

LEE TROOP.

BOUNCING BACK AND READY FOR ATHENS.

September 2003

Lee Troop's life over the last three years has been a roller-coaster ride, to say the least. However, after his excellent marathon at the World Athletics Championships in Paris, Troopy is back better than ever and setting his sights on next year's Olympics in Athens.

N.M. Lee, welcome back to Australia. Seventeenth and a time of 2:11.46 in the Paris World Championships, both enough to qualify you for a berth in the Australian Team for the Athens Olympics - you must be feeling pretty satisfied?

L.T. Yeah, but it's more relief than anything. To get a good Championship race under my belt means that I can now focus completely on Athens.

N.M. You ran a very sound race tactically in Paris. Was this your plan or was it just the way the race unfolded?

L.T. No, I had a chat with Mona before the race and we agreed that Championship races are totally different to other 'Big City' races and that I'd sit at the back of the pack in the early stages. In fact, Mona said he didn't want to see me near the front of the pack for the first 21 kilometres. Then in the later part of the race I'd try to pick off people as the kilometres ticked over. It's a totally different way for me to race as I've tended to be a 'bull at a gate' type person who races aggressively. However, the conservative approach paid off fantastically well in Paris. For future Championship races I will continue to be more patient and study how the race is going rather than be the one who is setting the pace.

N.M. Did you feel good for the first half of the race?

L.T. I felt really good for the majority of the race. There was a lot of surging going on and I was able to counteract each move up until about 32 kilometres. At one stage I ran 5.52 for two kilometres and was dropped but I didn't panic and was able to gradually work my way back up to the lead pack rather than trying to explosively jump back on straight away. Just before 30 kilometres they threw in a really tough surge and before I knew it, I was 80 metres off the back. I gritted my teeth and started making up ground and began passing people. Then, I got to about 35 kilometres and passed Chris Wardlaw, who was in the crowd. I was in about 17th position at that stage and feeling pretty good and expecting to run over a few runners who were in front of me. However, there was only one guy who picked up any positions over the last part of the race and that was Viktor Rothlin of Switzerland. So it was a little strange for a Championship race that the positions virtually stayed the same for the last few kilometres.

N.M. Perhaps the lack of hills on the course may have caused that?

L.T. Maybe, but probably more the heat or lack of it. Championship races are usually pretty hot events and the weather for Paris was not too extreme. I was 33rd ranked athlete in the race on times (2:09.49) so that shows that Paris was a high calibre race and top quality runners, given good conditions, are always going to run well.

N.M. What did you think of the course? Obviously the cobblestones were tough.

L.T. When the winner runs 2:08.31 you can't say there is anything wrong with the course. I didn't have any problems with the course. For the spectators it was probably very scenic but I didn't notice too much of it as I basically had 'head down and bum up' focusing on my race. However, I do remember running under the Eiffel Tower.

N.M. The winner, Jaouad Gharib of Morocco - did you know anything about him?

L.T. Before the race I knew nothing about him. He and the guy that finished fourth are just two virtual unknowns who had fantastic races on the day and that's what Championship races are about - you never see favourites win.

N.M. Did you run with him at any stage and, if so, did he look particularly strong?

L.T. I can honestly say that I didn't even know who he was although I did run with him during the first 30 kilometres, as did the other 28 athletes in the lead pack. However, I didn't single him out as a danger or someone who was looking particularly strong. My eyes were focused on Baldini, the Italian. Mona and I thought he was one of the main chances and he ended up running on strongly to take third placing.

N.M. Baldini has a very good Championship record.

L.T. Yes, he has. We didn't worry about Julio Rey as he's very up and down as well as being a 'drug cheat'. (Ed. Rey has recently returned from serving a ban for a positive drug test.) However, Baldini is an athlete I have a bit of respect for so he was a guy tried to keep an eye on.

N.M. Baldini is also able to run well in the heat

L.T. Yes.

N.M. The broken toe - how did it happen and did it affect you in the marathon?

L.T. I just stubbed it at Rome Airport and we just thought it was bruised. It bothered me for a week and a half. I flew into Paris a few days early to have X-Rays and was told it was only bruising on the bone and it would be OK. Then afterwards, I found out that there was a slight hairline fracture. However, the toe did not affect my race one little bit - where I finished was where I finished with no excuses.

N.M. You were also made joint Team Captain for the World Championships, with walker Jane Saville. That must have been a great honour?

L.T. Yes, a great honour but more of a surprise because, while I feel I'm well respected by my fellow athletes, I'm not sure that I'm well respected by the administration. However, they left it up to the athletes to vote and I got the nod. But it was certainly a great honour and something I will cherish.

N.M. Apart from carrying the flag at the Opening Ceremony, what was your role as joint Team Captain?

L.T. Not much really, although you have got to go to the track more and encourage the athletes, which everyone does anyway. In many ways the Team Captain becomes a counsellor for any athletes with doubts or grievances or problems. One example happened with young Sally McLennen, the 16 year old sprinter from Queensland. Because of injuries to selected athletes she put up her hand to run the 4 x 400 metres relay, but then walked out of the room and it dawned on her - "gee, what have I done? This is the World Championships!" So I just pulled her aside and said that I thought it was wonderful that a young athlete was prepared to take this great opportunity that could be the making of her. As it turned out the Australian 4 x 400 metre Team was withdrawn.

N.M. At the end of the marathon you even took time to defend the Australian athletes in the face of some criticism they had received about performances.

L.T. I just thought it was pathetic that some past athletes, in particular Dave Culbert could be so scathing of the Australian Track and Field Team. Fair enough, there may have been one or two performances that were a little disappointing but no one goes to a World Championships to perform badly and there is no sport in the world that has 200 countries competing. Dave talks in facts and figures and personal bests but if you go by that Steve Moneghetti's bronze medal at the Athens World Championships was a massive failure because he was seven minutes off his personal best. Dave Culbert has never won an Olympic or World Championship medal - he was just a punter like the rest of us, getting out there and having a go, so I found his scathing attack, especially considering his role as Chairman of Selectors, as a personal insult. We're all out there busting our guts for our country, with many of us paying our own way to train and go overseas.

N.M. Is it a case of, the longer you're retired, the better you were?

L.T. Yes, I call it the "Red Wine Syndrome" - the longer it's aged, the better it supposedly gets!

N.M. After the World Championships you travelled to Athens to check out the marathon course and the Olympic facilities. What were your impressions?

L.T. The marathon course looks tough. It's pretty flat for the first 14 - 15 kilometres and it's downhill for the last 6 kilometres, with the middle 21 kilometres quite undulating. It will definitely be a course where people will be coming back to you if you're running on strongly. Combine the course with the expected heat and you could say the marathon will be very tough. Then there's the city of Athens itself which would have to be the worst city I've ever seen - it's a cross between Bangkok, Bali and Buenos Aires. Finally, the facilities are nowhere near finished. But at least I know what to expect so I can prepare adequately.

N.M. So what are your plans for the rest of 2003 and 2004 in the lead-up to Athens?

L.T. It's pretty simple really, just basically follow what's worked this year. But step one is not to get injured! As Deek once said to me, 'running is not rocket science'.

N.M. What races are you planning to do?

L.T. Pretty similar to last year. This year I'll do the Burnie 10, the Noosa Bolt, the Zatopek. Also, Nike are trying to organise a race between Craig Mottram, myself and a few others around the Tan. I'll also spend some time at Falls Creek so that takes care of 2003. Then I plan to do the London Marathon in April, then the Olympics in August. There will also be a few other races that I'll slot in between the major ones.

N.M. Is the race around the Tan an attempt to break Mona's recently recorded Australian best time of 10.41?

L.T. I wouldn't say that. I'm pretty sure that Craig and I could run under 10.41. As to who would run the fastest, I would have to say, probably Craig. However, 10.41 is a wonderful benchmark but I would be pretty surprised if Craig and myself couldn't go under 10.30.

N.M. You mentioned the London Marathon as a goal race for next year. In the past you have chosen to represent Australia rather than chase some potentially big pay-days in the 'big city races'. What sort of money can an elite athlete make by running London or New York or Chicago marathons?

L.T. Appearance fees for someone like me varies between \$US 5000 - \$US 20 000 but in the 'big city marathons' the big money is the prize money. You can win 'big money' for winning and 'big money' for fast times. In some races you could potentially walk away with \$US 500 000. So if you're in great shape there's obviously a huge carrot to chase in the more famous marathons. If you're not quite at the top level there's

other great races in places like Japan where they pay good appearance money but not quite the same level of prize money and bonuses.

N.M. The last four years have been a roller-coaster ride for you with several pretty severe injuries inter-mixed with some encouraging performances. Obviously a tough time for you?

L.T. Yeah. Everything was fantastic up until '99 but for most of 2000 and 2001 I was injured off and on. I think in that time I had seven injuries. Then I used 2002 as my year of getting back into some consistent training and getting the body sound. Now, 2003 has been a very good year where I have been rewarded for some good, consistent, solid training. My races haven't been out of this world but they have been good, solid performances and a great stepping stone for next year.

N.M. What did you learn during the injuries and down times? Have you changed your training, changed your life style?

L.T. I've probably changed my outlook a bit, just learning to be more relaxed and just roll with things. I've learnt that there is no secret training program that will guarantee results, it's just pretty basic stuff - good mileage, long/hard reps, just staying fit and healthy. If you're trying to find that one secret session that will make the difference, I can tell you - it doesn't exist. In fact, that one 'super session' can often bring you undone!

N.M. Two years ago, when the injuries were so frustrating, were you close to retirement?

L.T. I was pretty close. At one stage, while I was in America, I had basically decided to retire. I had just had enough and felt as though I was hitting my head up against a brick wall. Looking back, I was still suffering from the Sydney Olympic Marathon. Mona had told me that after an Olympics you always have a down period, but obviously having gone through the shattering experience of not being able to compete at my best in Sydney made the down period so much worse. Basically, I was not enjoying my running, not enjoying life in general. I guess there's nothing worse than having some potential and people having high expectations for you, then not being able to deliver. One thing that was good about the World Championships is that while I'm happy with my performance, it's more of a relief to turn things around and start to put some tangible performances on the board.

N.M. If you had retired, what were you going to do?

L.T. That was the amazing thing. I think I spent about a month working out what I was going to do and there was nothing that really jumped out at me. Then, I got back into running. I believe that things happen for a reason and maybe I needed some time to think things over and realise that I still had some unfinished business in athletics. Looking back, it would have been very foolish, at 28 years of age, to retire with only a few good performances under my belt. I was fortunate that someone like physiotherapist Andrew Lambart came along and made me realise that I had to go back to basics with my recovery from my injuries - I had to start from rock bottom! Recovering from my last stress fracture I started off by walking 9 minutes, jogging 1 minute, then repeating. Then, when I could do that without problems, I went to walking 8 minutes, jogging two minutes so I had to bite the bullet and be very patient.

N.M. You are self-coached, even though Mona is an advisor. I can't think of many elite athletes that coach themselves. How does this situation work?

L.T. It works fantastically. I have been pretty fortunate in that I've lived in America and seen how their system works, I've seen how the Brits and Africans train so I think I know what works. Basically, my program is 90% of the De Castella / Moneghetti / Warldaw System with a few different Troop sessions thrown in. A few years ago I was doing the 'Quarters' session on the track every Thursday and I think that may have contributed to me breaking down. Unfortunately, 'Quarters' is a time-tested session and every Thursday I'd be trying to run each 400 in 63 / 64 seconds and complete the session in 13:30. Now I jump on the track maybe just once a fortnight or once a month and complete most of my harder reps on the roads and trails. After having all the time off through injury and having to work so hard to get back, I think I've got a great understanding of what works for me. Mona is also fantastic at planning ahead, slotting in races and altitude training blocks and blocks for recovery. The guy was a champion athlete himself but looks at training and racing with a lot of common sense.

N.M. Would it be fair to say that Mona has taught you to be patient? Does he hold you back on occasions?

L.T. Yeah, at times although I love the way I race, the way I'm not afraid to attack and be aggressive in races - I wouldn't have it any other way. I just love to put my 'heart and soul' into all my races. When I finish every single race I can honestly say that I have got nothing left in the tank. I have never finished a race and said, 'geeh whizz, I was a bit slack there on laps four and five!' I just run as hard as I can for as long as I can! I don't think there are too many athletes who can say that they race that way. However, Mona has been great in encouraging me not to chase my training but rather giving 100% in races, then moving on quickly to the next goal. I can honestly say that I'm finally over the Sydney Olympics and Mona has been great in that regard.

N.M. You say that you don't train on the track much these days. Would one of your 'bread and butter' workouts be reps around the Eastern Park road circuit? (Ed. one lap of the road circuit is 2.34 kms.)

L.T. I just love Eastern Park. I've trained there from the age of 11 or 12. Everyone has favourite sessions and I'll always go to Eastern Park and complete something around the Botanic Gardens. I always complete the reps on the road because I know exactly how far it is. I just love doing the two laps or three laps or four laps session off a two minute recovery. It's good, strong rhythm work and very marathon specific.

N.M. And the undulations make the session a little more varied.

L.T. Yes, although I probably know how to cheat the session, knowing when it's going to get tougher and when it's going to get easier, which is probably not a good thing.

N.M. Would it be fair to say that girl-friend, Freyja coming onto the scene has helped to turn things around?

L.T. Yes. Although it's not just one thing that's made a difference. In many ways I've had to bite the bullet and eat some humble pie but I think it's a whole host of things that have turned things around. But if you're relaxed and happy in your life, that's going to make a huge difference. With Freyja, I've met someone who is fantastic, she's got a great personality, she's very supportive of my running and we get on really, really well. Mona would probably say that I've had a fair bit of instability in my life that has led to a few problems. When things are going well, when you're running well, when you're in a great relationship, when you're financially secure, then you don't have a worry in the world. But if just one of those little fragments comes apart, other things seem to fall apart as well.

N.M. Lee, I reckon that the road back to the top for you started one Saturday afternoon last year when you ran a solo 13.36 for 5000 metres at a cold and windy Landy Field. Was that race a stepping stone for you and a huge confidence boost?

L.T. I would say that my Commonwealth Games Marathon, despite the fact that I came 7th, was the start of the road back for me. The fact that I had only been back running three months and that I was competitive up until 35 kilometres before I hit the wall gave me a lot of positives. Then I was able to recover sensibly and five weeks later I was able to win the Victorian 8 km. Championship at Ballarat over a heavy cross-country course. After that I felt I was back in the game. I wasn't doing anything startling but was feeling competitive. I then went to Burnie and got 'smashed-up' by Craig over 10 kilometres, then onto Noosa for the Bolt. At that stage Craig had come back to Australia as a leading international athlete, so it showed me just how far I had to go. I then then went up to Falls Creek determined to train really hard to close the gap from where I was and where Craig was. Then I came down to Geelong and ran 13.36 on a wet, windy Saturday afternoon so that showed me I was heading in the right direction as long as I stayed healthy.

N.M. From there you went on to win the Zatopek in 28.03. To win such a famous race must have been satisfying?

L.T. Yes, it was great to win the Zatopek but in typical Lee Troop style, I had set myself the goal of winning the Zatopek and breaking 28 minutes. But, after so many set-backs in 2000 and 2001, I was looking to finish the year on a high to set me up for a great 2003. Leading up to the Zatopek I went to Falls Creek again a trained really well. When you make sacrifices, things like training at Falls Creek by yourself, away from friends and family, paying for it out of your own pocket, you want to see a return for the time, effort and money so it was great to see some rewards.

N.M. You just missed your goal of sub 28 at the Zatopek but were able to rectify that in New Zealand.

L.T. Yes, in New Zealand I was fortunate to have a pace-maker but I ran really aggressively. Unfortunately, my training was hampered a little because the bush fires meant a third stint at Falls Creek was cancelled but I was still happy to run 27:51.27.

So it was fantastic to finally break 28 minutes. Of all my Personal Bests, the 10 000 m. has always been a bit disappointing.

(Ed. Lee's P.B.s are: 3000 m. - 7:41.78 5000 m. - 13:14.82

10000 m. - 27:51.27 Half Marathon - 1:01.00

Marathon - 2:09.49)

N.M. Then sub 2:10 at the Lake Biwa Marathon.

L.T. I went over to Japan with one goal in mind - to run as fast as I could. Before the race I said to Mona that if this race didn't work out, I would go back the track and concentrate on the 5 and 10 k. leading into Athens rather than putting all my eggs into the one marathon basket and maybe not even making it to the Olympics. So I ran the race as though it was my last race, probably a little stupidly because I was on the pace the whole way. When I finished the race, my agent Louis Posso was quite scathing of my tactics but I had already decided with Mona that I was going to find out if I had the potential to be a great marathoner. To run sub 2:10 was fantastic because that's a benchmark for elite marathoners. Now, I just hope I can run faster.

N.M. And you were on 2:07 pace up to about 35 kilometres.

L.T. That's right. After that I got tired and paid the price. It was quite strange actually because up to 35 kilometres I was on schedule to break Deek's record (2:07.51), then when Japhet Kosgei (winner in

2:07.39) got away from me I was thinking 'keep going, I'm under 2:09' then it was a battle to stay under 2:10. But I ran that off eleven months training so with more injury-free time under my belt I'm sure I can faster. I know I can run 2:07 if I do all the simple things right because I felt fantastic up until about 38 kilometres. After that the wheels fell off a little and my calves and quads were shot.

N.M. And Mona was one of the pace-makers.

L.T. Yeah, Having Mona in the race was fantastic because I felt so relaxed around him. I knew he would get to 30 kilometres spot on the required pace. At 25 kilometres Silvio Guerra dropped out but Mona kept up the 3.01 kilometre pace going. Then he dropped off at 30 kilometres and I went past him. I think he was quite surprised that I was still there.

N.M. Did he say anything to you during the race?

L.T. I was doing all the talking. He was pretty focused on getting his job done. He prides himself on completing things 100% so that's what he did. But even after his job was done he just jogged in for a 2:17 finish as he just won't have a D.N.F. against his name.

N.M. For Mona to go through 30 kilometres at 2:07 pace is an amazing effort for a 41 year old.

L.T. Certainly. He's just a wonderful role model for people of all ages. I just marvel at what he's like and the things he does. He steps on the starting line and doesn't offer any excuses, whether it be injury or age, he just runs hard and the funny thing is that I see people on the starting line who are intimidated by him, despite his age. However, I'm a pretty positive person and I look at him as a 41 year old male and think, 'I'm not going to get beaten by a veteran!' It's funny, I had a fantastic run at Bundoora this year and still only finished 3 seconds ahead of Mona causing people to question my run. However, when you consider that Mark Tucker, a 13.36 guy, was almost a minute behind us, shows that we were absolutely 'smoking'.

N.M. You're a big believer in altitude training with stints this year at Falls Creek, Boulder and St Moritz. Are you going to use those three venues again next year?

L.T. I'll use Falls Creek in November, January and March then I'll go to Boulder in May and St. Moritz in July. All the best athletes in the world use altitude training and you've got to do it if you want to be up with them. I'll also go to Ostia in the final few weeks before heading to Athens. Ostia is not an altitude venue, it's more a heat acclimatization venue.

N.M. Apart from altitude, what do Boulder and St Moritz have to offer?

L.T. Boulder is just a fantastic place. I love Boulder, it's just a 'groovy little town' - a bit like Ballarat, a university town. It's got great coffee shops, Pearl Street is great, a movie theatre up the road, a mall and you can train at about twenty different venues

- you can go up to 11 000 feet or you can stay at 5 000 metres. Then there's a track at the university. St Moritz doesn't have that much to offer. It's a very quiet little place frequented by elite athletes and recreational visitors and families. Apart from the training, there wasn't much to do. Also, I stayed at a back-packer hostel that I paid for out of my own pocket and I didn't know anyone so that made it a little harder to settle in whereas in Boulder, I know lots of people and feel really at home.

N.M. You are an athlete who runs particularly well off altitude.

L.T. Yeah, I think everyone runs well off altitude if they do it properly. I think those that don't run well off altitude have 'buried themselves' in the training.

N.M. Craig Mottram is on the way back after his own frustrating run with injuries and I know you're keen to run a quick 5000 metres on the track. As Craig and yourself are Australia's two fastest ever runners over 5000 metres, do you have any plans to run a track 5000 metres, perhaps with Craig?

L.T. Probably in the Melbourne Meet in February. It's going to be a fantastic summer with Craig getting back to full fitness and myself really fit again. I think Craig is capable of running sub 13 minutes but if we can race hard we can bring the best out of each other and record some fast times. I just hope there are some other athletes who see this as a fantastic opportunity to go to a higher level. But for Craig and myself, it's a great opportunity to prepare for overseas races.

N.M. Would you change your training in the lead-up to the 5000 metres?

L.T. There's no need to change it. I ran 13.14 preparing to run the London Marathon. There's no real secrets. You were saying before that Craig ran 13.17 three days ago concentrating on tempo runs and 5 km. race pace rhythm. Ninety percent of distance training is just long runs, the recovery runs the hard sessions. The last 10 % is just putting in tapering sessions in the lead-up to races. I really want to run fast in London and have a crack at Deek's record so I'll go into the Melbourne Meet hoping to run sub 13:30 or faster. If Craig's with me with a lap to go, he's going to win because I'm not going to outkick him but if I've broken away with a lap to go I might pull it off. So, as I said to Danny Hopkins of Nike yesterday, the race will be decided with a lap to go! However, it will be great for the sport.

N.M. And great for Geelong with Mark Tucker probably in the same race.

L.T. Yes, although Mark's got a few steps to take before he reaches that bracket. However, saying that, it's a fantastic opportunity for him to go to the next level. There's no use talking about going to America or going to Europe if you can't win races in Australia. There's great opportunities for our runners when Craig

and I are out of the country to win Australian Cross-Country Titles or The City To Surf or State Titles. Then hopefully, when we come back, they're ready to race at the next level and make National Teams.

N.M. Lee, you are in recovery mode after the marathon. What does recovery mode mean for you?

L.T. Because I went into the marathon in pretty good shape, I have recovered well. I'll run 70 minutes today and 90 minutes for my Sunday run tomorrow and that's only two weeks after the marathon. For the time being it's just one easy run a day and I won't start any sessions until next week. I continue to get regular treatment from Andrew Lambart and massage from Greg Whitfield. Because I've spent so much of the last year away, recovery also means a chance to spend some quality time with friends and family without the pressure of having to train twice a day. I'll also use my recovery time to map out the up-coming year. I should be back to full training by week 5 or 6.

N.M. What would be your first session back?

L.T. I'll probably just jump in and do some of Rohan Perrott's training. For example, he's been doing 'quarters' so I might do 300's while he's doing 400's or I might do the second ten minutes of Mona Fartlek with the group. Some of the problems I have had in the past were caused by coming back too quickly. After running 2:10.04 in the Rotterdam Marathon I ran the Flemington 10 km. Road Race four weeks later and tore a calf muscle. So for me the six week recovery period is vital. Basically, I don't have to play catch-up now because I've got myself back to 17th best in the world by doing things sensibly and with consistency.

N.M. You're naturally a pretty confident person. Did your confidence take a battering when things weren't going well?

L.T. My confidence took a battering because reality spoke louder than words. You can be as confident and optimistic as you like but if the results say you're struggling, it's very hard to argue with that. When you turn up to the World Cross-Country Trial and finish 17th, behind guys that you can normally thump by minutes, it's demoralising. You are what you run and to step off the course as only the 17th best Australian runner was embarrassing. At the time I knew that if I could get over the injuries and string together some training, I could get back up there. However, there's nothing more frustrating than to hear someone say, "if you follow this training program for 18 months you'll be back to being a good athlete" because someone like me will say, "I can get back in 3 months because I'll take a short-cut here and a short-cut there."

I've learnt that to be a top distance runner you need to be patient. For example, if I'm feeling a little stiff and sore, I'll change the session. If I'm scheduled to run 15 kilometres, I'll still run 15 kilometres but I won't do a session, I'll just run easily.

N.M. Mona and Deek were renowned for listening to their bodies and backing off when necessary.

L.T. Yes, they were. I used to believe that if I missed a session I would become unfit or I'd be underdone going into races whereas now I know that my body is on the edge and needs some recovery time,

N.M. Lee, thanks very much for your time. Enjoy your recovery period and all the best for the lead-up to Athens.

L.T. My pleasure, Neil.