I’m a Runner

Martin Roberts

The Homes Under the Hammer presenter, 57, on midrun tree-hugging

I run when I wake up because I think, ‘If the rest of the day goes pear-shaped, at least I’ve achieved something.’ It’s difficult running at 7am in winter, but the rest of the year, it’s a beautiful time to be out. When I get back, I’ll have toasted sourdough bread with orange marmalade, or Crunchy Nut Cornflakes with full-fat milk, or smoked salmon and scrambled egg on an English muffin. It’s depressing when I look at how many calories I’ve burnt off, because I think, ‘Oh Christ, that’s about half a muffin’s worth,’ but whatever!

When I’m running, I listen to power rock ballads such as Eye of the Tiger. It’s a cliché, but it’s a cliché for a reason. It works. I’ll take my labradoodles off track and run through fields and forests.

The Karate Stretches I learnt as a kid prepare me for a run. I’ll do the routine at home, then I take it easy for the first five minutes of the run before powering it up. I wear Karrimor Lycra shorts, a light top and a sweatshirt, with Asics trainers. They work for me and I change them every six months. I take water in a CamelBak, but I don’t use any running apps.

I had a Fitbit, but it was annoying because it kept telling me to do more exercise. I was like, ‘Sod off!’ I’m not about monitoring my runs. I do them in my own time and I don’t need a watch to congratulate me: ‘Well done, you’ve done 1,000 steps!’ I’m not interested – eff off!

Finishing the London Marathon is one of my proudest achievements. I had childhood asthma and my school report said, ‘Tries hard, but finds virtually all forms of physical activity impossible.’ When I was asked to do the marathon, I initially thought, ‘I can’t do that!’ I decided to do it, to break that negative cycle of thought, but I couldn’t be bothered with the training. I allowed myself a month to train, doing one run a week for four weeks, and come race day the furthest I’d ever run was four miles.

Camaraderie carried me to Tower Bridge, on track for a four-hour marathon, but on the other side of the road were runners who’d done the rest of the route. They were six inches away, but there was 10 miles for me to get to that point. From then on, it was a disaster, psychologically and physically. My body asked, ‘What the hell are you doing?’ As I approached Horse Guards Parade, the sweepers were clearing up, but I staggered across the finishing line in 6 hours, 57 minutes and 38 seconds.

I’m not embarrassed to hug a tree. It’s about connecting with nature. You wouldn’t find me on a treadmill or running down a road – the joy is in being in the countryside. My favourite run goes past a waterfall and through a woodland, so I’ll give the trees a quick hug as I’m passing.