

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-runaway-bookshelf-1463699105>

A photograph showing a variety of running-themed books laid out on a white tiled surface. The books include titles like "Running" by Ben A. Miller, "Too Die a Little" by Chris Cooper, "For the Glory" by Haruki Murakami, "Chicken Soup for the Soul Runners", "Where the Road Ends" by Nathaniel West Heller, "Born to Run" by Christopher McDougall, "Slow Jogging" by Lisa Wright, "Two Ours" by Ed Caesar, "Big Book of Marathons", "The Runner's Brain" by Dr. Jeff Goldberg, "Barefoot Running", "Runner's World", "The Way of the Runner", "Running with the Mindful Meditation", "The Run Revolution", and "Run Like a Girl". Each book cover features different imagery related to running, such as runners, landscapes, and abstract designs.

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sport except baseball.

That runners like to write and read about running will come as no surprise to non-runners. A satirical YouTube video called “First Person to Run A Marathon Without Talking About It” has garnered almost 570,000 views since it was posted last October.

But it’s somewhat surprising that so many how-to books have been written about a sport that touts itself as extraordinarily accessible, requiring little more than a pair of sneakers. Before learning to drive a car, most people read only a thin manual, if anything at all. But many novice runners take their first steps toward a book store, says Hal Higdon, who has lost count of how many running books he has written. “Somewhere between 15 and 20,” he says.

The multiplicity of how-to-run books reflects a variety of strategies. One book on how to train for a marathon may recommend walking stints, another wind sprints. As a counterpoint to Higdon’s 1992 classic, “Run Fast,” a book just published this month is called “Slow Jogging.”

The literature of running, however, isn’t all technical. Like baseball, a sport that has spawned literary efforts from the likes of Philip Roth, Don DeLillo and Roger Angell, running can be perceived as a metaphor for something larger than sport. The celebrated Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami made the U.S. best-seller list in recent years with a book called, “What I Talk About When I Talk About Running.” A favorite among runners is the 1959 short story by British writer Alan Sillitoe, “The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner,” which was adapted for the screen in 1962.

A popular type of running book celebrates the sport’s ability to help combat adversity, particularly mental-health issues. In a memoir published this spring called “Running Home,” Alisha Perkins says she found that running offered relief from a crippling anxiety disorder, while also giving her an identity apart from being married to Glen Perkins, the All-Star pitcher. “I think that all runners are running away from something, or running toward something,” says Perkins.

Other recent books have credited running with helping escape battles with depression and addiction—assertions supported by scientific research. “For 15 years, the words that best described Caleb Daniloff were ‘drunk,’ ‘addict,’ and ‘abuser.’ These days, the best word to describe him is ‘runner,’” says a plug for Daniloff’s 2013 book, “Running Ransom Road.”



Christopher McDougall, author of the 2009 best-seller “Born to Run,” at the Bird in Hand Half Marathon in 2014. *PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER MCDUGALL*

As a journalist who writes articles about running, Jen A. Miller noticed with some alarm the recent increase in running books. On the verge of pitching her own book, she worried that “it’d be part of the noise,” she says. But since its publication in March, her book—“Running: A Love Story”—has sold well, she says. A memoir, it describes how running gave Miller the self-esteem to stop investing in unpromising relationships.

The new crop of books also describes running as a way to nurture spiritual growth. At a time when research is finding physical and mental benefits from meditation, a growing school argues that it can be performed while running. “Running can evoke spiritualism and mindfulness,” says a promotional line for a book published this month called “The Tao of Running.” There’s even a runner’s version of “Chicken Soup for the Soul,”



Jen A. Miller, a journalist who writes articles about running, says her book “Running: A Love Story” has sold well despite a crowded marketplace. *PHOTO: MARC STEINER*

featuring “101 inspirational stories of energy, endurance and endorphins.”

Like running itself, the popularity of books about the sport has waxed and waned. In the 1970s, at the start of the first running boom, authors such as Jim Fixx (“The Complete Book of Running”) and George Sheehan (“Running and Being”) hit the best-seller list. “We went from a period of all running books selling well to a period of almost none selling well,” says Joe Henderson, who has written 30 running books. Today, roughly 50 million Americans run at least once a year.

Like Sheehan, Higdon and many other running-book authors, Henderson had a long-standing relationship with Runner’s World magazine, whose parent, Rodale Inc., has published dozens of running books. Rodale’s Amby Burfoot, a one-time Boston Marathon winner and the author of several books, attributes the recent surge in running books “to the market’s slow recognition that 50% of runners are women. Women are believed to be strong book buyers.” Indeed, Burfoot’s latest book, published this spring and called “First Ladies of Running,” profiles female pioneers of the sport.

McDougall says his book succeeded because it used running as a vehicle for telling the story of a larger adventure, involving an unknown tribe of Mexican Indians. Taking a similar tact, British writer Adharanand Finn moved to Japan to explore a mystery: How does that nation produce the largest number of elite runners outside of Africa? In 2013, “only six of the hundred fastest marathon runners in the world were not from Africa. Five of those six were from Japan,” writes Finn in his new book, “The Way of the Runner.”

Sales of running books are brisk enough that VeloPress, an endurance-athletics publisher originally devoted to cycling, now publishes as many books about running. “Runners are buying them, absolutely,” says Ted Costantino, vice president and publisher.

MORE ON RUNNING

- How Women Took Over the World of Running (<http://www.wsj.com/articles/how-women-took-over-the-world-of-running-1463415987>)
- How Millennials Ended the Running Boom (<http://www.wsj.com/articles/how-millennials-ended-the-running-boom-1462473195?tesla=y>)
- Obstacle Racing Finds Itself Stuck in the Mud (<http://www.wsj.com/articles/obstacle-racing-findsitself-stuck-in-the-mud-1463007512?tesla=y>)

The
most
loyal
buyer
of

running books may be Gene Blankenship, a cross-country coach in Newman Lake, Wash. “I’d guess I have about 1,300 running and track-and-field titles,” says Blankenship, who at 74 still runs three miles a day. His all-time favorite is a book that the late Sheehan, a medical doctor, wrote in 1975: “Dr. Sheehan on Running.”

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WHAT TO READ NEXT...



TENNIS

How Rafael Nadal Wrestles With the Anxieties of Age



A-HED

For World's Newest Scrabble Stars, SHORT Tops SHORTER



FOOD & DRINK

Can You Carbo-Load Your Way to Good Health?



HOMES

In Search of Summer Real-Estate Love

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