

FITNESS & WELL-BEING

GET UP AND GLOW



Part race, part street party, the Electric Run is one of a new wave of social sporting events that push the envelope on fun, writes Jeanette Wang

100

The approximate number of Color Runs taking place this year around the world

An Electric Run in Indianapolis this month. A similar event planned for Hong Kong next year will feature a music and light show.

You've probably heard of Hash House Harriers and their slogan, "A drinking club with a running problem." Recently, they have been joined in the world of simultaneous running and partying by another international group: ravers with a running problem.

Imagine thumping dance music, flickering strobe lights, laser beams, glow-in-the-dark sunglasses and thousands of neon-clad bodies, dancing, gyrating and shimmying through a five-kilometre fun run in the middle of the night.

By March or April next year you could be part of the street party that is Electric Run. CEO and founder Dan Hill says they're working on getting permits and finalising venues and event partners for the inaugural event in Hong Kong. There will likely be two events on consecutive nights, he says, with an estimated 40,000 participants.

"I'm confident we'll produce a show unlike anything [runners in Hong Kong] have seen," says Hill, who will be making his first trip to Hong Kong next month.

It's no mistake he calls it a show and not a race. Electric Run, says Hill, is a "world-class music and light show that also happens to be a running event".

"We really try to push the envelope in what a fun run could be," he says.

The event is part of a new wave of fun runs termed MOB – mud, obstacles, beer – events that are transforming the running world. The trend includes events such as The Color Run (also slated for Hong Kong next year), zombie runs and Tough Mudder.

"We coined the term MOB to describe events that are hyper social in nature and often team based: mud runs, obstacle courses, adventure races and so on," explains Sam Renouf, Asia-Pacific general manager at Active Network, a company that manages online registration for sports events and other activities.

He says the Spartan Race, an obstacle race which started in 2005 is believed to be the pioneering MOB event.

"It's all about the experience; this audience isn't concerned about the scenic nature of a

course, but instead as a way to engage in a social experience with a group of friends. Most participate [in MOB events] with friends and encourage others to join in."

From 2011 to 2012, Active.com – home of the largest online endurance and race community – saw an increase of 72 per cent in searches for MOB-related events, Renouf says.

Active Network conducted a survey of MOB participants last year and found that the biggest reasons for joining such an event were the fun factor (86 per cent) and because it was new and different (72 per cent). Most participants were women (58 per cent) and split among ages

20 to 30 (43 per cent) and 40 to 50 (46 per cent). Nearly one in three respondents said they encouraged at least five friends to participate with them.

Two weekends ago, Kevin McDonnell took part in a five-kilometre mud and obstacle race called The Major Series in Britain and says it's interesting how such events are attracting many first-time racers. "It's definitely helping people like me who want a bit more to their race," he says.

Such events, says Hill, have been borne out of today's obsession with social media and cater to what he terms "the GoPro generation", referring to the popular high-definition personal camera which people use to film and broadcast their own sporting exploits.

"People want to be a hero," says Hill. "They don't want to spectate; they are really hungry for events where they can participate in social and visual ways."

Social media has also been a key driver of growth for these events. The Electric Run Hong Kong Facebook page, for

example, was launched on October 11 and has garnered more than 5,000 likes without much promotion. The Color Run Hong Kong Facebook page has more than 10,000 likes.

This year, there were 32 Electric Run events across the US and Australia. Next year, Hill says there'll be 70 events in 30 countries. For the US events, they've partnered with DreamWorks animators, stage designers from Coachella (a US music and arts festival) and other artists to create a one-of-a-kind experience.

Participants are encouraged to be a part of the show by decorating themselves with glow sticks, neon clothes, LEDs or anything else their imagination can come up with. All ages are welcome and kids aged seven and under run free. The fun continues with a wild after-party.

The Hong Kong race will feature all of Electric Run's established stages, from "Electric Avenue" to "Rainbow Road". Unique to the race will be a music playlist created by musicians from Hong Kong and elsewhere in Asia.

Hill is not new to organising running events. In 2004 he founded the Ragnar Relay Series, a 300-kilometre relay-style team race which has about 100,000 participants across 15 separate events in the US.

But Electric Run and other fun runs – which are typically untimed and offer no rankings or prizes – are attracting more of a lifestyle rather than running crowd.

"What's happening with running is fascinating. It's not just runners any more, it's everyone," says Hill. "Our participants are more into music generally than running."

Travis Snyder had been a competitive runner obsessed with shaving seconds off his times. He co-founded the Red Rock Relay in the US, which is similar to Hill's Ragnar.

But he realised there was a need for non-competitive events for people to get fit and healthy and have fun. He started thinking of event ideas that would appear less threatening to the less active.

In January last year he started The Color Run series in the US. It

has become hugely successful, growing from about 50 runs last

year to more than 100 in at least 30 countries, including Singapore and China.

Guangzhou is set to launch its run this weekend. The five-kilometre event has waves of people released every 15 or 20 minutes. Participants are splattered with colour at every kilometre, and when it's over everyone looks like they have been tie-dyed.

Renouf says fun runs are building a new base in the running industry. The competitive market is very small, while the base continues to expand.

"While there will always be a market for more traditional endurance events for running, biking and swimming, we're seeing a new audience enter the market that can eventually graduate to more traditional endurance events," says Renouf. Hill expects traditional races to continue to grow as more people are introduced to running through fun events. However, he says expectations of what a race should be will be higher.

"In the past people cared mainly about a pretty course and if the race started on time. Now they want to be entertained a little more, have better race T-shirts and so on. The events that can meet that challenge are those which will do really well," says Hill.

"That said, I don't see anything changing for races like the Hong Kong, Boston or London marathons. They're institutions. If anything, their participation base is going to keep growing."

But can MOB events be sustained once the novelty wears off?

Renouf thinks they will evolve to meet participants' demands, but the concept of providing a unique experience is going to be around for a while.

"Experience is the new luxury," Hill says.

"I think it's a bit like a Broadway play. Some events are going to have more likes than others; some you do just once and you're done." jeanette.wang@scmp.com

Our participants are more into music than running

DAN HILL, FOUNDER AND CEO, ELECTRIC RUN



Runners are sprayed with dye during the Color Run (top); a zombie scares a participant in the Zombie Evacuation Race. Photos: AFP

PLAY LIKE A PRO

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The deadlift is a very common exercise in workouts and it's no surprise trainers put so much emphasis on it. It conditions the back, legs and even arms. It also strengthens your lower back, which is important for all golfers.

In golf, posture and core strength are very important. The deadlift strengthens your postural muscles, which you need to use when addressing the ball.

Remember, a good posture leads to more power and accuracy on the golf course.



Step 1: Do a half squat with a straightened back and keep your hands straight at all times. I have rubber bands on my weights to provide more stability.



Step 2: Slowly lift yourself up using the energy from your lower back. Remember not to bend your elbows or try lifting the weight with your arms.



Step 3: Stand straight and repeat steps one and two. Remember to focus your energy on the back.

Benefits: It gives you a more stable posture when you address the ball. A strong and stable spine generates more power in your swing.
Suggested reps: Do 10 reps for three sets. You can slowly increase the weights when you are more comfortable with this exercise. Lam Chih Bing is a Singapore golf professional on the Asian Tour

FIT & FAB

Pilot lands a second cool job – at sea level

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Having a cool job is pretty rare. Having two is almost unheard of. Yet when Bruce Seymour is not flying high above the ocean as a captain for Cathay Pacific, he's paddling on it as a surf ski distributor.

It wasn't meant to work out this way, says South African-born Seymour, 46. Growing up, he planned to be just like his talented father, a doctor who represented South Africa in cricket. So he enrolled in medical school and played the national sport.

But after discovering flying at university, he promptly changed careers. Six years ago, he got his first surf ski and hasn't touched a bat since. "[Paddling] is the most wonderful sport, especially in good weather. In the summer I'd much rather be out on the water. When you get hot, you either just roll into the water or stop at the beach and have a swim."

Seymour is also the chief organiser for Paddle for the Planet. The charity event brings together the world's ocean lovers for one day a year on their chosen craft – dragon boats, surf skis, paddle boards and even swimmers – to raise funds and environmental awareness.

For the past two years, Hong Kong has raised the most money, supporting the world's most biodiverse tropical marine region, Raja Ampat in Indonesia.

Although Seymour thinks Hong Kong's coastline is one of the most beautiful in the world, the rubbish floating in the ocean appals him. The matter is close to his heart, and he urges others to take action.

"I went fishing on Friday with my youngest son. His first catch was a plastic bag," he says, adding that ocean conservation is important to all of us.

Seymour laments the amount of discarded plastic bottles floating in the sea: "It's amazing how many bottles still have their caps on. People are

throwing bottles that they haven't even finished into the ocean," he says.

Name one simple thing that would make a difference to our oceans
Water bottles. If we could reduce how many water bottles we use, it would make a difference.

For example, if the place where you work or relax sells water bottles, you could encourage them to install a water fountain and encourage the use of that, or recyclable cups, instead.

How did your love of water start?

Growing up in Cape Town, we were always at the beach. We would walk along the beach and watch the fishermen. In those days they had these dragnets. They would

paddle out through the breakers ... and drop a net. Then everybody would buy fish from them and smoke them or barbecue them at home.

Has paddling become more popular in Hong Kong?

It's growing hugely. About half of my business is new paddlers.



Bruce Seymour takes to the water when he's not flying. Photo: May Tse

Sales tripled between the first year and the second year.

The Victoria Recreation Club (of which Seymour is a member) just did a huge project where they renovated all the racking. There is quite a bit of new racking which is filling up incredibly fast. By the end of the year it will be full again.

What's the attraction?

Technique is really important in paddling; it's not that easy to do. Paddle stroke is quite difficult. You're constantly learning. I also love all the equipment. You've got a GPS and a cool paddle, a nice boat and the water. It's fun.

Why paddle in Hong Kong?

I think it's just such a beautiful place. It's surrounded by water and there are so many beautiful places you can visit to escape the heat, get some exercise, and take

advantage of all the beautiful scenery.

As a pilot, I obviously travel to a lot of places; Vancouver, Sydney, Cape Town, and Hong Kong are some of the most beautiful places in the whole world. There are lots of beautiful places, but this is pretty special.

Are there similarities between flying and paddling?

Not really, but I guess for pilots it's about sports in general, the outdoor life. At work we have paragliders, kite surfers, paddlers, triathletes and ultramarathon runners.

As a pilot, you have time. If you do a long-haul flight, you typically get four or five days off afterwards.

Do you ever just pinch yourself?

Yes. I've got a meeting with a guy shortly who's going to try some surf skis and he said to me, "You've got two cool jobs." Being involved with the surf skis is really fun as well.