

EVENT REPORT



DOING THE DUBAI DOUBLE

Words by: David O'Hara
Photos by: Supplied

After a great summer of running in the Dubai heat and humidity, we recently had a chance to put our training to a test with the "Dubai Double". On a Friday night in late September, Urban Ultra held its season opener – the 30km Night Rebel on the Wadi Showka trails. Bright and early the next morning, Dubai Desert Road Runners held its season opener, a 10km road race at The Sevens. These two events take place within twelve hours of each other, but are diametrically opposed – a night 30km trail run in the mountains on rocky trails and a sunrise 10km road race on smooth asphalt.

Urban Ultra

Pascale and Louise of Urban Ultra put on the toughest running events around the Middle East, yet every time all the runners are simultaneously both suffering and smiling. The Night Rebel is on a technical trail at Wadi Showka with lots of rocks and hills, but with the added challenge of starting at 19:00 in sheer darkness. There is nothing easy about the 30km, yet the Urban Ultra crew at the checkpoints are like family to me. These are



the same folks who remember me crashing spectacularly at Hajar 100 last year, who shared my snacks of pickles and potatoes at the Big Stinker and who were mildly amused when I ran the UTX50 wearing sandals. Big thanks to all the crew and volunteers from Urban Ultra – that's a top-notch gang!

Checkpoints

Urban Ultra stocks its checkpoints every 5km with chopped up fresh fruit – it's like going to a picnic but with the food spread out over long distances. The crew at the checkpoints have probably seen everything possible among ultrarunners, like people who are running for twelve hours in the desert but try to economize thirty seconds by rushing through a checkpoint. Yeah, I prefer to kick back and enjoy the checkpoints, sample the cuisine (did you know Hajar 100 has the greatest vegetarian minestrone soup at the 52km checkpoint??), and chat with everybody to enjoy the social aspect of the event much to the chagrin of Louise.

30km of Fun

This year's Night Rebel is a training event for me and Ramzi, and we are joined by Aleksei. Last year, the three of us ran it separately and struggled for various reasons. This year we decided to run together, but easy enough to take a camel-selfie. Aleksei has been recovering from a Dubai summer flu, while Ramzi and I are one week away from our annual ultramarathon in the Himalayas. Our plan is simple: have fun and finish. We

run together, chatting about the usual ultra-topics: which shoes today, what's your hydration plan, do you have any different flavours of gels, are those new calf compression socks, why do the triathletes dress funny yet run so fast, what are the next events on the schedule. If you run ultras, you know what we always talk about.

Finish with Dignity

Shortly after the 15km turnaround, the three of us come across Magdy, who seemed so desolate as he straggled along in the darkness. We explained to Magdy that our goals were to have fun and finish together, and we invited him to join us. After the 20km checkpoint, Magdy is struggling with his nutrition. Ramzi and Aleksei take off together, while Magdy and I enjoy a leisurely pace back. The beauty of trail running is encapsulated with this chance encounter of meeting a great guy like Magdy and enjoying a random chat about philosophical issues of life and avoiding the discussions on heart rate monitors and VO2max. Together we finish the 30km with dignity.



Transition from Night 30km Trail Run to Morning 10km Road Race

Leaving Wadi Showka a little before midnight and driving an hour and a half home to get two hours sleep before heading out to The Sevens is only marginally better than trying to sleep in the sand somewhere. The Dubai Desert Road Runners holds what I consider to be traditional road races, with hundreds of runners, ranging from beginners to elites. My wife, Olya, and I are running the 10km with two of her work colleagues, which adds to the social aspect of road running. At the event, I notice two guys who ran the Night Rebel with me the night before – Mahan Toosi Moghaddam and Alvaro Lopes-Cardoso – which confirms that my idea of doing this Dubai Double is almost mainstream.

Preparation

Road running is a completely different beast than ultra trail running. Ultra trail running is about endurance and maintaining your pace



while keeping your mind occupied. Running a 10km race is about pushing yourself hard and holding on for as long as you can. When I ran the Night Rebel on Friday night, I wore trekking boots, white dress shirt and hiking shorts while carrying a backpack, simply to test my traveling gear for Nepal. When I ran the 10km on Saturday morning, I wore my fav green Hulk tshirt and swimming trunks because they were close by and clean when I got dressed. My experience shows that it doesn't make much difference what gear you wear as long as you are comfortable.

10km Race

The Dubai Desert Road Run 10km course is good for competition, as it is two out and back loops – which means you see the race leaders going past the opposite directions 2-3 times, depending on how fast you are running. Seeing everybody else run lets you know where you are in the pack and may help motivate you to keep pushing it. My pre-race goal was to break 49 minutes, which is faster than I've run a 10km all year. Even though I ran the 30km the night before, my legs were fresh and the challenge is whether or not my lungs would keep going to the finish. Sometimes it's such a mental struggle to keep pushing yourself harder than your mind wants to, but I manage to hold on and finish in 48:39. I'm pleased.

Next Event

The Dubai Double demonstrates that if you are serious about getting out and running in Dubai, you can find an event that suits you and your fitness level. It's a great opportunity to run with old friends and meet new people. Dubai hosts so many wonderful running events – you can fuff about on some and you can try to crush others – it just depends on getting in the training and making the plans. If you do some traveling, then your horizons expand exponentially. In July, along with Mahan and Omaima, I ran the "Hottest Ultramarathon in the World" when the temperature was over 50C at Al Qudra. Next up, in October Ramzi and I plan on running the "Highest Ultramarathon in the World" starting at Namche Bazaar, Nepal and climbing over 5400 metres above sea level. All you have to do is set your personal goals, make your plans, do the training and enjoy the event!

