

TWO'S COMPANY

– NOT A BATTLE OF WILLS

Three couples reveal the secrets to a happy running relationship with their loved ones...

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I would really love to be able to run with my partner – but it's almost impossible.

While we generally finish races in a similar time, when we try to train together, we fall out.

He thinks I start my training runs too slowly – and then speed up half way through, making it difficult for him to keep up. I accuse him of the opposite, racing off like a hare at the start, but then exhausting himself to a plod.

My runner girlfriends have similar complaints: "My husband is too fast, impatient, competitive and not very consistent."

Meanwhile, male running pals moan: "My wife gets annoyed whether I run with her, behind her or just in front. And when I try a few words of encouragement, she snarls at me."

For many couples, it appears that running together is more a battle of wills, than a harmonious affair.

It does seem odd, though, because


most people find that they can enjoy an argument-free run with friends, regardless of gender, and even if they have different paces.

One keen ultra runner told me: "It's so different when I run with a friend, compared to with my husband."

"I would never think to tell a friend they were running too slowly, or annoying me by speeding up hills ahead of me.

"It's just that, with my husband, I don't worry about telling him what I think. If he is running to fast and making me feel slow, then I tell him it's annoying me.

"If he tries to give me advice, I just get so irritated. I have no idea why this happens, because we get on well in others areas of our life. It's just the running."

Yet it doesn't have to be like this. There is a rare breed of couples who can run in harmony. We tracked down three pairs to find out how they do it... 



"We make a date to run"

Evie Serventi, the deputy editor of Running magazine, and her fiancé, Grant Pirie, 49, first met after they bumped into each other while running to work. They became running friends and got together as a couple three years later, in 2012. Evie, 44, reveals they have never argued while running together, whether as friends or partners, and they see a run more as a "date".

She says: "We look forward to running together because it's a chance to catch up on chat and to spend time with each other at the weekends. The weekdays can be really busy, so it's those Saturday and Sunday runs that we focus on doing together."

The couple don't take a watch with them and choose scenic routes near their home in Kent.

Evie, who is also a qualified sports psychologist, says: "We enjoy the outing, rather than being worried about it being a timed training session. Running is how we met and it's how we have always enjoyed spending time together."

The couple, who got engaged last September, on a beach in Evie's native Australia, do have different running speeds.

Evie says: "At the moment, Grant is fitter than me and he has better endurance, but he doesn't mind if we run at my slightly slower pace when we're together. He's really only competitive with himself and not with me. And I'm not at all competitive."

When Grant, an accountant, does want to gain some training miles they plan a run to suit them both. Evie says: "It might be that Grant runs to a place where I can drive and park the car. Then we run a route together. Or we start at different places and run to meet each other before running a route together. We try to adapt our running to suit whatever we're each training for, but when we run together the aim is for it to be time for us. Running is a total tonic for both of us."



A love of the same sport is what unites Laura and Alex Penny

“We plan marathon holidays”

Laura and Alex Penny are both 36 and have been together since they were at school. Non-runners for the first decade of their relationship, the married couple are now both members of the prestigious 100 Marathon Club. Impressively, they are the youngest couple in the UK to run 100 marathons each, and hope to become Guinness World Record holders of the same accolade. Running marathons is their hobby, and almost every weekend they are in a new place completing another 26.2-mile event. “We even plan holidays so we can take in a couple of marathons; last year, we did two marathons, Zurich and Salzburg, during a week away in Europe,” says Alex.

When racing, the couple, from Buckinghamshire, have a different pace, with Alex’s marathon PB a 3:10 and Laura’s a 3:49. Yet they still enjoy running together and often compete alongside each other.

Laura says: “Sometimes we do like to do our own thing in a marathon and, while we will start together, we’ll then agree to finish the race at our own pace. But we’re still running the same

race, enjoying the social side of the event and supporting each other where we can. Then, when it comes to off-road marathons or races that require navigation, we run these side by side. Alex is a good navigator, and we prefer to stay together for these races. I find he is very supportive of me and encourages me to keep going.”

Laura and Alex also have a peaceful solution for shorter, faster training sessions.

Alex says: “We both belong to the same club, Buckingham and Stowe Running Club, where I am a coach. We find it’s possible to run in the same group because we tend to do fartleks or hill reps, and we might do these at different speeds, but we are still together as part of the club.”

In fact, the couple seem amazed when I suggest that many other running couples fall out.

Laura says: “I think that because we both love the same sport, and neither of us is competitive with the other, and we don’t have kids, which means we have plenty of time to indulge our hobby, we just don’t have a reason to fall out. We both feel very fortunate to be able to run and we are very supportive of each other. Perhaps we are unusual, but I can’t see why we’d argue when running.”

“Running is our adventure time”

Scottish ultra runners, Katie Hall and Graham Kelly also met through running. Katie, 36, cheekily tugged Graham’s beard as she ran past him when taking part in the 53-mile Hoka Highland Fling race on the West Highland Way. Graham, 48, was injured and unable to race and, while that day in April 2015 started with disappointment, it turned out to be the first of the runners’ love match. Ever since, the couple have been almost inseparable and believe they are fortunate to share a passion for running.

Katie and Graham see running as an adventure and take off on weekends in their campervan to explore new places in Scotland. Their holidays have a running focus, too, and they plan trips to coincide with ultra events or to run routes of races they have supported at, such as the Tour du Mont Blanc.

Katie, a fitness instructor, says: “Most of our running is about the adventure. We love to see new places and we like to do so on foot. We plan as many campervan trips as we can, then head into the hills or along a trail on foot each day.”

The pair have a fairly similar running pace, although Graham is faster at shorter distances and uphill, while Katie has better endurance.

Graham, a project manager, says: “We can run together well, but as soon as a race goes over 50 miles, that’s where Katie wins. She is mentally stronger than me. Most of the time, though, we are able to run at a similar speed.”

In training, Graham is content to run according to Katie’s programme.

She says: “During the week, I will probably do my own training sets and reps, and I like to follow a plan. If Graham decides to run with me, he is happy to do what I have planned. He never has a training schedule to follow. Then, at weekends, it’s all about the fun side of running. If I can do my training sets on the weekdays, I am happy to run according to Graham’s ideas. He always suggests great adventures and I love going on them with him.”

The couple also encourage each other at races. Graham says: “We each take pride in offering support to each other for races. I feel so proud to see Katie doing well, and she is the same if I am racing. It might sound a bit loved up and clichéd but we love to see each other doing well and, if we can play a part in that, it makes us both happy.”

“We take pride in offering support to each other at races. It makes us happy”



Mutual encouragement is the key to Katie and Graham’s enjoyable running relationship