

Words of wisdom form rules to run by

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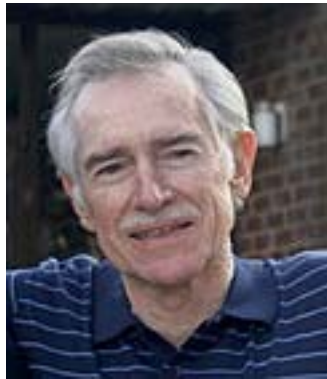
Over the past 20 or so years, I have measured out routes of varying distances in Freeport with my bicycle or car odometer and noted landmarks at mile markers or painted a line on the highway or the street. Now, of course, I have a Garmin Forerunner 201 with a GPS that measures the distance accurately for me, and I don't need landmarks or paint stripes.

My first Freeport route was the then-uninhabited Acacia Circle behind my house, which measured a third of a mile. It was a good, safe and private place to begin my running regimen. No one could see me struggle in my attempt to get my 200-pound body in shape and cast off the careless lifestyle of smoking two packs of cigarettes a day and overeating.

I ventured farther as my fitness and confidence grew, and as I trained for my first marathon. I expanded my routes to a mile around the block, a 5-miler around Freeport, a 7-miler over the Highway 36 bridge, to 10-mile and 15-mile round-trippers out to Quintana Beach and back, and all the way to the south jetty

on Quintana beach and back. Whether we run, or walk, to develop physical fitness or to train for a fun run or race, we want to know the distance and how long it takes us so we can measure fitness or progress toward our goals.

I thought about my run routes around Freeport about 7:45 Thursday morning while finishing up my fourth mile of a 5-miler around the Old River levee, one of the more pleasant and picturesque of the routes I run and one that meets my basic



criteria for **SAFE RUNS**, a useful acronym in which each letter stands for the beginning of a phrase.

Choose **Safe** routes with minimal traffic or a wide shoulder to run on in times of heavy, rush-hour traffic. Check to see if the route is relatively free of loose dogs or frequented by loose, hazardous humans or hecklers.

Always wear an ID with your name, address, phone number, blood type and medical information in case of an accident that renders you unconscious. If you run in the dark as I do in the winter, wear a reflector vest or a blinking red light.

Find a good, solid surface. Unfortunately most of the surfaces around our area are concrete, but you might be able to find an asphalt surface or a crushed stone surface like that

around Old River. MacLean Park offers the Bottomlands Trail. Brazosport College has a good running trail as well. Walk or drive the route to look for potholes, loose stones or gravel or construction.

Choose an **Environmentally** friendly route free of noxious air or poisonous plants. There are some routes I avoid at certain times of the year because of snakes and other wild creatures.

Choose a **Route** that has clear landmarks or signs in case you get lost or disoriented, which is easy to do in the dark.

If possible, choose an **Undulating** route that includes hills and upgrades to challenge you.

Choose a route that is **Not isolated**, one near places to seek help in case of an injury or an emergency, a route with some foot or vehicular traffic in case you get in trouble. Of course, some runners carry cell phones now to deal with emergencies.

Finally, choose a route that **Stimulates** you physically, mentally and spiritually. Contrary to what nonrunners think and say, running is not boring if you choose the right routes.

Have fun out on the streets and trails as you run or walk and avoid danger with **SAFE RUNS**.

Bill Shaw's running column appears in The Facts every other Monday.