

SUNDOWNER WITH DOUG BAILLIE

THE MARATHON MAN

I don't have the body of a runner," says Doug Baillie, chopping his vowels as South Africans often do. Since Baillie is the CEO & MD of Hindustan Unilever Ltd, the venerable consumer goods company, and a veteran marathoner, hence it is difficult to agree with such humility. "I mean just look at all the champion long distance runners. They are thin and wiry," says Baillie.

Baillie may think he isn't cut from a marathon runner's genetic material but he proves that large willpower beats strong legs any day. For a 52-year-old man, he is a serial marathoner. He has finished 7 London, 2 New York and at least 10 South African marathons in the last 25 years.

Sitting back in Lever House, the affable South African talks about his thrice-a-week running routine, and it sounds as demanding as running a Rs 12,000 crore company. He says, "I get up by 4.45 or 5 in the morning, and I begin running at 6." The jog from Mr Baillie's Carmichael Road residence to Lever House at Backbay Reclamation takes about 45 minutes, and he's ready to work before 7. That's when the day begins for the CEO of India's largest consumer goods company. "I like the fact that it isn't a selfish sport. On weekends, I can start at 6 and be back home by 8 am...just when the family has woken up from sleep."

Baillie's passion for running has been no less than a contagion inside HUL, Mumbai. This year almost 2,000 people (including family members) from the company will take part in the Mumbai Marathon.

For HUL, it seems like the management that runs together, stays together. So joining him on his running sorties are Dhaval Buch and Nitin Paranjpe, HUL's executive directors for supply chain and home and personal care respectively. Former foods division head S Ravindranath is also a regular in this running group, his 60-plus years hardly dampening his enthusiasm. Even Leena Nair, director for HR, was scheduled to train with the other members of HUL's management committee, but a broken collar-bone has kept her out of the action, for this event.

Mr Baillie is hardly your archetypal marathon runner. So how difficult is it to run very long distances? The trick is always running at a comfortable speed in comfortable gear. "If you can't talk, then you're running too fast," he says, unknowingly

echoing Reebok's line. Once the feet are pumping, the body moves into cruise mode and mind is left free to think. "Often, I get clarity over a number of business ideas or even presentations that I make to the staff when I'm running in the mornings," he says. En route, he also encounters other running enthusiasts, most notably Mr Ambani. "I always pass Mr Ambani running in the opposite direction, and we wave at each other. I once asked his drivers, why aren't you running, now of course I just give them a finger-wag and they smile back." Has he ever discussed running with Anil Ambani? "No, but we do nod and wave as we pass each other," says Mr Baillie.

So when did the fascination for distance running start? "When I was 27 I had just quit competitive field hockey and I needed to keep fit," he says. Mr Baillie, growing up in South Africa, played a variety of sport, and till recently had a single-digit handicap in golf, but found that running was his release and his stress-buster.

So he has run long, and run hard. More than 20 years ago, he ran the Comrades Marathon, one of the most grueling tests of character. The marathon is a 90 km race beginning at Durban and ending at Pietermaritzburg, otherwise more famous for the being home to the railway station where a certain MK Gandhi was thrown off from the first-class compartment of a train. Mr Baillie says, "I finished the Comrades Marathon in 9 hrs and 3 minutes." A test of endurance indeed, especially since the Comrades Marathon is preceded by a 42 km qualifying marathon! Since then, Mr Baillie has made it a point to run one marathon every year. Last year, he