



RUNNING ON FUMES

WE HEAR A LOT ABOUT DANGEROUS AIR QUALITY, BUT WHEN IS IT BETTER TO ACTUALLY NOT RUN IN A CITY? AND HOW ARE YOU, AS A RUNNER, EXPECTED TO MAKE THAT CHOICE? SCOTT CAIN INVESTIGATES



In a city like Beijing, which I visited last year – and where a good air day is still worse than even our reddest of red warning days in UK cities – the decision is easy. You just don't run. (Other than on a treadmill, with good indoor air treatment.)

But running matters to us. Taking that option away leaves, well, a bad taste in the mouth, even if it might be clinically better for us. Running means something more than just a gentle leg-loosener, welcome though that is: because of how it makes us feel, for the simple joy and pain of it, and for how it helps us to achieve things we once thought beyond us. What's more, we runners are a determined, nay, wilful bunch. Tell us we can't, and we more than likely will. So, other than giving up or giving in, what should we do?

BEWARE OF ONCOMING TRAFFIC

Firstly, get off the main roads. Air quality is influenced by a bunch of things (from temperature and wind direction, to street and building design) but a very major factor at a very local level is almost always traffic and congestion – so avoid main roads as much as possible. Even choosing to run (and wait for traffic lights to change) on the far side of a pavement, just a few more feet away from the cars, buses and lorries, makes a big difference. (If you like your sums, pollution can vary by a factor of 1:10 from street to street in urban areas).

All the better if you pick quieter, greener routes or those by water. Not only is the air quality very likely to be improved, but the experience of nature – however small and fleeting – from trees and flowers to birds, is calming. These small doses of nature, taking in everything from small local 'pocket' parks, to views of rivers or even manmade ponds and lakes, play a big part in your wellbeing and happiness. Trees in cities are important in that they take some of the nasties out of the air naturally.

Alongside public information alerts in a growing number of cities, there are a raft of digital products in the pipeline that can help both detect and, if you're able to adapt your routes, avoid the worst air pollution hotspots. These are only going to get better as the data and technology improves. Things like Flow (from Paris-



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based Plume Labs) and its UK equivalent CleanSpace (from Drayson Technologies) combine personal air quality sensors, in the form of small wearables, which provide near real-time air quality readings and forecasting information. You'll also need a smartphone to download their respective apps.



These kind of tools can help guide you on the cleaner air routes that you can take. They also can give you just as vital information on indoor air quality, including at work: this matters more than we

think, for our overall health and in terms of our running and other sporting performance. (Expect to see lots more on this topic in years to come.)

TRANSPORT TWEAKS

We are now seeing big shifts in how city mayors and both national and local governments encourage us to make our everyday journeys, with the UK's Department for Transport now having a £1.2 billion programme to fund better cycling and walking infrastructure: like cycle lanes, improved pavements, and traffic calming.

Unfortunately, running is not explicitly mentioned but runners benefit from those changes to how cities are designed and how we all move. Some of us are working hard to build evidence for why running should be included in these big funding programmes (get in touch if you want to know more and in particular what you can do).

London, Bristol and Manchester are in the leading pack of UK cities in terms of how they are prioritising active travel. Both London and Manchester have active travel 'tsars' who are doing great work to make the case for walking and cycling. For example,

the Mayor of London's new Transport Strategy, published in March 2018, has a 'central aim for 80% of all trips to be made on foot, by cycle or using public transport by 2041.'

As King's College London's Frank Kelly, Chair of the Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants – the official expert advisers to the government – put it recently: "The safe and efficient movement of people around the capital can only be achieved through a clean and expanded mass transit system – and by as much active transport in the form of walking and cycling as is feasibly

possible." Beautifully put. And the only thing we might usefully add would be to include running and us runners in the growing band of active travellers in all of our cities.

So what you do when you are not running really matters too. Can you make more journeys by public transport, bike or walking? Can you do the school run in any other way than drive; or if you feel driving is the only practical option can you share the load with parents of other local kids? Could you give up your on-street parking, allowing more of our city streets to become vibrant people-filled places, where children play?

This is precisely what has happened over the last few decades in cities like Copenhagen and Bilbao, but here in the UK it can be a politically toxic move: it seems we Brits love our vision of the freedom of cars, but really when did your own city-driving experience last feel anything like a car ad?

Ditch the diesel as soon as you realistically can – we know that according to the latest figures 37 of 43 areas across the UK have illegal levels of nitrogen dioxide and, in these towns and cities, the problem is caused mostly by diesel cars, vans and lorries. Depressingly, the tiny particulates from cars breaking on tarmac roads suggest that, according to King's College London, even if we shift to 100% electric vehicles we would still have dangerous air quality in our cities. We will need more people to move in other ways. Like running. So you are already part of the answer.

Finally, if you've really had a lungful of government not doing enough, support the vital work of Client Earth (clientearth.org), which holds government to account in the High Court for its failure to tackle the dangerous and illegal levels of air pollution in our cities. You can also support leading active travel charities, like Sustrans and Living Streets, who run excellent programmes with schools and local communities in particular. It might not seem enough, but in time we will all breathe easier as a result. 🏃



CITY SLICKER

New, urban-running contributor Scott Cain has worked with over 40 cities globally on their innovation challenges, using design and novel technologies to improve how we live, work, move and play in cities. His work on urban mobility – getting people and goods

from A-to-B – includes a particular focus on the role of running and other forms of active travel. Happily, he makes a habit of running in all the cities he works in and visits, helping him understand the city through its streets and people, including the vibrant and calmer places where we chose to come together and to escape.

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AIR SCARE

Toxic air causes over 40,000 early deaths in the UK alone each year.

As well as respiratory conditions like asthma, research shows hospital admissions for heart disease and subsequent deaths rise with increased air pollution.

Want to know more, and really geek out on the science and latest policy? Sign up to the National Air Quality Conference (airqualitynews.com), at Lord's Cricket Ground, on 4 October 2018.

Join in Clean Air Day on 21 June, which has 10 steps to make a difference. Visit cleanairday.org.uk, run by Global Action Plan.