean and jerks and kettle bell swings" are the culprits, says Schori.

"It is essential when you are performing exercises that the spine is kept in a neutral position as much as possible. I think sometimes when you are joining a boot camp class you haven't necessarily been taught the form specific to the exercise."

That's why both Schori



and Whitney say it is important to find a class and instructor that is the right fit for you. They recommend a small class size, so the instructor can comment on your form, especially if you are a novice. Also make sure it is a class with

people of the same demographic. If you are a 40-year old who is just getting back into running, a class with a bunch of super fit 20-year olds probably isn't the best choice. Their biggest piece of advice though -- go at your own pace.

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Ottawa trainer Tanya Robertson argues that your boot camp instructor should push you, but they have to make the workout safe at the same time. "As women we are not built to lift really heavy things. Carrying 50-pound bags of sand over your shoulder - not a good idea. We don't need to be doing stuff like that to be fit," she says.

For runner Meg Thorburn, 57, of Guelph, it is definitely

all about the leader. David Brooks' Runners Boot Camp is the perfect fit for her. She's brought her 10K personal best from 50-minutes to 46-minutes, and she gives a lot of the credit to Brooks.

"When I am running I can hear David's voice yelling at me," says Thorburn. "It just makes you want to keep going even when it's hard"

She doesn't enjoy every exercise he makes them do - especially the burpees - but for her, that's part of the attraction of the class.

"Boot camp forces me at the age of 57 to do things that I wouldn't voluntarily do otherwise," says Thorburn. "I think I will stay a lot fitter into old age. That is why I don't see myself ever quitting."

### FINDING THE RIGHT BOOT CAMP FOR YOU:

- Choose a small class size
- Find an instructor who watches your form. Ask if you don't know how to do a move.
- Look for a qualified instructor - they should be a certified personal trainer, or have a degree in a related subject.
- Be careful of boot camps that do a lot of running or jumping - that can be hard on the joints.
- If the instructor has you doing a lot of weight-bearing drills, pick another class - you are just asking for an injury.
- Stretch after the class, especially if it wasn't part of the workout.
- If it hurts, STOP!

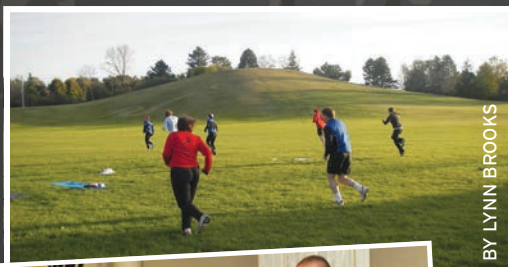



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