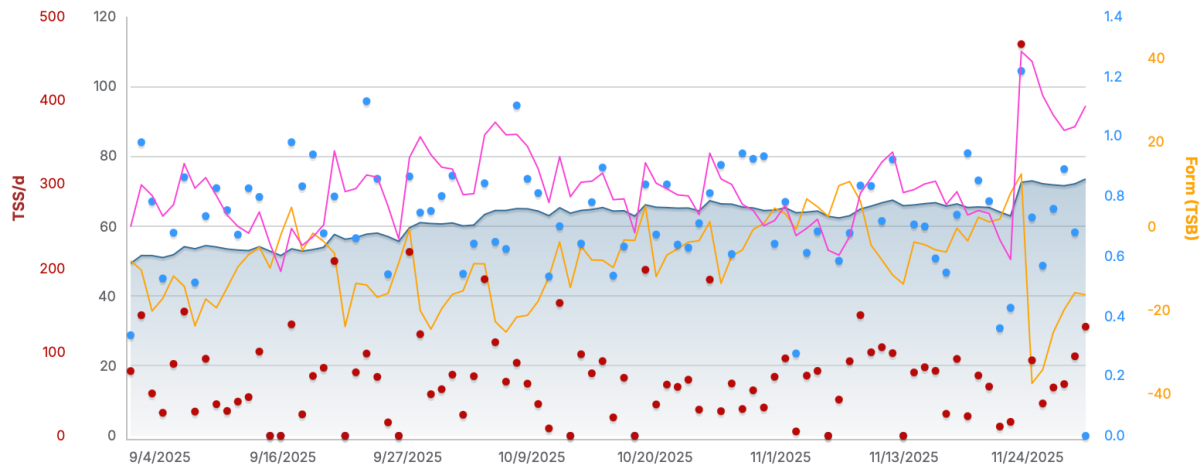




The Road to Valencia – A Rocky but Invaluable journey

Performance Management - All Workout Types



Although my formal marathon training didn't begin until **11th August**, the signs of trouble began months earlier. At the end of June, on a long drive back from Beaune, I was hit with severe congestion and a deep, painful cough that wiped me out for two days. I eased back into exercise gently, managing to lead a private run at Soho Farmhouse, but the pace was easy and I was whacked.

A week later I raced the Upton Standard Triathlon on **12th July**. The swim was fine, but the moment I got on the bike I had no power and was puffing on even small inclines. The run should have been quick, but again I felt weak and short of breath. It was hot, yes, but how I felt was completely disproportionate. We had a lot of fun after the race; I'd underperformed but at this stage I wasn't overly concerned.

After an easier week, we headed to Croatia and Montenegro for a much-needed family holiday. I ran most mornings, mostly easy sightseeing, but any time I pushed beyond Z2 my chest tightened and my breathing felt restricted. Still I believed that patience and a few weeks of easy running would sort things out.

Back in the UK, marathon training officially began. The first week went well, even the 400m intervals. But the following week I attempted 2 miles at marathon pace and properly struggled. It felt like my lungs were working at 75% capacity, my heart rate was elevated and I was sweating heavily. I again told myself it was early days.



The real turning point came on **29th August** during a threshold run (4 × 5 minutes). Perfect conditions, flat road, I was mentally ready. But I couldn't get anywhere near threshold pace and had to stop repeatedly just to catch my breath. I jogged home defeated and finally admitted this wasn't normal.

Time for a new strategy. The GP confirmed a restriction in my left lung, sent me for an X-ray (which showed a little scarring but no major concern) and blood tests revealed low iron, something at least to explain the fatigue. With reassurance that nothing serious was lurking, I shifted focus through September and October to rebuilding the aerobic base. Easy mid-week runs, long weekend efforts, two strength sessions every week, four spin classes at Soho, 2–3 swims, and a weekly turbo of overs/unders. My performance chart was steadily improving.

Then the legs started to complain. A 19-miler on **20th October** felt perfect and confidence was high. But the next day, a simple recovery run with strides ended abruptly with a searing pain through the lower left leg. I cross-trained and kept up strength work, then attempted a cautious 20-miler that weekend. With 3 miles to go I thought I'd step it up as I was feeling strong, but the moment I upped the speed the left leg started to fail, followed quickly by (in sympathy) the right calf. I limped home in despair

Two weeks off running followed. A sports massage didn't solve it. A myofascial session on **31st October** suggested peroneal irritation linked to a misaligned foot strike caused by hip imbalances. Then an ultrasound confirmed peroneal tenosynovitis and tight hip flexors. Anti-inflammatories and isometric exercises were prescribed.

Ten days later on **12th November** I managed a hesitant 20-minute run but it was still uncomfortable. At that point, I genuinely thought my Valencia journey was over. But a week later I managed to hold a steady 10K and optimism crept back. I may even make it to the Start line. On **24th November**, I had a breakthrough: a controlled 10-mile run at 8:00/mile that felt... achievable. As I write this, I'm preparing to head out for my final 13-miler. In one week, all being well, I'll be standing on the start line in Valencia.

It has been an epic struggle, physically, mentally, emotionally. The little demons in your head speak loudly when things go wrong. I'm in my mid-50s now; training needs to evolve. Low intensity is vital. Strength work is essential. Hard sessions have their place, but in moderation. Warm-ups matter. Stretching matters. Sleep matters.



Good nutrition matters. Get these right and not only can I stay in business, I can stay competitive.

Sharing this journey with you is a leap of faith. As a coach, as your coach, you know that I train you to avoid injury. It is only by avoiding injury that you can train consistently and this is the key to progress. So I'm hoping you can take from this that injury can happen to us all, despite best laid plans. What matters is how we respond. Solutions exist. They require patience, flexibility, determination and a good amount of mental resilience. And remember that whatever the outcome, there is almost always more to learn from the setbacks than from the victories.

So read carefully those wise words from Theodore Roosevelt for they ring as true now as they did when he first delivered them at the Sorbonne in April 1910