

As you read this, I will most likely be running around in circles in a wood, path or beach near you. I am in heavy training for my first ever race; the Baxters River Ness 10K. It's almost one year since I took up running and I am becoming increasingly obsessed by it, as everyone who knows about these things said I would be. Of course, obsessions and myself are nothing new. I could stalk for Scotland.

Today I am going to be running the race route as fast as I can, just to get an idea of how long it might take me to do it. I am hoping to complete it in under an hour (you have to estimate a time so that you start with equally speedy, or otherwise, runners) and I just want to check I wasn't being over-ambitious when I filled in my entry form. I may have to sneak into a slower section.

I did a quiz the other day; "what kind of a runner are you?" and it turns out I need to run more aggressively. The article suggested little tricks like using my arms more or talking to myself, but I decided instead to dye my hair red. Of course I was blond when I made this decision and it is only now I realised that the new colour clashes horribly with my favourite running vest that I was planning to wear on the day. So now I have to decide if I favour comfort over fashion. I suppose as an aggressive red-head I may just have to go with the clashing colours and be forced to run so fast that no-one will recognise me and my fashion faux pas.

One of my friends talks to himself while running. His favourite thing when he is trying to gee himself up is to say 'bitch, bitch, bitch' over and over again. I fear he might be in danger of being asked to leave his running club by those offended members running just in front of him. I struggle to breathe when I am running, never mind be able to talk. My preferred technique is to think of someone I really hate and imagine how all this effort will give me a much nicer bum than hers. Aren't I a lovely person?

Running is so good for me. This was confirmed this morning when the nurse gave me a gold star for my blood pressure. It also keeps my grumpiness down to manageable levels and seems to

be doing the dog some good as well. The best thing is that I can eat as much as I want and can still fit into my jeans.

As is the form for these things, I am running for a charity and have chosen one of the lesser known ones, called OneKind ([www.onekind.org](http://www.onekind.org)). I came across them lobbying at a political party conference a few years ago, and have supported them irregularly ever since. They are working for animal welfare and protection by trying to encourage a shift in behaviour to create a mainstream animal-friendly way of living, much as the green and the Fairtrade campaigns are doing. They believe that by making small and simple changes to our lifestyle we can make an enormous difference to animals.

This means ambushing friends and neighbours with a sponsorship form. I am grateful that most people have given me their money up-front as I may well be too tired next week to go back to collect. It also means that I will be letting a whole lot of people down if I fail to cross the finishing line. I doubt if anyone would ask for a refund, but they did give it to me in good faith that I would stay the course.

All these hours of training, the red hair, the advice given me by the more experienced and the thought of justifying the generosity of those who have sponsored me. If that doesn't get me round the course, I will just have to think of that bitch with the less than perfect bum.

If you want to show your support for Karen, please go to [www.virginmoneygiving.com/karenray](http://www.virginmoneygiving.com/karenray)