

“TROOPY” UNCUT

Lee Troop is one of Australia's elite distance runners with top class performances on the track, road and cross - country to his credit. However, the last eighteen months have been a bit of a roller-coaster ride with injuries slowing the Sydney Olympian.

N.M. Lee, you hurt your calf a few weeks ago. How's the recovery going and how has this setback changed your plans for later this year?

L.T. Yeah, I torn my calf about 4 weeks after running the Rotterdam Marathon and it certainly has been a major setback because I was planning to run an October Marathon, probably Chicago. I had also planned to skip the World Championships to help get rid of the little niggles I have had since the Olympic Games. However, unfortunately Chicago is now not going ahead and I'm not really sure what I'll be doing later in the year. Right now, everything I do will be concerned with getting the calf 100% right.

N.M. Chris Wardlaw claims that 99% of injuries are 'bad management' rather than 'bad luck'. In hindsight, did you rush your build-up back to full training following your great run in Rotterdam?

L.T. I did! I did!

It was a case of after the disappointments and setbacks of 2000, I had a great result in Rotterdam so I was really motivated and pumped up to have an even better race in October and that excitement cost me dearly because the little niggles then became a major problem. However, I just wanted to get back as quickly as I could and unfortunately, the calf tore. So, to answer your original question - yes, Chris is right, it was 'bad management' on my part.

N.M. Let's go back a few years. How did you become involved in athletics and what were some of your early experiences?

L.T. I got into athletics because of my Dad. He wanted to lose weight and he and a few of his mates were jogging around the block so I just tagged along with them. From that I got involved in Fun Runs so that's how I started.

N.M. Growing up, did you always want to be a distance runner?

L.T. Yep!!

N.M. Never a Shot Putter?

L.T. No..... never a shot putter..... I didn't want to be a sprinter or anything like that. Basically, I didn't have any speed so the longer the event, the better I performed. Also, I think I did O.K. in a lot of the longer events early on because a lot of the juniors were scared to race in events that were over 3 km.

N.M. As a teenager you had a bit of success in Australia. How did the move to America come about and what were some of your experiences living and running over there?

L.T. Actually, I don't think I had all that much success as a junior. However, I think I was fortunate that when I was 18 or 19 I had a bit of success at a State and National level and from that got a scholarship opportunity to go to America. In America they are always on the lookout for athletes on the brink of junior success and because I had a few good runs, I was offered a chance to go overseas.

Once over there, I found the American system great. Unfortunately, there are a lot of sceptics out there who think that it's too arduous and that athletes burn out but I had nothing but wonderful experiences at South Plains College in Texas. I reckon it's a great way of racing and training as well as a great cultural experience. We do have a lot of Australian athletes over there and if we had a similar system with our universities over here, we would have much greater depth in athletics.

N.M. Who were some of the athletes that we might know that you competed against and what sort of a racing / training schedule did you have?

L.T. Phillamon Hanneck, a silver medallist over 5 k. in the 1994 Commonwealth Games, was a runner many people might know.

As for training, it was pretty intense without too many long runs. Actually it was pretty boring - the longest run I'd do was probably 70 minutes. The week's training was made up of: Monday - Fartlek, Tuesday and Thursday - Track, Saturday - Threshold, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday were easy runs. All up I was only doing about 70 miles but it was quite intense.

Racing was usually every second week with races anywhere from a mile to ten miles.

N.M. Did you feel as though you came back from the U.S. a better runner?

L.T. Yeah. I also came back realising that running was what I wanted to do. Initially, I just went over to experience another culture but when I got over there I realised I had a bit of potential. I also had a great coach, James Morris, who was very understanding and very committed to his job and the international athletes under his care. James Morris was probably the person who opened my eyes a little and made me realise that I could be a good runner.

N.M. Is James Morris still coaching?

L.T. No, he's just retired after being a track coach for 55 years.

N.M. So he was the Bill Bowerman of Texas.

L.T. Yeah. A very highly regarded coach and person.

N.M. When you came back from America you made the big decision to move to Ballarat. How did this move come about and how did it change your running?

L.T. My move to Ballarat was because I wanted to train with Steve Monaggetti. He was one of the best athletes in the world over the marathon distance so coming back from America I realised that if I wanted to be a successful athlete I would have to learn from the best and train with the best. I didn't want to have any doubts that I had not done everything in my powers to give it my best shot. So moving to Ballarat and putting in all the hard work for six years was just trying to realise my potential. That way, if I didn't make it to the Olympics, it would not be through lack of trying.

N.M. You and 'Mona' are obviously great mates. Did you have to pay your dues early on to earn his respect as a runner and as a person?

L.T. Yeah When I first moved to Ballarat he really didn't want to have too much to do with me. He just thought I was a "fly by nighter" and I just basically broke him down over a period of six years. And yes, we are the best of mates. I hold him and his family in very high regard and I think that they reciprocate that back to me. I have been named Godfather for his newborn son, Matthew and I suppose that shows the friendship and the mateship that has developed.

N.M. What was it about Ballarat and 'Mona' that enabled you to take the next step in your running career?

L.T. I don't think it was really Ballarat. I think it was more 'Mona'. He helped me with lots of things outside of running. We can all run and we can all race but he helped me get a balance in my life outside of running. It was important that I had a bit of stability in my social life and work life. 'Mona' was able to provide all those things for me and he was a great sounding board for me whenever I had problems. Whenever I was struggling, he was able to provide some answers that usually were spot on. So basically, I think that he was the only benefit to me in Ballarat. I think that Geelong is equally as good as far as running terrain and environment goes.

N.M. It must have also helped that you were virtually injury free while training in Ballarat.

L.T. Yeah at least up until my last year in Ballarat. In 2000 I had nothing but an injury plagued year. I know I've got an injury now that I'm back in Geelong but I think it, and my other recent injuries stem from my initial injury early in 2000. I have had to rush the preparation for my last three marathons which has not helped my body fully recover and get strong again.

In Ballarat I had a good sports doctor, good physio, good masseur and it's taken a little while to get all that in Geelong but I've got all that now and I'm pretty sure that all the success I had in Ballarat can now be transferred to Geelong.

N.M. Did 'Mona' hold you back early on?

L.T. Yes both in training and racing. I wanted to run my first marathon in 1997 in Berlin but "Mona" was very quick to squash that idea. He held me back until London in 1999. As I said before, it was all the little things and his knowledge and experience, that was the reason I went to Ballarat in the first place, so that I could get the right advice.

N.M. '99 was a fantastic year for you. You ran 7.41 for 3 k. then a few days later you broke Ron Clarke's 5000 metre record when you ran 13.14. This was followed by a debut marathon in London where you ran 2.11. Obviously, all the hard work was starting to pay-off?

L.T. Yeah it was basically a culmination of many years of hard work. I started in Ballarat early in '95 and didn't have much success in 1995. Then in 1996 I won a few State titles. In '97 I won my first National Title and the "City to Surf".

Then in '98 there was the Commonwealth Games and then of course, I had a great year in '99. So each year was just a stepping stone towards the success that I had. I feel that one of the reasons I continued to improve and had success in '99 was that I was doing all the right things early on in that period when I moved to Ballarat.

N.M. Unfortunately, things started to go astray in the lead-up to Sydney. Did you overtrain and become over-motivated? I remember you talking about training three times a day during this period.

L.T. Yeah my breakdown was caused purely by frustration with the Australian Athletics bureaucratic system. All I wanted to do was become a marathoner but breaking Ron Clarke's record, instead of being a highlight, became a bit of a problem because when it came to the World Championships I was told that I could not run the marathon. I was told that I was Australia's premier track athlete and our best runner over 5 km. They didn't want to lose me to the marathon because they already had 'Mona'. And because they stopped me doing what I wanted to do, I became frustrated and started training three times a day. Doing that I soon became 'burnt-out', then got the stress fracture to my hip. And now, from that one injury, I've had nothing but a succession of niggles. Now I just want to take the rest of the year off from serious racing to get completely right so that for 2002, 2003 and 2004 I don't have the same problems that I had in 2000.

N.M. Just making it to the Olympic Marathon Trial was a fantastic effort against the odds. Your memories of the lead-up and the race?

L.T. Well, to be truthful I didn't think I'd even get to the Olympic Trial. I had a stress fracture diagnosed four months before the race, missed two months, then only had seven weeks to prepare. However, I did

make it to the start line and I guess one of the reasons I went to Ballarat was to learn how to be switched on mentally even though physically, the chips were down. I went out thinking that I didn't have anything to lose but really in the back of my mind it was six years of hard work resting on this one race to fulfill my dream of making an Australian Olympic Team. Anyway, I tried to conjure up all the lessons I had learnt on the way to becoming a good athlete and fortunately it all came to fruition on the day.

In the race itself my tactics were just to hang on the best I could, to start out slowly and not to panic. Basically to get through the race as relaxed as possible. Luckily for me a couple of the guys had bad runs which I was relying on to some extent because if they were all physically fit and all ran well, they should have beaten me.

I don't really remember the last half of the race because I was unfit from the lost training time. Gradually I became very fatigued and in fact, I passed out crossing the line and don't remember the last few kilometres. So even though the race hurt so much, I have nothing but good feelings about the experience because I realised my dream of making the Olympic Team.

N.M. On guts!

L.T. Yep on guts and determination.

N.M. And just when you thought, "I've made the team and everything is on the way up", you hurt a stomach muscle at the Bundoora 12 km. Cross - Country.

L.T. Yeah I strained a stomach muscle and once again it was to do with my initial stress fracture. Everything around my pelvic area was weak and a little contorted causing the muscles to over-compensate. Then doing the race the other side of my body was put under pressure which caused a slight stomach strain. Then I didn't back off because I thought that I'd missed so much training with the stress fracture that I needed to keep training for the Olympic Games. Unfortunately, that was a big mistake.

N.M. Had you become a bit slack with your "core stability" work?

L.T. I had. Because of the stress fracture I didn't want to get back into that sort of stuff too soon and aggravate the hip but in the end I had become a little slack with the supplementary training that is so important.

N.M. Going into the Olympic Marathon how confident were you that your body would hold together for the full 42.2 kms.?

L.T. I was very confident. I had done a 15 km. Road Race at Albert Park three weeks before and I got through that unscathed so I was confident that if I could stay relaxed and on top of my game I would get through the whole 42.2 kms. and be a top ten finisher.

N.M. How did you feel at say, 10 kms.?

L.T. I felt great. In fact, I felt great all the way up to 23 km.

N.M. Then the stomach muscle went. At any stage did you think of pulling out?

L.T. Yeah from about 34 - 38 km. I thought about it but it was only a thought.

N.M. Hadn't the marathoners made a pact - there was no "Plan B" . To finish was the only option?

L.T. Correct I guess for people who have trained under the Wardlaw System, there is no Plan B.

When you stand on the start line, you're there to complete the event, no matter what!

N.M. What did 'Mona' say as he passed you when you were obviously really hurting?

L.T. He just told me to "hang in there" but I knew that there would be no recovery because when I tore my stomach muscle at about 23 km. there was a long two kilometre downhill section through the city section before we came to the A.N.Z.A.C. Bridge. Unfortunately, for me, overstriding on the downhill caused the muscle to tear so that when I hit the bridge, I knew I was in a lot of trouble. When you go from 4th to in the 30's in such a short time you know you're in for a rough day.

N.M. There must have been much soul searching going on after the Olympics?

L.T. Yeah about two and a half months of it!

N.M. You bounced back with two excellent runs at the World Cross - Country and the Rotterdam Marathon. These races must have done wonders for your confidence and your belief in yourself as a marathoner?

L.T. Yes I think if I'd had a third bad marathon in a row I would have had to contemplate whether I should be a track runner or continue with the marathon or whether I wanted to be a runner, full-stop! But I'd put in so much time and effort to give up and what doesn't kill us can only make us stronger. When I did get back into running just before Christmas I made a pact that I would try to use the Sydney Olympics and what had happened in 2000 as a motivational tool from now until Athens in 2004.

So Rotterdam was a great boost. With the World Cross - Country, I guess it was good for my confidence going into Rotterdam because I was able to get through 12 ks. of mud and slush without stirring up my stomach so I was finally over the worst of that injury.

N.M. Rotterdam. Your memories of that race?

L.T. Nothing but sheer delight! When I arrived, there was talk of a World Record attempt but all I was worried about was settling into the race and running quicker than I had in London. I was on 2.08 pace up until 35 kms. but I lost two minutes in the last 7 kms. But having the year that I'd had in 2000, missing so much training - I only had 17 weeks to prepare for Rotterdam, I think it was a great result and showed that if

I can get 12 months of solid training, without injuries, that a 2.08 marathon is just a matter of time and that I can be a good marathoner.

N.M. Let's go back to the night at Olympic Park when you broke Ron Clarke's 5 k. record. I had 'goosebumps' just watching that race, with the crowd going 'bananas' and you dishing it up to the Kenyans, particularly down the back straight each lap. That surely was a special night?

L.T. It was. It's probably something that I've got more respect for now after having the setbacks over the last few years than I did at the time. When I broke the record I didn't really give a 'rats' about it because it wasn't part of my plan - it was just a bonus because I only wanted to be a marathoner. However, when things don't turn out how you plan, like my Olympic Marathon performance, I guess you've got to take any success you have as an achievement. I don't really think that I cashed in on that run as much as what I should have. I think that it could have been something that catapulted me into being a bit of a household name. Now, I have a lot of respect for the record because it had stood for 33 years. It's hard to believe that I'm the only Australian who, over that 33 year period, was able to break it.

N.M. Some great runners have had a go at it.

L.T. A lot have and that's probably one of the things I didn't respect at the time. I looked at some of the names who tried to break it and failed, then I went for it and got it. I considered these athletes were better than me and that I really didn't deserve it. However, now I'm really appreciative that I was able to do it.

N.M. How long do you think, L Troop - 13.14.82 (Australian Record) will appear in the record books?

L.T. I'm very confident that it will be broken next year.

N.M. By C Mottram?

L.T. C Mottram, M Power or L Troop.

N.M. So you think you can go faster over 5 km.?

L.T. I want to have another crack at it next year. I think I can run 13.10. If I can get through this year and then run a marathon later in the year, maybe November / December, it gives me January to recover and build up to track racing in February / March. So, yes, if everything goes to plan, I reckon I can get down to 13.10.

N.M. After the 5 km. record you had a crack at being a track athlete in Europe. Your memories of racing in Europe?

L.T. Nothing but bad memories! After breaking Clarke's record I went overseas not knowing how hard it was going to be. I thought that if I could break a record that had stood for 33 years, then racing the best guys in the world at their pet event would be a piece of cake. As it turned out, it could not have been further from the truth. I was the only white guy there and I was living out of a suitcase from hotel to hotel. Every race I did was an absolute torture test. These guys are the best at what they do and I was finishing only 15th - 20th in the races that I did. Perhaps being a bit arrogant was my downfall. If I had been a little more appreciative and respectful, like I am now, I probably would have still finished well back but my performances would have been a lot better.

N.M. Can you recount a couple of your races?

L.T. My first race was straight off the plane and I ran about 7.57 over 3000 metres after virtually being in the air for 24 hours. Then ten days later I raced a 3k. in Paris. Anyway, we took off and there was nothing but Moroccans and Kenyans in the race. The first lap I ran in 58 seconds and I was dead last. Then I've gone through 800 in 1.59 and I was still last. You need to remember that I've only ever run 1.57 for 800 metres so it was an unbelievable experience to be involved in a race where I had to run 'flat out' for the majority of the race just to hang on near the tail of the field. I was under the Australian Record up until about 700 to go, then just got really tired and ran 7.47. I just couldn't believe that I could be running a P.B. split and still be dead last!

N.M. Who won that race?

L.T. It was won by Luke Kipkosgei in 7.29 or thereabouts.

N.M. So even he slowed down.

L.T. Yes, a little bit. They were running 57's for the first lap.

N.M. Did you change your training so you could race at this much faster tempo?

L.T. I did and it was probably to my detriment in that I started training with the Kenyans and they just race everything they do. My best track session over there was 12 x 400 metres off a minute where I averaged 58 - 59 seconds for the whole twelve of them but that just tired me out because I'm not used to that sort of training on a weekly basis.

N.M. What about the Kenyan training away from the track? Did you do any easier training with them?

L.T. They don't do any easy running! If you go for a run with them in the morning they start off easily, at about 5 minute / kilometre pace but that's only for 7 or 8 minutes. By the end of the session you're running 3 minute / kilometre pace. Most of their training away from the track are "build-up" sessions and believe it or not, that is their easy running!

Also, even though they're all good athletes and great to train with, they don't have much respect for white runners, so every time you train with them they try to completely 'thump' you. They take it as a personal insult if they are beaten by a white person so they try to make every post a winner and they run as hard as they can.

N.M. What is your training philosophy?

L.T. I'm not really a Wardlaw trainer. I'm more in between what Wardlaw does and what the Kenyans do. I think Chris is probably a bit conservative in his training approach but he looks at training from the longevity point of view while the Kenyans are way too aggressive and that's probably why there is such an influx of them because a lot of them tend to break down. The fact that my training is between the Wardlaw and the Kenyan philosophies is probably why I can go through a period of not having any injuries and have a bit of success, then can sometimes have a few injuries when I up the intensity a bit.

N.M. After the Olympics you moved permanently back to Geelong. The reasons for the move?

L.T. After eight years of living away from family and friends I had just had enough. Also, after the disappointment of Sydney I realised that there was more to life than just running. I had dedicated so much to get so little return at the Olympics that I just wanted to come back and spend the rest of my running career in Geelong around people who like me for who I am irrespective of my results. In Ballarat, the only person I really knew well was 'Mona' and basically I didn't have a life out of running there.

N.M. What role does 'Mona' play in your running now?

L.T. An advisor.

N.M. He's not your coach?

L.T. He's a coach / advisor. Basically, we're doing most of the things we have done for the last six years. He's a great sounding board. He likes to sit down with me to map out races and training. At the end of the day, if I do it, I do it, and if I don't, it's purely due to the fact that I'm pig-headed.

N.M. In the lead-up to Rotterdam you changed your training slightly. After running 2.10 you have got to be happy with these changes. What did you do that was a bit different?

L.T. There were only minor changes. One was doing my everyday runs at a slightly quicker tempo. In Ballarat we did most of our running at 4.15 - 4.20 kilometre pace but now in Geelong most of my running is 4 minute / kilometre pace or quicker. I also introduced some longer reps. 'Mona' Fartlek and 'Quarters' had become a little monotonous after doing them for so long. It was also a case of trying to use Eastern Park, the Barwon River and the other great venues we have in Geelong in my training. Basically, I think that training is pretty much the same the world over, it's just the effort that you put into it and how well you recover from it that determines how successful you're going to be.

N.M. There's the 'Mona Fartlek' (2 x 90 secs, 4 x 60 secs, 4 x 30 secs, 4 x 15 secs with equal time 'float' recovery between) and 'The Gammoudi' (Gammoudi was a great Tunisian 5 / 10 km. runner of Ron Clarke's time. He has a complete set of Olympic Medals. His session was 6 continuous laps (2400 metres) made up of: 800 metres @ 80 seconds per lap / 800 metres @ 70 seconds per lap then 800 metres 'flat out'. Recover by walking a lap, then jogging a lap, then repeat two or three times.)

Tell us about the "Troopy Fartlek".

L.T. Well, I obviously have done the 'Mona' Fartlek and I've done 'The Gammoudi'. The "Troopy Fartlek" is just a small signature session or sessions actually, because there are two different sessions that I do. The first one is a pyramid session made up of: 1, 2, 3, 2, 1, 2, 3, 2, 1 minutes hard with half time recovery while the other session is where I run: 6, 4, 5, 3, 2, 1, 1, 1 minutes hard all with half time recovery. So both are basically 25 - 30 minute Fartlek Sessions.

N.M. So you have increased the sessions from the 20 minutes that the 'Mona' Fartlek takes?

L.T. Correct.

N.M. So many more people are now running under 2.08 for the marathon. Why? Is it because the Kenyans have finally worked out how to train for the marathon?

L.T. Basically what has happened is that the Africans now have specialist marathon coaches. Also, white agents and managers are trying to get as many African runners as possible because they know they can make money from them. These agents and managers are now putting on training camps for the Kenyans and other Africans and teaching them some of the secrets of marathon training and running. Things like doing long runs, threshold sessions, not necessarily having to do three sessions a day, instead of doing 150 kilometres a week 'flat out' every week, doing 220 kilometres at a slower pace and just getting the training done.

Also, there are so many Kenyans out there running. They might have 1000 people running to begin with and if 900 break-down, there will still be 100 champions. We don't have that luxury in Australia. We might have 50 runners to begin with and only a couple will be successful so we have to be a little more conservative.

N.M. No doubts about the use of E.P.O.?

L.T. No I guess the bottom line is that I can't be 100% sure whether people take it or not. However, speculation is rife that E.P.O. is used in endurance events. You hear on the grapevine that certain people are taking it.

N.M. What do you have to do to get down to 2.08 or faster for the marathon?

L.T. I think 2.08 is there. When I ran London in '99 I believed I could have run 2.10 with a 64 and a 66 minute split. However, I ran 65 and 66, the pace was too slow to half-way so I didn't quite achieve my goal. When I ran Rotterdam I believed I could run 2.09 and ended up running 2.10 after being on 2.08 pace up to 35 kms. So I think I've just got to get a period of twelve months under my belt where I'm not injured. If I can train like I did pre Rotterdam, over a longer period, I think that 2.08 is definitely there.

N.M. Gebreselassie is talking of moving up to the marathon. Your comments on his possible impact on the marathon?

L.T. The bottom line is that we don't know until he runs one. Everyone is talking about him being a great marathon runner but I think he may struggle because he's a bit of a toe runner and slapping his feet on the bitumen for 42.2 kilometres might take it out of him. Also, he's had a bit of achilles trouble lately that might be a problem. It's possible that he may be really good but you've got to get out there and do it. It's easy to talk about it - it's harder to do it. Everyone was talking about Paul Tergat running his first marathon in London but he was beaten by El Mouaziz (2.07.11) and ran 2.08 (2.08.15). You don't just step off the track and run a fast marathon.

N.M. Geelong athletics is very strong at the moment with some outstanding talent at the elite level and some very promising juniors coming through. Why, and what else needs to be done to keep Geelong athletics on a roll?

L.T. I think having the State League Team in the summer and the Geelong Cross - Country Team competing in the winter are critical in helping our talent develop. When I was coming through 10 years ago we didn't have the opportunity to represent Geelong, but now we have a wonderful opportunity to get kids from the schools to run at a high level. You only have to look at Tyson Mahon, Joanna Wall, Georgie Clarke, Craig Mottram, Ritchie Jeremiah and Taryn Rau, there's some young Geelong kids who are twenty years or younger who, through the benefits of having the Geelong Team, can fulfill their potential and see how good they can be, then use that to go onto a National level.

N.M. It has also got to be good for the kids to be mixing with some top athletes?

L.T. Yeah I think it is great to have guys like Darren Lynch and Rohan Perrott and myself who have been around for 10 - 12 years, competing at that level, passing on our knowledge and experiences. At the moment we also have a few other people getting involved with the running that helps the support network which keeps things running behind the scenes.

N.M. What goals do you have for the future?

L.T. My only goal at the moment is to make amends for my Sydney performance in Athens in 2004.

N.M. So all roads lead to the 2004 Marathon?

L.T. They do!

N.M. What about Lee Troop post running career? What plans do you have?

L.T. At this stage I hope to get married one day, have kids and possibly coaching? although, maybe not coaching? I think I'd rather have my dream business of having a restaurant up and going.

N.M. With your public speaking abilities, have you considered the media?

L.T. Yes and no It is something that I have had opportunities to further develop but at the moment I really want to just concentrate on running. I think that I have two more Olympics left in me so that means another 8 - 10 years of running. At the end of that, if I am a much more successful athlete, the media opportunities will open up.

N.M. Lee, thanks very much for your time. I hope the calf recovers quickly and that you are back running at your best very soon.

L.T. Thanks, Neil.