



# The road to *romance*

Your heart beats faster and your cheeks get flushed – when you think about it, running and falling in love have plenty in common. Just ask these three couples...

Words: Charlotte Ricca-Smith

## A HIGH-SPEED CONNECTION

**Nick Steddy, a 35-year-old postman, and wife Sue, a 42-year-old secretary, from Feltham**

**NICK** “My wife and I met through the RUNNER’S WORLD forum four years ago. She put up a question and I sent an answer. After that we must have sent around 100 emails in two months. I wasn’t looking for romance and Sue was just out of a long relationship and had children, but I felt like we had so much in common. So I suggested that we do a race together. Sue was cautious about meeting up but she eventually agreed to go for a coffee with me.

On our second date we went for a run, which I was a bit worried about as I’m quite overweight. In a bar you can dress to suit your shape, but a singlet and shorts don’t hide anything. But because we had already got to know each other I felt more confident.

We’ve never really been that competitive, although now that we’re building up to our first marathon we do compete on mileage. But we’re very supportive. We did a 10K run in Brighton recently and ran at our own paces, but because it was a loop course we got to see

each other during the race and were giving each other high fives.

Since the birth of our daughter in May 2007, we can’t always run together, but whenever we can find a babysitter it’s a great way to spend time together. And we always run as a family on a Sunday morning: we push our daughter along in a jogging pram and Sue’s son sometimes runs with us.

I feel so lucky to have met Sue. I’m not really a nightclub kind of person and I don’t think I would have had the nerve to pursue her in another situation. Running was a great

ice-breaker, and was a common interest that helped bring us together. Go for it and don’t let fear get in the way. I didn’t and I’ve found the woman of my dreams.”

**SUE** “I was wary when Nick asked me out via email, so initially I said no. After all, chatting and meeting are two very different things and he could have been a total nutcase! But we were getting on so well, so I decided to take the bull by the horns and finally suggested meeting up myself, but made sure that it was in a public place. I wasn’t so cautious once we’d met though, as within a week we had moved in together and he had proposed! We got married three months later.

Most people would probably think I was mad going for a

run on our second ‘date’, but I didn’t have anything to prove because I thought we were just going to be friends. I’m not fast at the best of times so I wasn’t going to knacker myself out trying to impress him. But neither of us look like typical runners – we’re not skinny whippets – so luckily he wasn’t that fast either!

I am quite competitive now though. The downside is that I sometimes push myself too hard to keep up, but the plus side is that Nick knows what to say to keep me going and he knows how I feel if I’m down after a bad run.

The other great thing is that the whole family gets involved. When he got into this year’s London Marathon, but I didn’t, I signed up for the Edinburgh Marathon one month later. We’ve booked flights for the whole family and are making a break out of it. My son often runs with us and I’m sure as soon as our daughter is old enough she’ll join in too.

There is no doubt that meeting Nick has improved both my running and my life. I certainly wasn’t looking for love, but he was in the right place, at the right time, and it all just fell into place.”

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## HOT TO TROT

### How running heightens physical attraction

“The physical energy and mental well-being you experience from running make you more likely to feel sexual,” says Dr Helen Fisher, an anthropologist who specialises in sexuality, from Rutgers University, USA. But that isn’t the only reason that running can be a turn-on. It also drives up dopamine, a pleasure-triggering chemical that elevates testosterone, a desire hormone. Running with someone new may raise those levels even further. Of course, running also reveals your assets. “You see, hear and smell the other person,” says Fisher. “You observe personality traits, such as persistence, grace and stamina. In the world of courtship, running is like the peacock displaying his tail.”

## THE RUNNEymoonERS

**Raymond Farrell, a 38-year-old solicitor, and Susanne Young, a 33-year-old anaesthetist, from Glasgow**

**RAYMOND** "I joined a running club with a friend, Eleanor, and we were split into groups and Eleanor became friends with Susie - she likes to think that it was her that got us together.

We did our first marathon together in 2006 and did some long-distance training together for it, but we normally train separately because we run at different paces. I am very competitive, so while I was prepared to hold back during training so we could run together, at the marathon I selfishly ran off so I could get faster time. I think if you've got an understanding partner they'll realise that you have to run your own race.

Susie also understands that I need to make time to exercise, because she runs too. She knows if I don't go training that I can get pretty antsy - she's actually worse than me. And because we both run it means we get to combine romantic trips away with a sporting activity. But running the Boston Marathon was Susie's idea - she is calling it our 'runningmoon!' We get married on the Friday, fly out on Saturday, and run the race on Monday. So it's not ideal marathon preparation, especially as it's going to be a fairly colourful wedding, as you'd expect from a Scottish wedding! But I'm drawing the line at running it in my kilt, from a chaffing point of view.

I don't know how we would have met without running, because we don't mix in the same circle of friends. The only real downside to us both running is that there is lots of smelly washing!"

**SUSANNE** "My running partner, Eleanor, who works with Raymond, suggested that we would make a nice couple. I wasn't sure at first, until I



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spoke to him a few times after running. I was won over by his cheeky charm and we got together in October 2005.

I ran with him when we first got together, but Raymond is way too fast for me so we don't train together. We have run together on holiday, and he's pretty good at running at my pace, but I'm sure we always go a bit faster than my normal pace! Even though we don't

train together, we are good at encouraging each other on cold wet nights to go to the club.

When we ran our first marathon in Venice we set off together, but Raymond went ahead. I didn't mind - I had Eleanor with me and didn't want to hold him back. Last year we both qualified for Boston, which is three days after our wedding in April, and I managed to persuade Raymond that

running it for our honeymoon was a good idea! Most of our friends think we're mad, but a beach holiday just isn't us. Raymond is way too pale and freckly and we'd both be bored. I know it's a bit nuts but we might never get the opportunity to do it together again. I don't expect him to run with me hand in hand, but it will be great just to be at such a big event starting the rest of our lives together."

IMAGES: DOM BOWER, STUART WOOD

## THE SOCIALITES

**Mark Shepherd, a 38-year-old project manager, and Rachael Elliott, a 30-year-old analyst, from Newbury, Berkshire**

**MARK** "I first met Rachael at a club social in Oxford. The first thing I noticed about her was her fabulous physique. I'm a coach, so when Rachael started doing triathlons, I offered to help. We got chatting more via email and at other socials - and then it got more social!

I didn't worry about what I looked like when we first started running together. The first time she met me I was wearing trackie bottoms and a fleece. And that's all she's seen me in since - although I do have great array of brightly coloured sports shoes.

Training isn't the place to be competitive, or to try and set personal bests, so most of the time our runs together are conversational and motivational. But let's face it, it was our competitive nature that attracted us to each other. Our first physical contact was an arm wrestle!

We don't run together all the time because I don't think it's a good idea - one of you will be running too fast or too slow. Running is also a personal thing, and it's nice to run on your own. I'm not the chattiest at 5am and when we first started going for early morning runs I was so quiet Rachael wondered what she'd done. So now I tend to do those runs alone.

That's the great thing about having a partner who runs: it creates a mutual understanding of the sport. She understands why I get up at 5am to go on a 25-mile run before work, and I understand why she is frustrated when she runs 37:10 instead of 36:50.

I'm a scummy IT guy from Scotland and she is a professionally trained musician from Hampshire - without running we would never have been in the same place at the same time."

**RACHAEL** "Mark was a much more experienced runner than me, so he offered to help with my triathlon training. We were both married at

the time, so neither of us was looking for love.

But when our marriages broke down we became much closer and we finally got together when he gave me lift home after a social. We pretty much moved in with each other straight away.

When we first got together I used to make an effort about

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my appearance when we went running, but it didn't last long! Now I don't care what I look like. Besides, with Mark it's a case of 'what you see is

what you get'. That's what I love about him.

We're both competitive people, which is why we're so well-suited, although we're not like that in training - in fact Mark slowed my running down, which helped me to get fewer injuries. But at races we are very competitive, as WAVA [age-grading tables] enables us

to compare our performance times - I usually beat him!

Running together gives us quality time. I am away from home a lot during the week,

so running at the weekends is something we can do together. Being with Mark has spurred me on and now I've got no one making me feel guilty about running. He understands if I'm jittery because I've not been running and he's the first one to push me out the door.

In return I like to think I've helped him to improve, as since we've been together he's started running ultra distances internationally for Wales. I'm there to look after him and provide food and refreshment.

The only downside of us both running is that we are very one-track minded: everything revolves around running, and our house gets messy because we are out training all the time!" 

