

A Soloists Solitary Perspective

By Abi Moore
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It's been in your calendar for months. Possibly years. Your first ultra of the year, or perhaps your life. Every runner's race calendar is personal, full of personal choices, decisions, adventures and goals. Regardless of your race season, S7 is probably a pivotal race in your season, which, in my case, is suitably and sinisterly marked on the calendar with a large X. An X which gets closer every single day...

Regardless of your personal training and planning, one thing's for certain, on everyone's calendar throughout Alberta, every other province and an increasing number of countries who attend this outstanding race, everything seems to work backwards from the X. One week out you want to be doing this, two weeks out you want to have accomplished that mileage, four weeks out you want to have reached this goal, not just that goal, eight weeks out you want to not think about it, four months out you have no idea what your trail shoes look like. Come July 5th however, you will have a pretty good idea.

Planning for your ultra is akin to planning your wedding. You buy a ridiculous amount of new gear, and random items you will never use again. You taste test new race menu items, opting for stomach settlers over taste bud tantalizers. You pick your closest friends to be your support crew and saviours. And you get as fit as you can. Come race day, there may not be a party favour or lace clad wedding dress in sight, but speaking as someone who's Mom didn't cry at her wedding, but lost it at the S7 finish line, I can tell you now, emotions run high from start to finish.

So after putting what seems like an unprecedented amount of time into planning for just one weekend of your life, what exactly can you expect? Well here's a few discoveries to hopefully remove any, (or at least a few), elements of surprise from your personal adventure this July 5th (and 6th)...

A sensible place to start is at the beginning.

The Pre-Race Dinner: It's a valuable addition to race day weekend and gets you in the mood, so certainly a must for me. Whether that's a mood of sheer panic, or numbness, there are many others in the same boat as you. Just look around at the nervous shuffling, gentle limb rubbing and stretching. **Do:** Distract yourself by hitting up the Giv'er Shirtworks stand and adorn yourself with S7 branded clothing. **Don't:** Panic. Get some good sleep (or any sleep at all), and smile, after all you've almost reached that darn 'Day X'.

'Day X': A recurring feeling throughout the whole Day X, aside from feeling slightly tired, is the S7 atmosphere. They should bottle it and sell it. It's incredible and whether it's down to the slightly tired delirious feeling, it brings tears to your eyes at times. This atmosphere is a collaboration of fellow racers, supporters, organizers, strangers and volunteers. The S7 volunteers are the most amazing people on the planet and if you're a soloist, with minimal or no support, don't panic, there'll be someone there to help you. **Do:** Prepare yourself to be amazed by how friendly everyone is. **Don't:** Forget to muster up a smile, the race day photos by Raven Eye Photography are awesome.



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Leg 1: You're on course. This is actually happening. Oh my god I've forgotten how to run. Leg 1 is one of the shorter and easier legs, with a gently climb out of town through the Frank Slide debris field. Landing you in the bush, where you will reside for the remainder of 'Day X'. Expect lots of cheering along the way, a sign of what's to come. **Do:** Remember to breath. **Don't:** Forget this is 'Day X'! Enjoy every minute. Or at least one minute per hour.

Leg 2: Views. And a gentle, then not so gentle climb. If you didn't know what your trail shoes looked like before, you do now. Enjoy the scenic high trail along Hastings Ridge, before you hit a steep, gnarly single-track down. Cruise back into town. 32.5kms are done, just like that. **Do:** Get ready for transition area excitement. It's loud, supportive and quite emotional. Possibly as you are reminded you're not alone out there. **Don't:** Think about Leg 3.

Leg 3: I'd be lying if I said it wasn't steep and sometimes pretty solitary, but it's a good one. You'll get wet, muddy and everything in between. It's also, as a soloist, a great one to get checked off. You'll come back into the same transition area you started this leg at, ensuing another loud cheer, before you head off on Leg 4. 67.5kms done. **Do:** Fill up on water whenever you can on this leg, it's not a quick one and if it's a hot one, you'll be exposed and chugging water on those climbs. **Don't:** Forget sunscreen.

Leg 4: This is where things change a little this year. This leg, which used to pretty much go on to eternity and back, is a mere 17kms now! Ending near the Tourist Information Centre, rather than taking the 'dreaded ditch', I for one am hoping this change will be a good one, mentally at least. **Do:** Remember you are now into the second half. **Don't:** Look to your right, as Leg 6 is watching you.

Leg 5: Not a clue. It's 29.6kms of new trails and I'm personally hoping for a nice surprise (Andrew, Brian and Erin please don't let us down...) **Do:** Keep running. **Don't:** Think about Leg 6...

Leg 6: Too late. Wow. New this year, it's a gruesome combination of the old Leg 5 and 6. 36.2kms, described by organizers as an "evil climb". My true feelings I can't put into print, so we'll stick with evil climb. Great views of the Crowsnest Pass and your trail shoes will be had. And I can safely say for the many racers, this is where darkness descends, adding a whole new element and excitement to the race. Fellow racers become best friends and comrades and volunteers become saviours. From chicken noodle soup to twizzlers, they've got it covered. **Do:** Dress warm. It's windy up there and getting cold sucks. **Don't:** Twist anything on the descent, it's tricky in the dark.

Leg 7: It's like Christmas with a hangover. You're so excited, but you don't feel so good. 'Day X' is almost behind you and the finish line is, albeit creeping, closer. But you feel you'd enjoy it a whole lot more if you hadn't done what you did the day before. This leg is also shortened to 10.7kms this year, primarily single-track from start to finish. I'm pretty sure it would be a great run if there hadn't been 169.3kms prior to it, but it's a good one to keep your brain and legs moving. **Do:** Watch out for skunks. With 4kms to go last year I narrowly avoided getting sprayed, severely adding insult to injury. **Don't:** Miss the Twizzlers at the final aid-station, they made the whole experience more like Christmas. And from here to the finish it's a fun (a term used loosely), run down Saskatoon Mountain to a seat and a beer. And a bed.

Completion: Whether on a team or a soloist, you've made it. Congrats! An inspiring adventure to say the least, one that can be morale boosting and soul destroying within the space of a minute. But whatever your goal, whatever your outcome, you'll come away with a whole host of memories. Some to remember and some to forget. **Do:** Have yourself an amazing race, make friends and be inspired by others. **Don't:** Say you'll never do this again. Because you will. See you next year...



Abi Moore won the Female Solo category in both 2012 and 2013 and she is eager to try the new 100-miler course. Residing in Fernie, BC, Abi is always happy to get out on the local trails and share her race stories.