

Pat Carroll Running Group

Written by Matt Phillips - group member since August 2004

Late in 2004, CoolRunning.com.au conducted an annual reader awards poll which among other things, asked voters to nominate their favourite running club. It was no surprise to see the likes of the Sydney Striders attract a strong vote but it surprised many to see the Pat Carroll Running Group figure prominently alongside these long established clubs. The running community could have been forgiven for asking 'who are these upstarts from Queensland?' In past issue of R4YL, some more traditional clubs, such as the Sydney Striders and Glenhantly Athletics Club have already been featured, it seems appropriate that we now turn our attention to a group whose format and structure looks set to carve a niche in the future of distance running clubs and groups in Australia.

The man whose name fronts the Pat Carroll Running Group needs little introduction to the running community. 'Coach Pat' represented Australia eighteen times, competing in three Commonwealth Games, and is currently the fourth fastest Australian Marathoner and Half Marathoner of all time. Also the holder of the Australian All Comers Half marathon record for his amazing 61.11 in the 1994 Sydney Morning Herald Half Marathon, Pat has firmly embedded his footprints in the annals of the Athletics Australia All Time Records. Now retired from competitive running, Pat

says the transition from elite athlete to full time running coach was a gradual one, coming about by a series of fortuitous events rather than a strong ambition to coach. 'Whilst I was winding down my competitive running in 2001, I was asked by the coach of a local triathlon group, Troy Fidler, to take his squad for a long run on Sunday and a fast session during the week. I agreed and found the opportunity rewarding in many senses. As a leading athlete, I focused almost exclusively on myself but as I was slowly letting go of serious competition, I saw there was a need for people to have some direction with their training.' After training local triathlon competitors for a short time, word began to spread and it wasn't long before Pat was being contacted by runners expressing an interest in being coached by him and training under him. After completing his responsibilities to the triathlon group, Pat began to coach those keen runners and take them for speedwork sessions on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. That moment marked the inauspicious birth of the Pat Carroll Running Group. The year 2002 saw the continued interest of runners wanting to be coached by Pat, but the door wasn't exactly being knocked down. Current Group members Jo Sherman and Mark Jones were among the original Group members, receiving written programs from Pat that were emailed on a spreadsheet whilst they attended twice



Pat leading the pack.



weekly speedwork sessions, running with Pat in the heart of the Brisbane CBD. Pat chuckles when reminiscing about those early days with just a few runners in attendance. 'Five or six attendees was a good day!' As the calendar turned over to 2003, Pat was still working full-time for an insurance company while running the Group on a part time basis. The experience of compiling programs for his runners and emailing them got Pat thinking regularly about how he could improve the service to his runners. Those thoughts subsequently led to occasional brainstorming sessions about the opportunities offered by full-time online coaching.

In August 2003, opportunity knocked when Pat's department at work was downsized and redundancies were offered. Pat recalls original Group member, Jo Sherman was quick to suggest 'this is a blessing in disguise because you can now devote more energies to the Group.' After accepting a redundancy, Pat plunged into the world of full-time coaching. He started an online coaching business, PatCarrollOnline.com and took steps to expand the coaching and services offered to the Brisbane based Pat Carroll Running Group. Jo helped Pat set up his first web page and Pat began his new life by actively recruiting and advertising for runners to join the Brisbane Group or to be coached online from anywhere in the world. 'It was

scary going out on my own.' Pat says 'but the redundancy afforded me a year to try and make things work.' Hence PatCarrollOnline.com was born and along with the Pat Carroll Running Group, became a major focus for Pat. The next twelve months seemed to fly as the Group grew to fifteen and then to twentyfive regular members while Pat promoted the Group as 'a fun and supportive environment free of elitism or categorisation' whose members were 'hungry to achieve.' Likewise, the PatCarrollOnline.com client base grew steadily. By the later stages of 2004, Pat felt that the foundations of the Group were firmly in place, but it was not until the introduction of the 'Countdown to Gold Coast 2005' campaign that the Group really blossomed. Pat believes this was the turning point. 'I put a lot of energy into the Group and into the marketing and the

numbers just swelled with people feeding off the energy and enthusiasm of each other.' The campaign featured presentation nights where renowned dietician, Greg Shaw and popular physiotherapist, Peter Stanton (both of the Brisbane Lions medical staff), addressed the Group on their preparation for the Gold Coast events. Pat also commenced providing a wide range of refreshments for the Group after the Tuesday and Thursday morning speedwork sessions. 'I need to bring a plate to training for all this food!' became a regular joke. Late arrivals to work were commonplace as enthusiastic runners cooled down over breakfast treats and drinks provided by sponsor, PB. Needless to say, there was a strong camaraderie growing amongst the 'Pat Carrollers' as the members like to refer to themselves. The team bond was further enhanced by Pat's

release of a wide range of Pat Carroll Running Group running tops and training gear from sponsor, Mizuno, that increased the member's sense of belonging and pride, particularly on race days.

At this time, Pat also further developed and expanded his informative weekly newsletter. Pat sees the newsletter as a very important tool to link the Group, enabling current exploits to be documented, regular photos from training to be posted and time trial results to be released. Coupled with Pat's motivational stories derived from his own running career and featuring his infectious sense of humour, the newsletter enables those who are not currently training, due to injury or a break to be able to stay in touch with and follow the progress of their team mates.

The 'Countdown to Gold Coast 2005' culminated with a hugely successful formal event held two weeks after the Gold Coast events. Two slide shows of photos taken throughout the campaign were a highlight with Group members reliving the blood, sweat, tears, triumph and despair of the previous four months and taking home a DVD of the slide show to retain those priceless memories forever. Group awards were presented with Theresa Fabian being voted by her peers as the most valued Group member of the year. The night was the first opportunity for many to witness their team-mates in formal attire and the jokes were flowing freely. Those 'Pat Carrollers' who stayed the distance also had the privilege of witnessing the Group's first streaking incident with a male (already notorious for nude running) and a female streaking half way up Brisbane's Goodwill Bridge. Naturally, the 'no names, no pack drill' rule is in place here!



Squad training is great for motivation and socialising.



There are always a lot of laughs!



Despite the fun there's plenty of hard work to do.



The scenery adds to the experience

Whilst other running clubs and groups have many years of history to draw upon and long established traditions to live up to, the youthful PCRG created and embraced many popular concepts during the successful Countdown to Gold Coast 2005. These new traditions will endure for a long time and those who experienced the excitement of the period were privileged to be part of it. The success of the first half of 2005 saw the number of regular PCRG members exceed fifty while the Group continues to attract frequent casual visitors such as interstate runners in Brisbane for a business trip or holiday. Likewise, PatCarrollOnline.com has proved successful with over one hundred members signed up. So where do the 'Pat Carrollers' come from and who are they? Given Pat's choice of training venues in the heart of Brisbane's CBD and 6am training times for Tuesday and Thursday speedwork, his sessions are popular with runners who work in and around the CBD. Of particular interest is that at last count, no less than eleven members of the Group had confessed to being solicitors and other members of the legal profession! Thankfully, Pat has structured training so that they have to concentrate on breathing, rather than talking! The rest of the Group makes a living in positions as diverse as a Member of State Parliament, CEOs, Managers and a healthy sprinkling of self-made and self-employed business people. The composition of highly motivated individuals within the Group who are 'hungry to achieve' in running, in their careers and in life lends weight to the often debated theory that runners have character traits that are compatible with high achievements in all aspects of life

Some long standing 'Pat Carrollers' took time out to contribute their thoughts on what is it that makes the PCRG special for them: Mark 'Jonesy' Jones offered 'I joined Pat's Group three years ago and have seen the Group grow from five people attending sessions. For me the attraction was Pat's reputation as Queensland's best ever distance runner and the advantages that I might gain from his great knowledge on running. After a period of stale running, I was seeking fresh motivation and new ideas for my training and racing. I have received all that and something even more valuable – that is the friendships within a pack of fellow running loonies. My non-running friends do not really understand what makes me tick and it is pretty damn nice being with other people who love running. Having said that, one remarkable quality of the group is that we all like each other but



The group!

we all also like beating each other. After a competitive training session, we are all good mates again. Pat's ethos is that runners of all abilities are respected. In parallel to this, his personality and leadership qualities have formed a tightly bonded group of runners who are hungry to achieve at their own level. Mark 'Slash' Kenney says 'I had been running semi-seriously for about 6 months and knew I needed to get some proper coaching to improve. I'd read some of Pat's coaching tips on the Gold Coast Marathon website and knew he did group coaching but it wasn't until I ran in the PWC Cool Night Classic in 2002 that I really made up my mind. Pat won that day, but that wasn't what swung it, it was the fact that I saw him enjoying an ice-cold beer afterwards when I thought that's the coach for me - run then have a beer, perfect. Three years and about 20 PB's later, I am still with him and still enjoying a beer after a run.' Theresa 'Tesso' Fabian divulged 'I'd been doing speedwork elsewhere for a couple of years in squads of up to fifty. The first day I turned up at Pat's there was just five guys and myself. On our warm up I was so far behind I almost lost sight of them all. The same thing happened during the 500m reps we did. Funny, but far from being put off by this I couldn't wait to get back there. Every one of them, including Pat, was so friendly and encouraging and there seemed to be a special vibe within the Group. As the 'Pat Carrollers' grew that vibe remained. I enjoyed it so much that I didn't care if my times didn't improve - I was just having so much fun training with such a fantastic bunch of people. The good thing is my times did improve, and keep improving. In 2005 I did PBs at every



Enjoyment is a key component of training.



distance from 3k up to the marathon. And I'm still having fun!' Pat believes that the success of the Group has come about because all members are equally respected regardless of their pace. Training sessions are structured so that the Group runs together as much as possible and nobody feels like they are holding their team-mates up. It should be noted that while Pat continues to get his fix by running with the Group at speedwork, he is also inspiring his charges at the same

time; who is going to bludge the last rep of the morning with Pat running alongside barking 'C'mon! Dig deep!' Pat adds 'Recognition of excellence through the Athlete of the Month award is not based on times, but on effort. Likewise, runners vie for Achievement Awards - specially struck gold medals awarded to runners who run a PB in three consecutive 3k Time Trials, or run a PB when the previous PB was more than three months previously.' Finally, I get the humble Coach to narrow it down and tell us what he thinks is the best attribute he provides. Having run with him for nearly two years, I know that he is a man who is more likely to tell a story about someone or something other than himself. Pat opens up and says 'The fact I have credibility as a result of being at the top end of distance running is a characteristic that I believe instills confidence amongst the Group members, while my obvious respect for runners of all abilities ensures everyone is welcome. As a result we have a positive and friendly group environment. I also would like to think that my personality adds a certain amount of flavour when steering the Group.' The Pat Carroll Running Group is not your typical running club, but its members and Pat will tell you that they wouldn't have it any other way!



Members – More than 50 regulars
Sessions – Tuesday and Thursday
Location – The Ship Inn, southern end of Goodwill Bridge, Brisbane. 6am (5:40am in summer)
Cost - \$8 per session, \$55 for 8 sessions or \$155 for 24 sessions. First session is free and visitors are welcome.
Email - pat@PatCarrollOnline.com
Phone - 0403176672
Website – www.PatCarrollOnline.com



Our Favourite Run - Pat Carroll Running Group - The Ship Inn to New Farm

Written by Matt Phillips
Image by Glen Eaton/ShutterSpeed
Photography

The Pat Carroll Running Group enjoys the variety of three training locations in and around the heart of the Brisbane CBD. The favourite speedwork venue is the magnificent 150-year-old Botanic Gardens whilst West End's Riverside Drive is also a popular training venue and hosts the monthly time trial that takes place with the morning sun glistening off the mighty Brisbane River. The Group's favourite run however, is the riverside run to the New Farm cliffs where speedwork then takes place on a wide and even strip of bitumen under Brisbane's imposing Story Bridge.

1. After meeting at Brisbane's newly redeveloped Ship Inn, the Group heads off on a warm up run to New Farm in two waves over the pedestrian/cyclist only Goodwill Bridge. At the early hour of 6am, the River

more often than not is pristine and there is only the distant sound of a city awakening. 2. Exiting the bridge, the run then takes in the shaded east side path of the Botanic Gardens with the river still just a stone's throw away. 3. Leaving the Gardens, the run continues to hug the river, as the Group ventures onto the Eagle St Pier boardwalk with modern skyscrapers looming above on one side and the river lapping at the edge of the boardwalk on the other. The end of the boardwalk marks the arrival at New Farm, where the Group then runs under the Story Bridge and ends the 3k warm up at the start of the floating Riverwalk. 4. Following a short break, run throughs and speedwork then take place on the bitumen strip with the New Farm cliffs and Story Bridge both towering above the proceedings. 5. Following the conclusion of speedwork, the Group returns to the Ship Inn for a warm down run by the same route. With the feel good endorphins still flowing and another step towards our goals having been taken, runners can take a moment at the



Running over the Goodwill Bridge at the start of warm up

end of the session to admire the Brisbane River and city skyline from the crest of the Goodwill Bridge content in the knowledge that Queensland is indeed 'beautiful one day, perfect the next!'

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