

As the saying goes what goes up must come down. Running downhill is a skill that needs to be practised to improve. It also places a greater load on the legs which unless you have trained for will turn your quads into a quivering mess. Not a state you want to be in half way through a race like the Hounslow Classic when you have 4100m to go up and down.

Here are a few tips on how to prevent that from happening

### Build slowly

Downhill running places a far greater load on the joints so must be built up gradually. Start with incorporating hills in your normal runs until your legs can handle the increased load without any extra post run soreness

### Technique

The hills in Hounslow aren't smooth firetrails - they are single track and technical. Running downhills like this takes skill and like any skill you need to practise to improve.

The key is to look a few feet ahead of you and allow your brain to plot a course for your feet. Cadence should be high, stride length short and more of a mid foot landing. This allows you to quickly change direction according to the trail conditions ahead.

If you lean too far back your feet are more likely to slip from under you, lean too far forward and you increase speed and increase the chances of somersaulting down the hill. The perfect lean depends on the gradient of the hill.

Keep the pace slow to begin with and as your confidence improves increase the speed. Most people will need to get right to the edge of their comfort zone to improve. Taking the handbrake off is crucial for a quick descent.

### Downhill repeats

Once your legs have adapted to running comfortably down hill on technical trails you can start to increase the speed. I'd start with around 20-30 minutes of faster downhill and then build volume up to around 60 minutes peaking around 3 weeks before the race.

Given the lengths of the descents on Hounslow the longer the hill you can train on the better but if you don't have access to longer technical hills then shorter hills and more reps will be a good substitute.

Downhill sessions are the same as the uphill sessions discussed earlier. All you need to do is make sure you gradually build up both the speed and volume of faster downhill running.

Another variable to manipulate is the recovery, giving yourself 60 seconds recovery at the top of a hill before going downhill is a much easier session than turning around and immediately heading back down.

Once you have adapted to faster downhill running you can flip the hill sessions around and start at the top, run down hard turn around and head back up again. This allows you to run even faster as your legs are fresher than if they have run or hiked hard uphill first

### Stairs

Given the amount of stairs in Hounslow improving your ability to descend stairs will certainly improve your race day performance . Running down stairs is a different skill to running downhill and should also be practised.

Descending stairs has less room for error than hills and more caution needed but when you watch someone skilled at descending stairs you realise that its not just about fitness and strength - there is a definite skill involved.

Start slow and develop the leg speed on fresh legs first and as you become proficient practice descending stairs on tired legs . For example you may do 3 sets of 20 minutes of stair repeats . The pace on the descent starts quick and gets slower whereas the pace on the ascent starts slow and becomes faster . Once you have adapted to that you can go hard up and down for the whole 60 minute session .

**Be Warned**

Downhill running hurts, lots! Build up gradually and give your muscles time to adjust. When you legs can recover the next day with no more soreness than you would get from a hard run then you can increase the distance or speed.