

► INSPIRING RUNNER

It's never too late! – BILL BULLEN



Grandfather of four, Bill Bullen is one of the fittest 71-year-olds you're ever likely to meet. Full of life and energy, he trains harder than most men half his age, running and spinning up to five times per times per week and fitting in yoga and circuit training.

But it's his passion for running that really drives him. He loves nothing better than to get outdoors and to feel the freedom and sheer joy of running. But surprisingly, Bill only took up running two years ago when he was 69-years-old. "It was after the death of my beloved wife Maureen," he explains. "I felt I wanted to raise some money for the hospice where she had been looked after. They were organising a 10k in my local town and I thought 'I can do that! It'll be something different to do.'"

Bill knew he needed some advice and had no idea where to start. So he went along to a local beginners' running class and started with two minutes jogging. "On my first session, the coach asked me what was wrong with my left arm as I was running with a strange style," he says. "I had to explain, rather sheepishly, that I was busy holding my trousers up. I had no idea what to wear and was woefully under-prepared. She did laugh though!"

"I was really surprised by how quickly I got fit," he says. "In no time at all, I was able to run for 45 minutes." He took part in the 10k a month later and finished in 58 minutes, which he was delighted with. "I was absolutely thrilled," he says. "I'd set myself the goal to finish in under an hour and even though the course was really hilly, I did it. It was quite a surprise!"

Bill's enthusiasm however, is also his downfall and as a result he is plagued with injury which makes him feel he's not reaching his potential. "I have surprised myself just how competitive I am, and I want to push myself and improve all the time. But of course this means I often get injured. Being older and not having years of endurance behind me, means I struggle with repeated calf and Achilles problems which is frustrating and I've had to learn the hard way."

But it doesn't seem to affect his performance. Bill took part in the Brighton 10k in 2009 and slashed 8 minutes off his time finishing in 50.50. Not only that, he was second V70 in only his second ever event. "I had no idea I was quite so fast," he says. "I just turned up, set off and had no idea what I was doing or how to pace myself. I was so

disorientated at the finish I even forgot to pick up my medal. It was a fantastic day though, and I loved cheering all my new running friends."

For widower Bill, the social scene that running brings is vitally important and he enjoys spending time with the friends he's made at his running club. "Running with the ladies is such great fun! They're all younger than me of course and try to beat me, but I don't let them!"

Bill's motivation for running came about from the loss of his wife and a desire to support the hospice who had cared so well for her. "But I found to my surprise that I loved it," he says. "It just goes to show that even when the flush of youth has passed you can still take up running. It really is never too late! I still feel like I'm 21 - I just wish my legs were! Give it a go, you might just surprise yourself."

