

KERRYNN McCANN - AUSTRALIA'S QUEEN OF THE ROADS

Kerryn McCann is Australia's foremost female distance runner with many top class performances at the highest level over a number of years. I was fortunate to catch up with Kerryn between training sessions for a chat at The Milch in Falls Creek.

N.M. Kerryn, you've travelled from your home in Woolongong to Falls Creek again this summer. How many years have you been coming to the Victorian High Country to train over the New Year?

K.M. I first came to Falls Creek in 1996, just before the Atlanta Olympics. I didn't come here in 97 because I was having Benny, but I have been up here every year since then.

N.M. How long will you be staying this time?

K.M. I came up before Christmas for about 9 days, then went home for Christmas, and now I'm back for another two and a half weeks. I have a marathon in Osaka, Japan on the 27th of January so I'll head back home for 10 days to freshen-up.

N.M. Why have you chosen Osaka?

K.M. I've run there in 94 and I wanted to do a marathon early in the year and Osaka is a really fast course. It's also a women only race and I'm keen to have a crack at the Australian Record of 2 hours 23.51 held by Lisa Ondieki. Lisa actually ran her record on that course.

N.M. The lack of time change between Japan and Australia would certainly be a factor in you choosing Osaka.

K.M. Yes. It's a nine hour flight but there's only a small time zone difference so I don't have to fly over too early. I'm flying over on the Wednesday for a Sunday race. It's much easier than say, flying to London where I would have to arrive three weeks before the race. Current thinking says that you need about one day recovery for each time zone you cross.

N.M. What are the benefits of Falls Creek as far as you're concerned?

K.M. I've run a couple of P.B.'s and an Australian Record for the Half Marathon (67.48) off training up here so it certainly works for me. I think there are a couple of reasons for that. Firstly, I think the altitude has an effect although 'Rab' (Chris Wardlaw) disagrees - he thinks it's more the training effect of a large group training harder. I also think it's the rest that I have up here. Back home I'm working part-time a couple of days plus looking after Benny and Greg and training which all means that I'm tired all the time. However, up here I get lots of rest and just run which means I feel good every session.

N.M. You seem to run very well up here over the challenging terrain. In fact, some of the fast men have great trouble keeping up with you. I remember Ray Boyd in 1999 / 2000 having many interesting duels with you. In the end I think he called a truce at three all.

K.M. Yes, we did have some fun. I always tell him that he should thank me because he ended up running a Sydney Olympic Marathon Qualifier not long after training at Falls Creek. (Ray ran 2 hours 13.26 at the Chicago Marathon in 1999)

I reckon he got super-fit up here because I chased him around for a few weeks.

N.M. He claims that he was chasing you!

K.M. Well, I think that we both benefitted.

N.M. This year you should be super rested because you've got your own baby-sitter in Troopy staying with you. In fact, as we speak, Troopy and Benny are enjoying "Shrek" at the Glo Cinema next door.

K.M. Yes, Benny and Troopy are great friends. They play together.

N.M. The plans for the year after the Osaka Marathon?

K.M. Firstly the Commonwealth Games which are in July. I'm not 100% sure but I also think that the World Half Marathon Championships are on in May in Belgium. I last ran the World Half Marathon Championships in 1993 so I'd like to run those again.

N.M. Do you know any of your likely opposition for the Commonwealth Games? Obviously the Kenyan women will be strong.

K.M. Yes, they will but I'll have to wait and see. There's a lot of names that could run but the marathon is such a strange event with injuries ruling people out.

N.M. Do you know anything about the course?

K.M. Nothing at the moment. I'll find out as the Games get closer.

N.M. Your running history. How did your athletic career begin?

K.M. I started running when I was ten years old. Then I won a State Title when I was eleven or twelve. A few years later I won an Australian Cross-Country title at High School when I was 15. Then I gave it away for a few years but when I started running again I slowly improved, eventually turning to the marathon.

N.M. Your coach is Chris Wardlaw. How did you begin working with Chris?

K.M. I actually met Chris at the 94 Commonwealth Games. I have been working with Chris ever since and have found that my running has improved out of sight under his guidance.

N.M. What changes did Chris make to your training?

K.M. Quite a lot of things. Before I started working with Chris I used to do a lot of 'hell sessions' and was always sick. Chris said that he wanted to look at my diary. Anyway, he found a pattern where I would be racing and training really hard, then I would get sick. This would follow a six week pattern where I'd race or train too hard then I'd come down with flu or bronchitis or tonsillitis. He was very surprised that I had not noticed what was happening but I thought that it was just me. However, when I look back, some of the training sessions I did were just ridiculous. For example, I'd be recovering from some illness then a day later I'd go out and do a really hard track session. I also did things like racing a week after a marathon or racing two half marathons too close together. Basically, my training was not consistent - it was all over the place. When I met Chris everything changed. Firstly, he had me doing the same training every week - fartlek Tuesday, track Thursday, strong run Saturday, and never miss a long run on Sunday. That was my training and I haven't changed it since 1994. I have been so consistent and that's the main reason my running has improved so much.

N.M. And has your general health improved?

K.M. Yes. I hardly ever get sick now.

N.M. Chris coaches you by phone and e-mail.

K.M. Yes. I'm 34 now and I find that I don't need a lot of direct coaching. Every week I e-mail Chris and let him know what I have done during the week. If there is a big race coming up I tend to talk to him a little more.

N.M. One of the benefits of the "Wardlaw System" is that you know what you're doing every session.

K.M. That's right. There's not many surprises, just good, consistent training. I just let Chris know my time for the "Quarters", how far I ran in the fartlek and how I'm feeling.

N.M. When you began with Chris, was the initial training very conservative in regards to mileage and intensity?

K.M. Yes, although the mileage gradually increased but the intensity of my training was so much less than what I was used to doing. In fact, I thought this new training was easier. But early on with Chris I got a bit of a rude shock. I was used to doing 400's at a fast pace but then I'd have a minute recovery. This way I was able to run the whole lot under 70 seconds on a grass track. However, Chris set me a "quarters" session of 8 x 400 metres with a 200 metre 'float' between. I think my first three were under 70 but then I hit a brick wall and was doing something like 85 seconds. I thought, 'what is going on?' But now I can get all my quarters down in the 70's with short recoveries which is much more specific to racing.

N.M. Up in New South Wales do you have many training partners or do you tend to train by yourself?

K.M. A few of my afternoon runs are by myself. There's a couple of guys in Woolongong that I've been training with for years that I run with some mornings. Some of the morning runs are at 6:30 so I can be back in time for work.

N.M. What sort and amount of training are you currently doing?

K.M. I do 180 kilometres a week. I have an easy day Monday and Friday, long run Wednesday and Saturday, fartlek on Tuesday, eight quarters on Thursday and a strong 16 kilometre run on Saturday.

N.M. Which days do you double-up?

K.M. Five days a week. Every day except Monday and Friday. When I double-up I do an easy 8 kilometre run in about 35 minutes.

N.M. Do you do any supplementary training to help you perform at you best?

K.M. Two days a week I meet some guys from the Surf Club to do a circuit. I incorporate it into my 8 kilometre afternoon easy run where we do sit-ups, push-ups, chin-ups, a bit of rowing - just pretty basic stuff.

N.M. I hear that your chin-ups are improving!

K.M. Yes! When I first started the guys had to lift me up onto the bar - and I counted that as 'one'. Then I just hung from the bar as the others did their chin-ups because I couldn't do anymore. Now I do two sets of ten, but I do cheat a little bit because I don't go all the way down.

N.M. Two sets of ten, unassisted? - that's great!

K.M. Yep! Unassisted!

N.M. That's better than the three recorded by a very fine Geelong runner with the initials C.M.

K.M. Well, I figure that I only have to pull up 46 kilos - he's a lot taller than I am and he certainly weighs a lot more.

N.M. So you have him covered in power to weight ratio?

K.M. I think so.

N.M. Do you do core stability work or stretching?

K.M. No, not really. Maybe a little stretching.

N.M. Many marathon runners claim their only stretching is bending over to tie up their shoe laces.

Your lead-up to the Osaka Marathon - have you changed anything or do you have a special session that you add?

K.M. Nothing. I don't want to change anything that has worked well for me in the past. I'm just happy to do what I usually do. If I change it around too much I might get injured or sick. I'm a big believer in just getting the sessions done and using common sense. Hopefully, I can run a little faster in sessions leading up to a big race but that's about all that might change.

N.M. And your taper?

K.M. The same sort of things. Two weeks before I do a two hour run then I ease right back. Then in the last week I do mainly light jogging and rest a lot.

N.M. Your diet. Is there anything special that you eat?

K.M. I eat pretty healthy food all the time but leading up to a race I really concentrate on my eating. During the last month I try to cut out any junk and concentrate on eating really good, low fat food. And then after a marathon I get stuck into the bad foods to see what I'm missing out on - as a sort of reward - strawberries and cream and ice-cream and that sort of stuff. After a race I can put on a couple of kilos very easily but that soon falls off when I start training again.

N.M. You don't have to worry about getting too lean? A lot of runners training as much as you do battle to keep weight on.

K.M. No, not really. I've never really worried about my weight. Somedays I get really hungry so I eat more, and other days, if I'm not so hungry, I eat a little less. I think my body has found its correct running weight.

N.M. Do you take any supplements and do you have regular blood tests?

K.M. Yes, I take Vitamin B, iron and Vitamin C. I usually have blood tests when I'm feeling a bit 'flat' to make sure everything is OK. However, my iron has been good for some time now.

N.M. What do you do after a marathon to recover?

K.M. I take 6 weeks to recover and to get back up to 180 kilometres per week. After the race I have 4 - 5 days completely off which may not be a good thing but I feel that I have trained so hard that I deserve to have some time to spend with my family. Then, it's just a gradual build-up with me doing my first quality session about 4 weeks after the marathon.

N.M. Since you have been with Chris you have run P.B.'s all the way through from 3 k. to the marathon. Any particular reason why you can race so well over such a wide range?

K.M. Yes, from 3 k. up my P.B.'s have improved dramatically. Maybe having a baby has helped.

N.M. So you're crediting Benny for some of your P.B.'s?

K.M. He's certainly helped.

N.M. Big city marathons versus Championship marathons. Your thoughts on both and do you have a preference?

K.M. I like the big city marathons. They're enjoyable and a bit more relaxed. With the big city marathons the courses are usually faster, they look after you so well and they have pace makers. But it's hard to compare - they're like cheese and chips. There's the pride of representing your country in the Championships versus the relaxed feeling of almost running for yourself in the big city races. Also, I've found the Championship marathons, especially the Sydney Olympic Marathon, very stressful because you're representing your country. It was a great honour to run the Sydney Marathon because it was in my home country but in the back of my mind there was a feeling of "what if I stuff it up?" I was just glad that it went pretty well and it was certainly a wonderful experience. For the whole 42.2 kilometres the crowd was yelling for me and even though I was cramping badly towards the end of the race, I'll never forget the roar as I entered the stadium. I can't imagine ever feeling as good as I felt that day with the crowd yelling and screaming. That was definitely the highlight of my running career. Even now, if I watch the video, I get a bit emotional when I see myself running the last few hundred metres.

N.M. You were running on strongly at the finish.

K.M. Yeah, the crowd did that. I was pretty stuffed and cramping badly.

N.M. When did you start to feel not so good?

K.M. Probably about half way. Maybe I didn't have enough to drink.

N.M. Was that when Takahashi started to kick it down a bit?

K.M. Yeah. She put in a bit of a burst and I couldn't go with her. In the end I was pretty happy with 11th but looking back I think I could have done better if I had done things differently. I think I should have drunk more fluids in the days leading up to the race.

N.M. Do you find the men a help or a hindrance in the big city races?

K.M. Sometimes they can be a problem. Not so much in Chicago last year because I was pretty much on my own. In New York I had a few problems clipping runner's heels and missing a few drinks. However, it's also good to tack onto a pack of men and run as a group.

N.M. You mentioned the Chicago Marathon which was a few weeks after the September 11 Terrorist Attack. Did you have any doubts about the race going ahead and how did you stay focused?

K.M. At first we weren't sure what would happen but after we were told that the race would proceed I just kept away from the papers and T.V. and tried to concentrate on running my best race. As it turned out the race was a fantastic event with record numbers.

N.M. It must have been amazing to compete in Chicago in the World Record race with Catherine Ndereba of Kenya running 2:18.47?

K.M. It was amazing, especially to come third. However, to come third and finish over 7 minutes behind the winner was a little weird. However, she's an amazing runner and there wasn't much I could do - I ran the best race I could.

(Kerryn ran 2:26.04)

N.M. Did you see her at all?

K.M. I saw her for the first mile, then she just took off and was gone!

N.M. What do you like to do when you're not running?

K.M. Not a lot. I love to look after Benny and he certainly keeps me busy. Soon we will be demolishing our house and rebuilding so that should keep me very busy choosing colours and fittings and furniture for the new house. Also, I love my garden, I love to read a good book, I love to cook.....

N.M. Your speciality being.....?

K.M. Any dessert. I love dessert.

N.M. It's funny that runners have a sweet tooth.

Kerryn, you're a Mum and work part-time. What is a normal day for you?

K.M. I work two days a week, Monday and Tuesday, at the Commonwealth Bank. I really enjoy my work but it can be a bit hard to fit everything in, what with Benny and training and cleaning and cooking and shopping and paying bills. That's why I think I run so well at Falls Creek - all I have to do is concentrate on running and rest.

N.M. What time do you have your morning run?

K.M. Early. I try to get out early so I can get back and have breakfast with Benny. A lot of the people I train with work so I can get up at 6:30 to train with them or train by myself later in the morning. But I prefer to run with people so I get up early. I have my afternoon run at about 4 o'clock.

N.M. Finally, motherhood and running is a hot topic at the moment with Susie Power absolutely flying after giving birth to baby Jai. You also have reached a new level after giving birth to Benny. What reasons do you think are responsible for this phenomena?

K.M. Everyone asks me this question and I'm not really sure why. I'm not even sure if there's a scientific reason. All I know is that after the Atlanta Olympics I needed a break. I had been doing athletics basically all my life and I needed a rest. I'd wanted to have a baby for a long time and after Atlanta was the ideal time. During my pregnancy I didn't do a lot of running but towards the end of my pregnancy I was really big and I couldn't run and I started to miss the sport. Then, after Benny was born I gradually started running again. I was setting P.B.'s in my sessions. I was now really enjoying my running and feeling relaxed. Benny was far more important to me than running. Sometimes I'd be up all night with Benny, then go out and run a P.B. session the next morning. It's hard to explain things like that. I didn't feel any different to how I felt before I was pregnant. It was just that I was running so much further and my watch was telling me I was running a minute quicker. However, I did lose a bit of weight after having Benny. I was probably two kilograms lighter than ever before so that may have had an effect on my running.

N.M. Sounds like a happy runner makes a good runner.

K.M. Yeah I think so. And just being so much more relaxed about the sport. It just doesn't seem so important any more and so I tend to enjoy it more.

N.M. Kerryn, thank you very much for your time. I hope you have a great run in Osaka.

K.M. My pleasure, Neil.

Note: Kerryn boosted her Commonwealth Games medal claims when she finished 4th in the Osaka International Marathon on Sunday the 27th of January. Kerryn was 10th at half-way and finished strongly in her third best time of 2 hrs 28 mins 30 secs, despite a recent illness. The race was won by Lornah Kiplagat of Kenya in 2:23.55. At the World Half Marathon Championships in Brussels on Sunday 5th May, Kerryn finished 11th in 1:09.47, just 41 seconds behind the winner, Berhane Abere of Ethiopia.

RUNNER PROFILE

Kerryn McCann

Occupation Business Banking Assistant with the Commonwealth Bank
Age 34 **Date of Birth** 2 / 5 / 67

Height 162 cm. **Weight** 46 kg.
Married / Single Married 10 years to Greg.
One child - Benton (4 years old).
Coach Chris Wardlaw

Personal Bests

1500m. 4.22
3000m. 8.50
5000m. 15.08
10000m. 31.55
Half Marathon 67.48
Marathon 2:25.59

Favourite Food Sticky Date Pudding / Desserts
Food Eaten Before a Race Toast and honey or jam
Favourite Drink Cup of Tea
Favourite Movie nothing stands out.
Favourite Book all Bryce Courtenay's books.
Favourite Music / Band "Super Jesus"
Favourite TV Show "Friends", "Malcolm in the Middle."
Favourite Night Spot too old!!!
Favourite Holiday Spot Noosa

A Normal Training Week.

Mon. am. 16 km. easy.
Tues. am. Fartlek Session. 16 km. total.
pm. 8 km. easy
Wed. am. 25 km. easy.
pm. 8 km. easy + exercises.
Thur. am. "Quarters" 8 x 400 metres with 200 metre 'float'. 16 km. total.
pm. 8 km. easy.
Fri. am. 16 km. easy + exercises.
Sat. am. 16 km. strong tempo run.
pm. 8 km. easy.
Sun. am. 35 km. easy
pm. 8 km. easy.

Total - 180 km. per week.

Two Week Taper Before Marathon

Sun. am. 2 hours easy
pm. 35 mins easy.
Mon. am. 60 mins easy.
Tues. am. 20 mins warm-up / Fartlek / 20 mins warm- down
pm. 35 mins easy
Wed. am. 80 mins easy.
Thur. am. 20 mins warm-up / 6 x 400 metres / 20 mins

		warm-down	
	pm.	35 mins easy.	
Fri.	am.	50 mins easy.	
Sat.	am.	20 mins warm-up / 15 - 20 mins 'effort' / 20	mins warm-down.
	pm.	35 mins easy.	
Sun.	am.	80 mins easy	
	pm.	35 mins easy.	
Mon.	am.	50 mins easy.	
Tues.	am.	20 mins warm-up / Fartlek - 2 x 90 sec, 2 x	60 sec,
2 x 30	sec, 2 x	15 sec / 20 mins	warm-down
	pm.	25 mins easy	
Wed.	am.	60 mins easy.	
Thur.	am.	20 mins warm-up / 6 x strides / 20 mins	
		warm-down	
	pm.	25 mins easy.	
Fri.	am.	30 mins easy.	
Sat.	am.	30 mins easy.	
Sun.		MARATHON	

Other Training / Recovery Sessions.

Massage / twice weekly exercises.

Favourite Training Session Saturday's strong tempo run.

Best Ever Performances 2000 Tokyo Half Marathon (Australian Record 67.48 - 3rd place),

11th in the Sydney Olympic Marathon,

3rd in the 2001 Chicago Marathon and in 2000 running

15.08 to break the Australian 5000 metre Record.

Favourite Place To Train Falls Creek.

Toughest Ever Training Session running up Mount Bogong in 1996. The whole session took 3 hours.

Most Admired Runner / Person Steve Moneghetti, Catherine Ndereba.

Advice to Other Runners "Be patient, don't overdo the training, enjoy the sport."

Goals for the Future to break the Australian Record for the marathon. Commonwealth Games this year and Athens Olympic Games in 2004. Another baby next year.

Anything else??? I have run 15.26 on grass for my Thursday "Quarters" session.