



"I hope to be running when I'm 90"

Jeanne Bryan, 73, Melbourne

"I used to drive my two daughters to their athletics club and one day the other mums told me they too had started running. 'You should join us,' they said.

"No chance," I replied. I was in my early 40s, 13kg overweight and could barely walk, let alone run. However, they kept nagging me. I was living in England at the time and when winter arrived with its dark evenings I thought, right, no-one can see me, and I started walking around the track.

Gradually I began alternating walking with jogging and eventually decided to join the other mums. I was the slowest but my distances gradually grew longer and I became lighter and faster.

I got some serious coaching and at 45 was selected to represent England in a veterans' cross-country race. I represented my country several more times after that and also did a couple of marathons.

In 2004, I moved to Australia with my youngest daughter. Today I'm still training at least three times a week. I did the Melbourne Marathon on October 18 and finished in five hours and 26 minutes – not the time I wanted but I was the first in my age group.

People say: "You're still running? At your age?" but I enjoy it and like being out in the fresh air. I've got a bit slower, but I've never been injured or needed to stop. I hope to continue running when I'm 80 or 90."



(above) Jeanne Bryan; (inset) Gwen Gleeson (second from left) running the 100-metre sprint for women aged 85-89 at this year's World Masters Athletics Championships in Lyon, France

PHOTOGRAPHY NICOLE CLEARY

have meant I've wound down a bit in the past five or six years and made adjustments such as better arch supports in my shoes, only running on soft surfaces and replacing a couple of runs with a swim but I still run for at least an hour three or four times a week.

It's never an effort – it's part of my life and gives me a lot of satisfaction. I still enter open races and although I know I won't win, I'll compete with the women around me. I might not run as fast as I did but I still run as hard.

When I'm training, I'll look for people to overtake – usually runners wearing earphones! I never wear earphones because I just love my run so much.

I can remember at the beginning of my athletics career, my mum came to pick me up and I pointed to a woman 20 years older than me. "Mum, there's this really old lady here, she's even got children," I said. "I want to be able to run as long as she does."

That woman is still running. In fact she beats me in the longer races. I joke with her that she's made it hard for me to ever give up but actually I don't want to ever give up."

"I don't want to ever give up running"

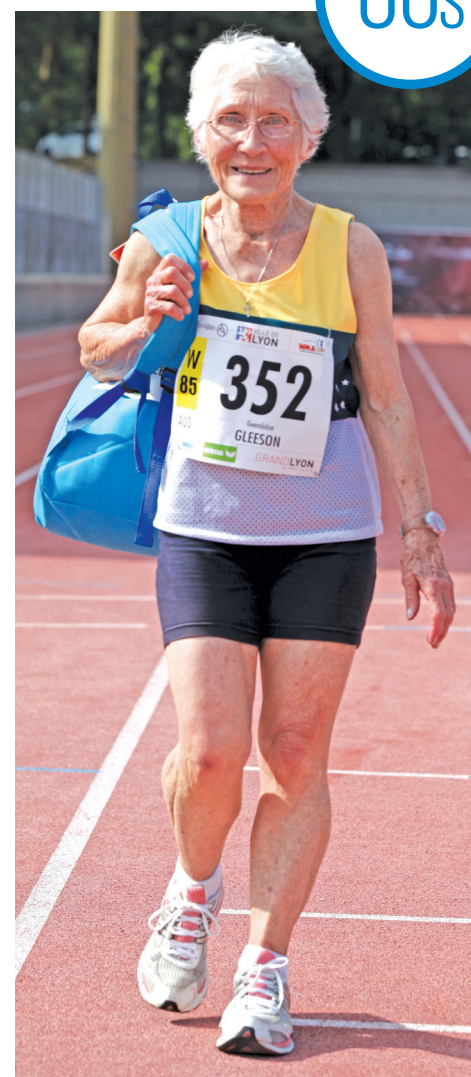
Anne Lord, 54, Melbourne

"I started running at 15. Nearly 40 years later, I've only ever had one short break and that was enforced after I developed high blood pressure at the end of my first pregnancy.

I had a lot of success in my early career.

I competed for Australia four times in the World Cross Country Championships, including after I became a mother, which meant juggling training around kids and paying a babysitter every Thursday night so I could go to the track. "That's expensive," people said, which was funny really. If I'd been meeting friends for a drink rather than training, they wouldn't have commented.

Age, family and my career as a physio



"We shouldn't be afraid of too much exercise"

Gwen Gleeson, 86, Canberra

"At 59, I saw a notice for a 6km fun run. I'd skied regularly and ran up and down stairs so I thought, I could do that.

I joined a women's jogging group and enjoyed it so much that I kept going. A year later, I joined ACT Veterans Athletics Club and I've been running with them ever since. I do sprinting on Mondays and Thursdays, and on Sundays I run a cross-country handicap race of up to 5km. They calculate how we compare with other runners in the world our age. I'm in the top 10 per cent.

My biggest thrill was in 2009 at the World Masters Games in Sydney. I was on the 100m start line and they announced, "Gwen Gleeson representing Australia."

My knees are good and I'm rarely injured. When people see me running, they sometimes exclaim, "Oh, slow down!" as if it's going to harm me, but we shouldn't be afraid of too much exercise.

I'm going to keep running as long as I can. I raced against a 90-year-old at the recent World Masters event in France, so she's an inspiration."



"I took up pole vaulting in my 40s and hurdling in my 50s"

Wilma Perkins, 66, Brisbane

"At school, girls weren't encouraged to do sport. In fact my mother advised me against long jump in case it damaged my reproductive organs!

Then at 31, I saw a story on TV about Masters Athletics and was inspired to join my local club. I started sprinting then tried the 400m. I thought I was going to die but I kept at it.

In my 40s I took up pole vaulting and in my 50s I taught myself to hurdle, starting over little cloths then 20cm barriers then the full hurdle. For my first race, I wore a full Cathy Freeman bodysuit so if I fell over I'd take off as little skin as possible.

Your body does change as you age. Recovery is slower and I've noticed the length of my stride has shortened.

Still, I get a lot of satisfaction out of athletics: a sense of achievement, fitness and friendships. It's not the winning that matters – it's the striving to be the best I can be."