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80 MILLION EUROPEAN RUNNERS REVEAL THEIR REASONS TO RUN

'European Belgians' are a blueprint of the European runner

The world of running is experiencing a 'second running wave', with approximately 36% of 15 to 65 year-old Europeans taking to the streets, parks, forests, and gyms. But how did this new boom come about in Belgium and the rest of Europe? Why is it that we run?

To honour its 60th anniversary this year, ASICS took its expertise in running to another level by conducting an unprecedented research into the mind of the runner. Executed by the research institute Synovate, ASICS' 'Reasons to Run' research asked more than 3,500 runners in seven European countries* to reveal the 'why?' behind their actions, making it the biggest study of its kind ever.

From body to mind

A significant fact that comes up in each country is that the attitude towards running is one of 'first the body, then the mind'. The physical benefits of running far outweigh the mental benefits when it comes to getting started, with health issues such as fitness (for 54% of runners) and weight-loss (for 40%) being the two main reasons why Europeans start running. As time goes by however, the balance shifts from the body to the mind as runners discover the mental rewards running gives them, with 34% declaring they do it for fun and 35% as a means of stress-relief.

On average, Europeans wish to lose 6.1kgs by running, but the Dutch go above and beyond this target with a goal of 9.5kgs. On the topic of running partners, the British hold the highest number of runners who run with their babies in strollers

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while the Italians hold the highest percentage of running-club memberships (13%) as they enjoy the company of a running partner the most. When asked what goes through their minds whilst running, the Spanish declared they scrutinise other runners they see, while the French focus on their breath, pace and rhythm, the British worry about their finances and the current credit crunch, and Belgians think about nothing at all.

We run as we are

Delving deep into the runner's mind, ASICS' 'Reasons to Run' research delivers some intriguing results. The findings range from a general consensus over certain aspects (such as why people start to run) to factors that differ hugely between nations (such as motivation to continue, injury prevention, and preferred locations). These differences are down to the fact that the runner's mindset profile greatly resembles their country's disposition. The hard-working Germans, for example, are diligent runners who don't like to give up, while the *joie-de-vivre* French run mainly for fun. The down-to-earth qualities of the Dutch mean they are not bothered by anything while running in contrast to the passionate Spanish who find they are easily irritated.

The Belgian runner vs. the rest

Perhaps it is as a result of the country's geographical location and the fact that the headquarters of the European Union are situated in Belgium that the Belgian runner is a blueprint of the European runner. When all was said and done, the Belgians revealed themselves to be the European average. But they also set an example. They enjoy running the most, are capable of reaching a Zen-like state of mind (with 15% thinking of absolutely nothing at all as opposed to the 10% of passionate Spanish runners), and they strongly believe in the power of music to help them run longer and faster. They consider running as a means to improve their performance in other sports (19%), and are the second highest nation to

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view it as a way of getting fit and losing weight (65%). Above all, the Belgian runner manages to take from running everything that makes the sport worthwhile, from physical health to mental well-being.

The marvels of running

Not since the first running boom of the early seventies, when people realised that running was a reliable means of getting healthy, has the world of running seen such an immense escalation in runners. Progressively more runners appearing in parks, streets and gyms, a surge in numbers on marathon registration lists (with a total of 494 marathons taking place in Europe alone), and a huge increase in women taking up the sport (33% of European women started in the last 12 months) are just some of the signs highlighting what is now known as the 'second running wave'. This latest boom is emphasised by the fact that a third of today's runners started in the last year and the numbers just keep growing, with the current total of European runners exceeding 80 million.

** NB: The countries that participated are Great Britain, France, Italy, Spain, The Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany, and the results are a representation of the 80 million runners in these European countries.*

For more details, facts and figures about the Reason to Run survey, please see www.everythingaboutrunning.asics.eu.

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Anima Sana In Corpore Sano (sound mind in a sound body)

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In 1949, ASICS' founder, Kihachiro Onitsuka, established his specialised sports-shoe company in Kobe, Japan. Central to Onitsuka's drive was his belief that exercise leads to the development of a healthier body, and that a sound body is the cradle for a sound mind. Nothing epitomises his philosophy more than running, where the body and mind must constantly work together in harmony. Since its launch, ASICS has become an authority in the field of running thanks to its continuous studies into the behaviour of the runner's body. In celebration of its 60th birthday (an extremely symbolic event for the Japanese), ASICS has decided to take its commitment to running innovation to another level and become the authority in yet another field – that of the runner's mind.