



Pains and pleasures of a long-distance runner

Last month, East Finchley dad Jamie Austin ran the length of the M1 motorway to raise money for research into type 1 diabetes after his son Henry was diagnosed with the condition. Here, Jamie describes the pains that almost stopped him in his tracks and the pleasures that kept him going.

The route was familiar: past East Finchley station, up the High Road, past the Phoenix, over the Stag crossing and on towards our road. But it felt otherworldly as I took the final, tired steps of a run that started 220 miles north and had seen me pass through Yorkshire, the East Midlands and the Home Counties.



Motorway madness: Jamie sets off on his journey down the length of the M1 from Leeds

After the final leg from Hampstead Garden Suburb, I was finally home. In minutes, I would be able to see my wife Rachel, and my children, Rosie, 10, and Henry, 12, after two weeks apart.

It was no real surprise that it felt odd, as the whole project was a curious undertaking. Inspired by Henry's ongoing battle with type 1 diabetes (T1D) and our frequent journeys up and down the M1 to the clinical trial he joined at Sheffield Children's Hospital and to his grandparents in Nottingham, I had decided to run the length of the M1 motorway, from junction 47 at Garforth near Leeds to junction 1 at Brent Cross, over ten days. I called the project 'M1 for T1' and aimed to raise money for T1D charity JDRF.

Secret plan

The hare-brained

scheme only took shape in the second half of 2022. I desperately wanted to do something for Henry and everyone living with T1D, since we had learned what a relentless and exhausting condition it is. I kept the idea secret, as I tested out my legs and my willpower.

In October, having run three consecutive days of 20km+ and made the huge decision to leave my marvellous colleagues at news agency Reuters, I finally announced my plans. The initial reaction from most people was confusion ("Sorry, you're doing what?!") swiftly followed by a wave of support I feel I've been riding ever since.

As I trained, extending the frequency and distance of my runs and learning what and how to eat, the scale of the challenge started to sink in. I had never even completed a marathon, so what was I doing trying to emulate ultramarathon techniques? Talk about running before you crawl!

Some days I felt excited as I stomped up the Dollis Brook path to Barnet, feeling the project was eminently doable. Other days my legs ached and my worry lines deepened as I wondered if I had bitten off more than I could chew. Training intensified as the year closed, with pasta and 30km runs replacing beer and hangovers on Christmas Day and New Year's Day.

Support team

I set off for Leeds on Sunday 22 January and joined my parents, Barry, 80, and Glenys, 78, who were to be my 'support team'. For the next two weeks, they chauffeured me to start and finish points, kept my spirits up and brought strawberry milk every day (my post-run ritual!). You can say what you like about cycling coach Dave Brailsford and Team Sky's methods, but they have NOTHING on Barry and Glenys.

As we headed south broadly



Close to home: Friends and fellow runners join Jamie, kneeling, in Hampstead Garden Suburb for the final run into East Finchley

following the motorway's route, the days were tough, but I can honestly say that I loved every minute (apart from being away from my family. Thank you, FaceTime).

Low and high points

The lowest point was in the middle. After a fast day through



Off-road: Jamie runs canal-side

Nottingham, my left knee was sore and deteriorated as I ran through Leicester. In the countryside, mud stuck to my feet in huge, heavy clods, straining my knee further. The camber of the canal towpath I was on made my foot land at awkward angles that shot little lightning bolts of pain up my leg.

I carried Henry's cuddly toy, Monkey, in my backpack every day and, as I hobbled to the finish point, quietly wished on him to bring me luck. That evening, as I treated my injury, I told my parents they should be prepared for me to walk from there on. Probably meaning eight hours of slow progress each day.

The thing that probably saved me? My dad had an orthopaedic inner sole in his right shoe to treat a flat foot. I figured a similar, hereditary issue may be hindering me. His left innersole, almost lost amongst old shoes and boxes, fitted perfectly into my trainer. I set out gingerly the next day but, with a straightened gait, the pain dissipated and never returned in the same way.

The high points were too numerous to mention. I ran with friends on all but two days, including N2 residents Joe

Crouch and Tom Avery, and their company was utterly inspiring. As were the messages of support along the way, from our street's WhatsApp group to social media posts from the other side of the world. I was incredibly lucky with the weather, saw some beautiful parts of the country and discovered TikTok (OMG, I am sooo Gen Z).

Most importantly, the project delivered way beyond my expectations. It raised awareness of T1D through media coverage, including stardom for Henry on TV news and the front of *The Archer*, and incredible sponsorship of more than £20,000; a huge amount that will help JDRF deliver their vital work. The gener-

(organised by the wonderful Justine Csaky).

We paused outside the Phoenix, which had kindly put up a sign to welcome me home, before heading to the finish. Turning the corner onto Bedford Road was something I will never forget. A crowd of family, friends and neighbours had gathered in the street to welcome me home. A surreal end to a surreal project. The rest is a blur of confetti, applause, hugs, smiles and cake. Yes, not entirely dissimilar to a wedding, now I think about it...

Now as the dust settles on my adventure (and my trainers), I'm left with nothing but positive memories and a profound sense of gratitude to the people who helped me, especially our amazing local community, which never ceases to get involved, put its money where its mouth is, and support everyone. From me, Henry, our



Glad to be back: Jamie is welcomed home by his family Henry, Rachel and Rosie.

osity has blown me away.

A surreal end

I wasn't alone as I took the final steps up the High Road. A group of local friends, including Archer Academy and Holy Trinity parents and pupils, and Archer Dad football teammates, joined me for the last 3km

family and the whole T1D community; thank you! (Until next time...)

There's still time to support Jamie and his goal to raise as much money as possible for diabetes research charity JDRF. You can make a donation at: www.justgiving.com/page/m1-for-t1

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