I’M A RUNNER

ALDO ZILLI

THE CELEBRITY CHEF, 64, ON HIS CANINE RUNNING PARTNER AND TRAINING TOOLS

I RUN BETWEEN RESTAURANTS IN MY CHEF WHITES. I get the Tube to Piccadilly and run up the escalators every day. I use them as exercise – you’ll never catch me standing. I wear trainers 24-7 and I put on a baseball cap and sunglasses to run between San Carlo on Regent Street and Signor Sassi in Knightsbridge, then back to Cicchetti in St James’.

DATES GIVE ME ENERGY FOR RUNNING. I soak them overnight to release the sugar, then, in the morning, I have them with an espresso and a berry-and-almond milk smoothie, before I run around my field listening to the Alan Brazil breakfast show on talkSPORT. When I get back, I have porridge with blueberries and raisins.

I LEARNED TO RUN ON CELEBRITY FIT CLUB. They put weights on us to make us realise the excess weight we were carrying. So if we were 20kg overweight, they made us run with that on our back. Running has always been in my life, but since the show, I understand what I’m doing. An American ex-military guy called Harvey improved my technique, and at the end of the series, we ran a 10K in Alexandra Palace. I won the race and I won the show, losing 15kg!

I NEVER PLAN MY ROUTE, and I always get lost. In Shanghai, I was two hours late for a meeting when I went for a run and couldn’t remember the name of my hotel. It took a 15-minute cab ride to get me back. In Hong Kong, another runner went two miles out of his way to run with me to where I was staying, and in New Delhi, I paid a tuk-tuk driver to lead the way to my hotel while I ran behind on the pavement. I didn’t want a lift – that would have been cheating!

I’VE GOT THE FITTEST FRENCH BULLDOG IN ENGLAND. His name’s Romeo and he runs 5km with me around my field. In the beginning, he’d run to a certain point, then stop dead. He wouldn’t go any further, so I had to jog back with him on my shoulders. He’s at least 10-15kg, so he’s a proper lump. I miss him in summer because his breeding means he can’t run when it’s hot, but now he can do the whole circuit with me, so we’re both as fit as each other.

LIKE MY ESPRESSO, RUNNING IS IMPORTANT TO ME. It’s my tonic, and it’s the only form of cardio that works for me – but I have to be careful now. As you get older, your joints are not as strong as they used to be, so I try to avoid impact on my knees and ankles. I love running in the sand and I always run barefoot. I took Romeo with me to a beach for a run along the seafront and he went mad on the sand.

RUNNING GIVES ME QUALITY TIME WITH MY SON. He’s 14 and he joins me every time he can. We leave the girls behind and go on boys’ runs together – Rocco, Romeo and Aldo. We’ll stop for a breather and have a long chat. On one run we ran past a café and stopped for a coffee. I’d never done that before and it was a nice moment. My daughter Twiggy is 11. She’s my little star, and she comes too and cycles alongside us.

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*Aldo Zilli is head consultant of the San Carlo restaurant group*