

Eternal dame nation

Consume



Sprinter friendly Members of Runner Girls India



A women-only group of runners is laying claim to the city's jogging tracks, says **Amrita Gupta**.

If Sabine Tietge had her way, "run like a girl" would no longer be a derisive remark. It would imply "running strong, fierce and sexy", attributes that she believes every member of her 200-strong club Runner Girls India possesses. The first group of its kind in India, the club is meant exclusively for women who love to run for fun. "Amateur runners, women especially, are plagued with a whole set of doubts like: 'I'm too overweight and self-conscious to run', 'I don't know how to run right' or 'I don't know what to wear'," said Tietge. The idea behind Runner Girls India, according to her, is for women to feel comfortable running with other women. "We have all kinds here: we've got teens and grannies, people who've never run in their lives to those who've done full marathons," she said. On alternate Saturday mornings, a bunch of 15-20 women meet at Cubbon Park for fortnightly Girls-Only-Runs. There's no need to register, people just "show up and run". Usually, they head to

Konarak or Airlines for breakfast afterwards, because, as Tietge pointed out, "they accommodate a gang of stinking women quite willingly". "Getting out with a group is much more satisfying than just being bored on a treadmill," added Runner Girl Naina Lal, and it's even better when that group environment is not competitive or intimidating. "A loop is 4.5km, so depending on your mood, you could do one or three - there'll always be someone running at your pace, you can go ahead, backtrack, join up or do the run-walk," explained Lal. Run-walk? "You know, when you run a little, walk a little," laughed Tietge, adding that for new, overweight or older runners, it's a great way to go longer distances while reducing the chance of injury. With a three-month-old baby, Tietge finds it's a technique she employs a lot. "I am struggling to start all over again, from being someone who could run 52 km, to feeling like seven minutes is too much," she said.

To provide further encouragement to rusty runners or those just starting out, last year, Runner Girls India started a nine-week programme called C2-5K. "We wanted to get people who had never run off the couch and

work them up to a five km run," explained Tietge. It's easier with little benchmarks she said, because one km can seem never-ending, five can be really challenging, but after that, they agreed, it's easy. "Many newcomers approach running with a 'what's-in-it-for-me' attitude, but they soon realise it's all about the feel-good factor: if I can achieve this then why not something else?" said Tietge. "It's valuable me-time with my girlfriends; no husband, no

'It's valuable me-time with my girlfriends.'

phone." But when she formed the group in late-2007, it wasn't just to carve out girl time. "Most of us have had bad experiences running on the streets alone," recalled Tietge. "Some got comments, others got groped - it's unnerving and puts you off." With Runner Girls, the women had safety in numbers. Though most of them were also members of Runners for Life, they realised they wanted to "chat and be girly" rather than play catch-up in a competitive environment. "You are supposed

to be able to talk when you not as much as we do," lau Tietge. "On our runs we ca discuss personal stuff bec there are no guys around - which sports bras are the where they're available."

"People say that all you run is an old t-shirt, whate shorts and a pair of shoes. women, a good sports bra to the top of that list," add They've also discussed "h prevent chafed nipples, ru during a period and runni pregnant". But chit-chat a they still do the distance. / from running in events lik Sunfeast and Midnight M in the city, they've also participated in the Mumb: Auroville marathons, and organise Runner Girls eve soon. "Plus we do running holidays: last year we did Hampi, it took five hours t we combined it with sight and ran from temple to ter she recalled. Though run why they got together, no togethers are to run; the g meets socially too: "we ha much fun together that, q often, we do movies, meet birthdays, baby showers, too," said Lal. See Events and talks.