

MARATHON MAN

Shawn Sturland,
marathon runner in training

Two years ago, when Shawn Sturland first went to a personal trainer, he couldn't do the 10 lunges she asked of him. "My fitness was just appalling," the 42-year-old says. Existing on 20 coffees a day to get through an 80-hour working week, Sturland's diet was patchy at best.

Now he's training for not one, but three marathons, and says 2012 was the year in which running transformed his life for the better.

"I was having a tough year a couple of years ago, a lot of work stress, three kids, it was hard. I just didn't know where I was going at all, I had no direction. I knew if I could get a goal that was absorbing; it had to be something that changed the basic elements of what I was doing. It had to be something fundamental."

He chose running.



A stressful job, poor diet and raising three children had Shawn Sturland struggling – until he found running.

Trainer Duck Patten worked with him for months getting his fitness up and his body strong enough so he could run without injury.

"Those early runs were terrible, we'd be running up Mt Victoria, I'd be exhausted thinking 'why am I doing this?', but every time I cut something out of my diet, or got my sleep in order, it made a tremendous difference to the running. It just gets better and better. I don't drink more than two cups of coffee before midday – nothing else. As a result I'm enjoying the running."

Sturland, clinical director of ICU at Wellington Hospital, started to get into running events, like the Xterra series earlier this year, and his breakthrough came in April, when he ran the Waitarere Half Marathon near Levin with a big group of ICU colleagues to raise money for Heart Kids.

"Up until then these events had been a real strain. I think it was the fact the people at work had got behind me there [at

Waitarere]. Running had become such a big part of my life. They gave me a picture I've got on the wall in my office and I strongly identified with it. It shows me in a hospital bed at the end of it. But it's the way people were starting to see me as a runner."

He says he's seen his new lifestyle filter into his work and family. He plans his running first before anything, and makes more time for his family because of it. "My life wraps around the running, rather than vice versa. Time away from the family for running is time away, but time together is time together. I'm doing a lot more with the family in terms of fitness. It wasn't that I was the unfit dad, it was that I wasn't making time for it."

Next year he is aiming to run a marathon at Motatapu in Otago in March, July will see him run a marathon near Ayers Rock in the Australian Outback, and at the end of the year he wants to run the Kepler Track in Fiordland over a few days.

SAILING TO GOLD

Jo Aleh and Polly Powrie,
Olympic gold medallists

Going into the last race in their 470 category, sailors Jo Aleh and Polly Powrie knew they were going to be bringing home a silver medal from this year's London Olympics.

That would have been enough for the Auckland-based pair; their goal had been to win a medal.

But they knew they had won gold as they approached the finish line, their British rivals back in ninth place. "[We were] coming up to the finish line, and knew we'd definitely get it," says Aleh. "It was actually really strange. It was a bit of relief, but it's like this massive moment, and we were like 'oh, have we done it?' We both didn't quite know what to do. We had a hug, and normally in sailing when you win a race you jump out of the boat, or capsize it, but we just took the spinnaker down."

For Powrie, the relief was huge. "We had finally achieved this goal, we had worked our butts off for four years and we had managed to do what we set out to do. Once it sunk in we were pretty excited."

Not that getting to the podium had been all plain sailing.

Says Powrie: "Obviously the Olympics was the big regatta for us, but we had three or four regattas throughout the year that we were focusing on; world champs and a couple of world cup events. [We did] pretty terribly, actually, in most of them. We had our first event and we bombed out and came right and then Jo fell off her bike in the middle of the world champs. She was covered in bandages. But we came right for the right one, you know."

Powrie also had a back injury earlier in the year.

Life has changed for the pair, who lived at home with their parents for the four years leading up to the Olympics to save money.



Though they both sail fulltime, they also have university studies and survive on funding from Sporting New Zealand and High Performance Sport New Zealand. Since winning the gold, they have been able to pick up sponsors and move out of home.

"Some things have been quite different, others are the same," says Powrie. "I came back and went back to uni and had exams in November. A lot of other things have changed; we've been to lots of schools and prizegivings and awards shows and

Polly Powrie, left, and Jo Aleh left a string of disappointing performances in the distant past by winning gold at the London Olympics in August. Photo: REUTERS

corporate events for the NZOC [NZ Olympic Committee] and sponsorship commitments, and all that stuff is pretty unusual for us."

Aleh says it's been a hectic four months since returning from London. "I never thought about what it would be like coming home afterwards. The goal was always the event."

When *Your Weekend* catches up with her she's on her way to another end-of-year school assembly. She loves the kids' reactions to her medal. "The jaws drop when you pull it out." ■