

THE RISE OF VERTICAL RUSH

The latest sport not only appeals to competitive instincts but raises big money for charity and might render that gym membership obsolete. **Victoria Stewart** heads up the stairwell of one of London's tallest buildings

CLAUSTROPHOBICS, look away now. You are in an airless stairwell and the view ahead consists of steps and railings. All around you is a sea of red faces and the sound of squeaking trainers, then, every so often, someone gasps for air.

A 21st-century torture chamber this is not. It is the emergency stairwell of the City's tallest building, and 1,200-odd people have been crammed into it. Usually only used during fire drills and when the lifts aren't working, today they have a new role in London – as a training tool and charity fundraiser.

Vertical Rush is a tower-running (aka stair-climbing) competition held in aid of the homeless charity Shelter whereby 1,200 competitors pay a £150 entrance fee to race each other, usually in teams of five, to the top of Tower 42. It may sound just like a hop and a skip but 42 floors, 920 steps and 600 feet later and your thighs will have only one thing in

mind – collapse, as I discovered in a lethal training session last week.

Running up the world's tallest towers in as short a time as possible has been growing in popularity across the world. Taiwan's Taipei 101 challenge demands a fiendish 2,046 steps, and New York's Run-Up race up the Empire State Building and Milan's Vertical Challenge are equally demanding. In London earlier this month we witnessed Step Up, where 250 sport fanatics leapt up the Gherkin for the NSPCC, on Thursday Vertical Rush comes to Tower 42 for the second year running, and on 13 May Portsmouth will host the city's first Spinnaker Tower Challenge.

Lauri van Houten of the International Skyrunning Federation and Vertical-running.org, which regulate high altitude running and stair-climbing, says: "This is not just a stunt – people can use the stairs as a training regime in the City. I think the challenge to become



"This is not just a stunt – people in the City can use the stairs as a training regime"

On a high: Tower 42, the City's tallest building, has 42 floors and 920 steps

Vertical World Circuit champion will catch on."

Equally, Matt Roberts, who has been training Dragon Duncan Bannatyne to scale the stairs this week, credits this recent popularisation to our increased awareness of what's out there, exercise-wise. He says: "We're getting better at fitness in the UK. Long extreme challenges like marathons are more popular than ever now but quick, quirky things such as Vertical Rush have an appeal because they're slightly out of the box."

Not only that, of course, but as the sport isn't yet professional there isn't as much pressure on competitors to exceed a certain benchmark. There may be records set, such as the 4.52 minutes by Matthias Jahn in Tower 42 last year, but most people aim simply to make it to the 42nd floor, by whichever method.

So what gave Shelter its vertical brainwave? Ed Jordan, director of income

and enterprise at the charity, says: "The inspiration for Vertical Rush was simple. We were looking to establish an event that was completely new to the UK and that would provide a fun way for people of all fitness levels to come together in support of us."

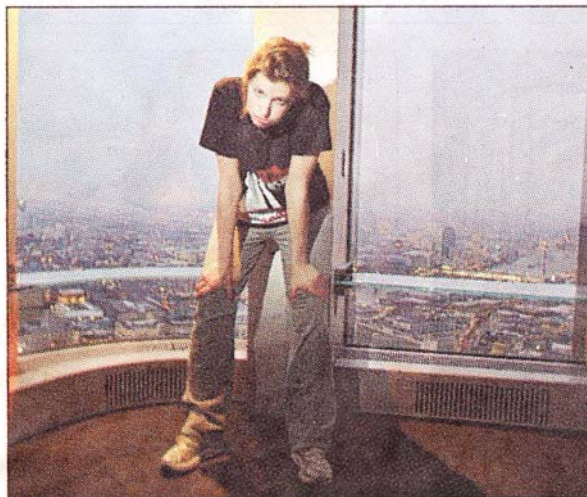
America is proof that this unusual concept works as a fundraising initiative. Austrian sports extremist Michael Reichetzeder of Towerrunning.com says this Sunday there will be eight tower-running competitions held in the US alone – from Detroit to Denver – all in aid of a good cause.

With each competitor paying an entrance fee and additional donations, the fundraising figures aren't surprising. Last year Shelter raised £165,000. So the pressure is on for Vertical Rush 2010 to be "even bigger and better," Jordan hopes.

But as charitable as we and the

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Made it! Victoria Stewart is in no fit state to notice the view from the top of Tower 42



TONY BUCKINGHAM

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Americans are, Reichetzeder reveals that over in central Europe they care about the sport for its own sake. "In Austria it's all about the sporting event. You get a free buffet afterwards and everyone talks about it. Raising money isn't the focus." This is a man who has taken part in Austria's Mount Everest Treppenmarathon in Radebeul, a 20-hour race that

demands you run up 8,848 metres 100 times.

So if you've got thighs of steel and you're a good fundraiser (you still have until tomorrow midday to enter), could you be ready to rush?

TOWER-RUNNING TIPS

Personal trainer Matt Roberts says:

- Improve your muscular strength endurance by doing step-ups or squat jumps with plenty of repetitions.
- Do intensive cardio training. Take to the hills and do interval training for 60-90 second blasts.
- Don't rush the first stage of the race. Pace yourself and keep your breathing regulated. Also, wear as little as possible.
- Afterwards, eat sugary food and carbohydrates to replace the lost energy.

Towerrunning.com's Michael Reichetzeder says:

- It helps to have a running background.
- Always run two steps at once, even if you feel you can't run any further.
- At the top, drink hot tea or something isotonic and always stretch.