



# The actress and the runner!

Phoebe Thomas, has said goodbye to *Holby City* but the dynamo actress shows no signs of slowing the pace and continues to combine her passion for acting with running fast!

**INTERVIEW BY FIONA BUGLER**

**T**hreshold runs are a key part of my weekly schedule," says Phoebe Thomas, taking time out from a hectic schedule and talking to me on the phone from a busy coffee shop. "They're vital for building speed endurance." Not the sort of chat you'd expect to be having with the girl, who for the last three years, played Nurse Maria Kendall in *Holby City*, the kind and cheeky nurse – but this petite actress is packed full of passion for running.

"My dad, Dave Thomas, is very active in the running community and I grew up helping out at races."

## **SMALL SCREEN STAMINA**

Despite her athletic upbringing, her first love was always acting. The 27-year-old proved she had stamina and has spent most of her twenties working hard on the small screen. Before commencing her three-year stint in *Holby* she'd also had starring roles in *Night and Day*, *Family Affairs*, and *Teachers*. And she even took on the role of Lady Godiva (which meant baring all)!

But, she didn't get where she is today by indulging in long luvvie lunches or schmoozing at late night London c'leb clubs. This girl preferred to test out her stamina by donning a pair of spikes and thrashing it out in the mud of cross country.

Her brilliant times (recent PBs include a 19:15 at 5k) would make you think she'd





“ Running was the perfect anti-dote to 12-hour days on set of the hospital drama with airlifts and fake deaths! ”

been a lifelong runner, but she's only been focussed on the sport for five years.

Her first race was the local *Race For Life* in Enfield. "I got a respectable time and came in the top 10. So, I thought, 'I might just continue with this running malarkey'."

In her second *Race For Life*, the talented newcomer, was just pipped at the post for first place. It was time to get serious.

**GETTING THE RUNNING BUG**

"When I started running dad gave good advice. I ran three to five times a week, it was a bit hit and miss, sometimes more, sometimes less, but I always did a long run, and a fartlek/hill session. I knew what I was doing but I didn't have target races."

Having got the bug, and realising she wasn't without talent, Phoebe started to stretch out the distance she ran and entered a 10k, then a half marathon. She ran her first half marathon, *The Silverstone Half Marathon*, in 1:37, and then joined *Enfield and Haringey Running Club*.

"But my training plateaued, I was still racing and training, but not improving. Then I started to be coached by my boyfriend, and lo and behold I started to improve."

Not surprising, as her boyfriend is renowned coach and running consultant, Nick Anderson, who works with UKA and

EA as well as coaching beginners through to elite athletes.

**WORK HARD – RUN HARD**

But it's not just because of Nick that she's made such strides forward. Phoebe is disciplined and works hard to get results, training six days a week, including double runs on Tuesday and Thursday.

"Running was the perfect anti-dote to 12-hour days on set of the hospital drama, with airlifts and fake deaths! I'd leave for work at 630am and not get home until 8pm," she says. "But I'd make sure I always got straight into my kit, and out the door."

"I listen to my body, and if I was tired, I'd only run for 30 minutes, but I'd always run."

As part of her six-day training week, two threshold runs are key – and she believes they are the thing that lifted her off her plateau, and helped her improve. "I started with just five minute blocks of threshold running, now it's continuous for 30 minutes."

"I don't wear a watch or measure pace or heart rate," she says. "I go with how I feel. My threshold runs are at a pace where I can only give three or four word answers, I'm on the edge of discomfort."

The rest of the week includes a long run, hills and steady aerobic runs – and when she's training for 5ks and 10ks, speed work.

Phoebe trained for the London Marathon this year but had a disappointing result because of a bad bout of Noro virus. "I had an experience that all runners dread, three months of training, getting PBs (a 39 minute 10k and 88 minute half), then hit by a bug!" However, her 19:15 *Battersea Park 5k* result showed hard work pays. "Paula Radcliffe was cheering me on. She's a *Holby* fan!"

She hopes to get even faster and is working towards 18:30 for 5k and 38-something for a 10k. "This is the first year I've concentrated on 5k/10ks," she says.

Like Nick (page 34), and Sarah (page 48), Phoebe had just completed the *London Bupa 10k* when I interviewed her. "I ran with Iwan Thomas (the ex sprinter) and we were so caught up in the crowds at the start that we thought let's just get as close to 40 as we can. We were pegging past people shouting 'Coming through'. I ran it in 40:20."

**HEALTHY MIND AND BODY**

As well as racing, Phoebe runs just to feel good, and, "to clear my head... When you're filming you're constantly being asked what you're doing and where you're going. When I'm frustrated about the day I put it into the run. It's a complete release for me."

And, as an up and coming young actress, it's vital that she looks good. As a petite size 8, and 8st 4lb, she's in great shape, and is pleased that she doesn't pile on the pounds on her 3000-calorie day diet.

People on the set at *Holby* used to ask me, "Why are you eating so much?" she tells me, "And I'd reply: 'Because I can!'"

As well as training six or more times a week, and (up until May 2010) working 12-hour shifts on *Holby City*, the energetic 27-year-old also finds time to fit in coaching runners on a one to one basis, alongside boyfriend coach, Nick, through their business [www.runningwithus.com](http://www.runningwithus.com).

"I love working with beginner runners," she says. "I teach them to run as a way of life and not 'binge-run' (ie stop/start)."

She's even started training a group of celebrities, who, she says get a bad name running in big events like the London Marathon. "They usually get sandwiched between the fast club runners and the elites and don't get taken seriously."

Phoebe has married two of her passions and the combination of acting and running would be a dream for many people. But it's clear that it's firey determination and hard work that fuel her success. And a competitive edge... When I mention fellow soap star, *Emmerdale's* Tony Audenshaw, (featured in our May issue) has run a sub-three hour marathon and ranks as number one celebrity, I sense that on the other end of the phone there's a sparkle in her eye! And wonder if she silently says: 'GAME ON!' **RF**