# Beyond the Oval

Get all the benefits of running fast without ever stepping foot on a track. By Adam Bean Image by Randall Tate /Tandem From the June 2011 issue of Runner's World

Whether you welcome it or dread it, speed work does a runner's body good. "More than any other type of training, speed work is the most effective at building your fitness because it really pushes you out of your comfort zone," says Andrew Kastor, an Asics running coach in Mammoth Lakes, California.

"You recruit muscle tissue that lies dormant during slow running and train your body to become more efficient at faster paces." Unfortunately for many runners, speed work is synonymous with track—a venue that's often unavailable, inconvenient, or frankly, intimidating. But you don't need a synthetic oval to get your fast fix. Here are four ways to shore up your speed without running in circles.

**ON THE ROAD**

Asphalt is everywhere. And if you race, doing speed work on the road best simulates the impact and conditions you'll face. Of course, it can take a toll on your body. "The road can beat up your legs, but that's what you want—up to a point—as this makes you stronger," says Kastor.

**THE WORKOUT**

Half-mile repeats at your goal [**5-K**](http://www.runnersworld.com/subtopic/0,7123,s6-238-244-259-0,00.html) pace with a quarter-mile jog recovery. "The recovery is long enough to clear most of the lactic acid from your muscles, but short enough to keep the workout challenging," says Kastor. [**Beginners**](http://www.runnersworld.com/topic/0,7122,s6-238-520-0-0,00.html) should do three or four repeats; more advanced runners can run up to 10 repeats. Measure the distance with a GPS or [**mapmyrun.com**](http://www.mapmyrun.com), or run by time (for example, if your 5-K pace is 8:00, run four minutes hard and recover with two to three minutes of jogging).

**ON THE TRAIL**

"[**Trails**](http://www.runnersworld.com/cda/microsite/0,8032,s6-238-511-0-0,00.html) always offer better scenery than the roads or track," says Nancy Hobbs, coauthor of The Ultimate Guide to Trail Running. "They're also easier on your legs, and they improve balance, coordination, and mental focus." You do have to stay vigilant, however, as unstable or slick terrain can cause missteps—or worse.

**THE WORKOUT**

Trail fartleks. Do this workout on a stretch of gradually ascending trail. To build strength, run fast uphill; to increase your turnover, run fast on the down hills, says Hobbs. Jog for 10 minutes, then go hard (about 10-K pace, or a speed that feels moderately hard) for 30 seconds, easy for 30, hard for 60, easy for 30, hard for 90, easy for 30. That's one set. Perform three to 10 sets.

**ON THE** [**TREADMILL**](http://www.runnersworld.com/topic/0,7122,s6-238-571-0-0,00.html)

With the trusty TM, weather is never a limiting factor and "the forgiving surface allows you to recover from speedwork more quickly," says Kastor. On the flip side, mills can be boring, many don't adjust to simulate downhill running, and the belt's movement alters how you use your hamstrings, says Kastor. "This could lead to muscle weaknesses or imbalances if you're on the treadmill all the time."

**THE WORKOUT**

Progression run. "The idea is to gradually get to a level where you're really working," says Kastor. Do a 10-minute warmup jog at about 12-to 15-minutes-per-mile pace, depending on your ability. Then increase the speed by .1 or .2 miles per hour every minute for five to 10 minutes. Decrease the speed and jog or walk for one minute. Begin the next progression at the speed in which you ended the first phase. Again, increase by .1 to .2 mph every minute for five to 10 minutes. Jog for two minutes. Begin the final progression at the speed in which you ended the second phase. Cool down with a five-minute jog.

**OFF YOUR FEET**

Doing speed work on a bike, elliptical machine, stair climber, or in the pool delivers a significant cardiovascular boost without impact. If you're injured, it's a great way to maintain your fitness.

**THE WORKOUT**

Cardio sprint pyramid. After a 10-minute warm-up on the cross-training tool of your choice, go hard for 30 seconds, one minute, two minutes, four minutes, two minutes, one minute, 30 seconds. After each hard segment, go easy for the same amount of time. "Your intensity should be an 8 or 10, where 1 is sitting and 10 is all-out sprinting," says Jason Karp, Ph.D., a coach and personal trainer in San Diego. "Aim for an 8 on the longer segments, and 10 on the shortest." Newbies should stick to a single set, advanced runners can do up to three (go easy for three minutes between sets).

**RUN Better**

If you listen to music, use it to time your repeats. Alternate 5-K pace for one song and jogging for one. Aim for six to 12 songs total.

**Fine Tuning**

Tips from coach Andrew Kastor on how to adjust speed work variables to meet your running and racing goals

**GOAL:** Improve speed; mile or 5-K race

**SPEED TWEAKS:** Run shorter, faster repeats (one to two minutes or 200 to 800 meters) with long recovery intervals (three to five minutes).

**GOAL:** 10-K or half-marathon

**SPEED TWEAKS:** To develop speed and endurance, split your speed work days evenly between short repeats with long recovery and long repeats with short recovery.

**GOAL:** More endurance; marathon

**SPEED TWEAKS:** Run longer, slower repeats (four to 10 minutes or 1000 to 2000 meters) with short recovery (one to two minutes).