

WHAT'S YOUR WORKOUT? | JEN MURPHY

This Marathoner Is a Dog's Best Friend

LIKE MANY marathoners, John McLean trains with running buddies. But if he isn't keeping pace, he gets barked out. Mr. McLean is a dog-lover who logs miles with four-legged friends, both his own and rescues.

For years Mr. McLean, 63, ran solo. He and his wife, Barbara McLean, live in Arizona. They worked in the aerospace industry and travel made it tough to look after a dog. The day after Mr. McLean retired in 2014, he came home with Abby, a 10-week-old chocolate Labrador.

"I did some online research and training a dog to run is really like training yourself to run," he says. "You have to focus on hydration, increase mileage slowly, especially for juveniles. I think we both experience runner's high." The big difference, he says, is teaching them not to race off the trail to chase desert critters.

He enjoyed Abby's company so much, he began volunteering at a local shelter, walking and running with rescue dogs a few days a week. "I usually let the dogs decide the pace," he says. "Many surprise me. Just like with people, you can't judge a good runner by appearance."

This past spring, he and his wife, a dog-lover but not a runner, adopted Finn, a two-year-old Lab mix, from the shelter where he volunteers. "Abby taught Finn good trail-running behavior and Finn made Abby more playful," he says. Mr. McLean races marathons

and ultra-trail races, which are longer than 26.2 miles. "I started running in my 40s, so my joints aren't trashed," he says. His canine crew is helping him train to qualify for the 2021 Boston Marathon. For his age group, he needs a qualifying time of four hours and five minutes or less. "I want to celebrate my 65th birthday by running Boston for a third time," he says. He'll attempt to qualify on Saturday at the Tucson Marathon.

The Workout

Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays, Mr. McLean is at Pima Animal Care Center in Tucson by 6 a.m. to walk and run with several of the hundreds of dogs there. He jokes that working out with many dogs is like interval training. "I start out with a mellow dog for a brisk warm-up walk, then alternate between running dogs and walking dogs," he says. In addition to the cardio benefits, being pulled by an enthusiastic dog works the biceps and shoulder muscles, while any sharp changes in direction help improve balance, says Mr. McLean. "Frequent bending for treats, affection, and poop pickup also strengthens the core," he says. He estimates that he covers 4 to 6 miles during these four-hour volunteering stints.

Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays, he is out before dawn for a 1.5- to two-hour run with Abby and Finn on one of the many trails accessible from Tucson along the Catalina Highway. The dogs are disciplined



Marathoner John McLean trains with his dogs, Abby, left, and Finn on trails at Mount Lemmon outside Tucson, Ariz.

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enough to run off-leash in a pack with him. The farthest he has taken Abby is a 13-mile, three-hour run. "She came home quite tired, as did I," he says. When training for a marathon or longer distances, he adds a solo run on Wednesdays. He'll run up to 23 miles on a network of paths in Tucson called the Loop. Mr. McLean has had Achilles tendon problems as the result of tight calf muscles, and says he stretches for 15 minutes every night and before his morning run.

The Diet

"I'm a total omnivore, with a heavy emphasis on fresh fruits and vegetables," says Mr. McLean. He fuels pre-run with a banana and coffee. After, he might have a fruit smoothie, eggs and rice or a par-fait of yogurt, fruit and granola. He always has a Cliff Bar in the car in case he needs nutrition immediately after a run.

Throughout the day, he grazes on nuts and fruit. He occasionally breaks for a green salad. "Like the dogs, I eat when I'm hungry," he says. His wife cooks most nights. His favorite dishes include navy-bean soup, meatloaf and potatoes and jambalaya. Dinners are often accompanied by a salad of vegetables from their garden. Before a marathon he eats pasta.

As for the dogs, they eat Purina Pro Plan twice a day and get marrow bones as a treat. On runs, Mr. McLean shares pieces of low-fat mozzarella sticks with them.

The Gear and Cost

Mr. McLean's running wardrobe includes Patagonia running shorts (about \$65 a pair), old race shirts (included in race-entry fees) and Brooks Caldera trail-running shoes (\$140) with custom orthotics. "I'm religious about making sure I have a pair of shorts that fit comfort-

ably and over time have learned that breaking in my socks is just as important as breaking in my shoes," he says.

On trail runs, Abby and Finn wear their licenses (\$20 a year apiece), dog tags with names and phone number (about \$10), and Findster GPS pet trackers (about \$200 for both dogs). For Pima Animal Care Center outings, Mr.

McLean wears cargo pants to hold treats and poop bags. Volunteers are charged \$10 for a six-foot ship lead. He carries water on a hydration belt, as well as a collapsible bowl so he can share with the dogs.

The Playlist

"The rapid footfall and synchronized breathing of a well-tuned pack, human and animal, is a symphony in itself," he says. Mr. McLean listens to the tinkling of dog tags to keep track of his pups if he can't see them all.