

BOB GARDINER – RACING AS TRAINING

Nowadays, our top walkers walk sparsely, selecting their races with deliberation and choosing to train for the majority of their time. It is only in the final preparation period that we tend to see more regular appearances. This is a strategy which works and indeed, when racing at absolutely top pace, races must be carefully planned and executed.

But this was not always the case. In our day (gosh, I sound old!), we raced every week, month in and month out, and we used our races as part of our training. This is a valid strategy but one that requires careful consideration and a lot of trial and effort to perfect. It is very easy under such an intensive race routine to get to the end of the season with the tank empty and find that you are pulling up short just when you should be at your peak.

Bob Gardiner was a good example of someone who got it right. He was a great club man, racing nearly every week at the club level and putting in an appearance at every championship event, yet he always managed to peak for the big events on a diet of races that few nowadays could contemplate.

His preparation for the 1968 Olympics was a wonderful example of this technique. The following table lists his racing calendar for the 12 months leading up to the Mexico 50 km event.

30/09/66	Albert Park	Vic Champ	50 km	4:19:59	1 st
08/11/66	Albert Park	VAWC Handicap	2 Miles	14:26	3 rd fastest
15/11/66	Olympic Park	VAWC Handicap	2 Miles	14:27	2 nd fastest
25/11/66	Mentone	Interclub	1 Mile	7:01.0	1 st
29/11/66	Olympic Park	VAWC Handicap	2 Miles	14:43	2 nd fastest
06/12/66	Albert Park	VAWC Handicap	3 Miles	21:04	2 nd
13/12/66	Olympic Park	Invitation Meet	1 Mile	6:38	3 rd
16/12/66	Olympic Park	Interclub	2 Miles	13:59	1 st
19/12/66	Olympic Park	Invitation Meet	1 Mile	6:36.5	2 nd
09/01/67	Geelong	Invitation Meet	1500m	6:10.5	1 st
13/01/67	Olympic Park	Interclub	1 Mile	6:54.6	1 st
17/01/67	Olympic Park	VAWC Handicap	2 Miles	14:41	2 nd
24/01/67	Albert Park	VAWC Handicap	3 Miles	21:02	2 nd
27/01/67	Olympic Park	Interclub	1 Mile		1 st
03/02/67	University	Interclub	2 Miles		DQ
07/02/67	Albert Park	VAWC Handicap	2 Miles	13:54	2 nd
10/02/67	Olympic Park	Interclub	1 Mile	6:57	1 st
14/02/67	Albert Park	VAWC Handicap	3 Miles	20:56	2 nd
22/02/67	Olympic Park	Victorian Championship	2 Miles	13:46	2 nd
02/03/67	Olympic Park	Invitation Meet	2 Miles	14:34.6	2 nd
03/03/67	Olympic Park	Invitation Meet	2 Miles	14:23	2 nd
06/03/67	Albert Park	VAWC Handicap	2 Miles	13:52	2 nd
10/03/67	Albert Park	VAWC Championship	10 km	47:33	3 rd
17/03/67	Olympic Park	Invitation Meet	2 Miles	13:59.6	2 nd
28/03/67	Olympic Park	Victoria vs. New Zealand	3000m	12:49.1	3 rd
30/03/67	Ringwood	Handicap	2 Miles	15:25	Unplaced
31/03/67	Albert Park	VAWC Scratch race	20 Miles	2:33:18	1 st
06/04/67	Albert Park	VAWC Scratch race	20 km	95:36	2 nd
20/04/67	Albert Park	VAWC Scratch race	10 km	46:37	1 st
27/04/67	Albert Park	VAWC Championship	5 Miles	37:46	3 rd
11/05/67	Albert Park	VAWC Scratch race	40 km	3:25:43	2 nd
18/05/67	Albert Park	Victorian Teams Race	5 Miles	36:27	1 st
25/05/67	Toowoomba	Australian Championship, Olympic Trial	50 km	4:22:23.6	1 st
01/06/67	University	Victorian Championship	10 km	49:29	4 th
15/06/67	University	Victorian Championship	10 Miles	75:19	1 st
22/06/67	Albert Park	VAWC	7 Miles	53:46	3 rd
29/06/67	Albert Park	Victorian Championship	20 km	96:51	3 rd
13/07/67	Albert Park	VAWC	15 Miles	1:57:25	1 st
20/07/67	Albert Park	VAWC	6 Miles	44:14	1 st
27/07/67	University	VAWC	2 Hours	14m 143ly	1 st
04/08/67	Ballarat	VAWC	11 5/8 mls	86:18	1 st

10/08/67	Albert Park	VAWC	20 Miles	2:39:10	1 st
24/08/67	University	VAWC Championship (Track)	50 km	4:14:17	1 st
07/09/67	St Kilda – Frankston	VAWC Handicap	25 Miles	3:20:46	Fastest
14/09/67	Albert Park	VAWC Handicap	6 Miles	43:31	Fastest
04/10/67	Mexico	Team Trial	10 km	49:52.2	4 th
17/10/67	Mexico	Olympic Games	50 km	4:52:29	19 th

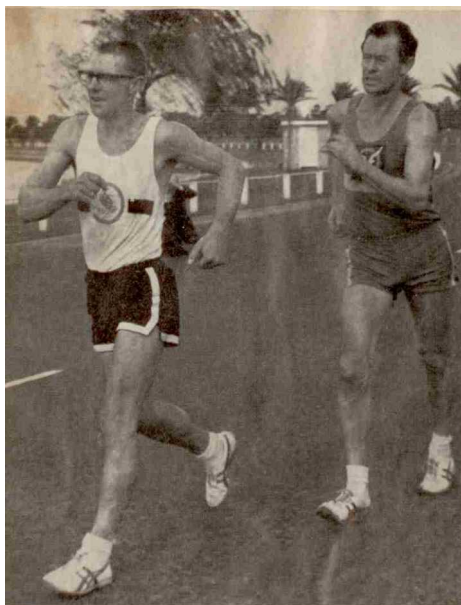
He finished the 1967 winter season with a victory in the Victorian 50 km championship in in 4:19:59. It was only a couple of minutes over his Tokyo Olympic 50 km time (he came 5th in the 1964 Olympic 50 km event) and signaled that his training was on target.

After 6 weeks off, he threw himself into the summer season, racing every week, sometimes even twice a week and beating everyone except for Noel Freeman. During the season, he set new PBs for the short distance events and challenged Noel in a whole series of wonderful races that extended over a 5 month period.

When the summer finished, it was straight into the winter and in those days it was a winter with a much greater emphasis on long distances. Over the next 4 months while preparing for his 1968 Olympic 50 km event, he raced two 20 milers, one 40 km event, one 25 mile event and two 50 km events. It was no surprise to anyone when in early May, he won the Australian 50 km championship and Olympic trial by more than 5 minutes. The course in Toowoomba in Queensland was a tough hilly one and the race was held in bleak conditions. His time of 4:22:23 was impressive in the circumstances.

Yet with all this intensive racing over a long period, he was without doubt at his peak at the end of the winter. First on August 24, in a VAWC Track 50 km event at Melbourne University, he won in 4:14:17, setting new Commonwealth, Australian and Victorian records. I was fortunate enough to witness that walk and I still remember the constant pace with which he ate up the 125 laps. Then 2 weeks later, he finished 4th from a scratch start in the classic Melbourne to Frankston 25 Mile event. His time was a sensational 3:20:46 (around 4:10 pace for the 50 km) and he pulled up fresh and looked to have plenty in reserve.

He headed off to Mexico in the best form of his life and ready to improve on his 5th place in the 1964 Olympic event. Sadly, like most of us, he had no idea of the toll that the high altitude and heat would exact from his body. In the Olympic 50 km, after a good start, he gradually lost ground and faded back through the field. His last 10 km was walked in the semi darkness with people wandering across the course. His 19th place in 4:52:29 was a disappointment but still a gutsy effort. I have no hesitation in saying that if this event had been held at sea level, it would have been a different story.



Bob leads Ted Allsopp in the 1970 Victorian 20 km championship at Albert Park

Bob remains the classic example of someone who had the uncanny knack of racing every week yet always peaking at the right time for the big events. Some day, he might share his secrets with us!