

# Broken Records

They might be the world's most hated exercise, but burpees are no match for this woman

*By Hannah Bass*

Most of us shudder at the thought of doing 12 burpees, so how does 12,004 sound? Because that's what it'll take to beat the Guinness World Record set by Eva Clarke, who last month powered her way through an eye-watering 12,003 burpees in 24 hours.

Eva, 34, originally from Australia and now a personal

trainer based in Abu Dhabi, already had four World Records to her name after pounding out more push ups in 24 hours than an entire squadron of soldiers, but she was aiming for more. "I like to push myself," she says. "I first got interested in breaking World Records when I was pregnant with my third child and someone challenged me to a push up contest. He actually beat me—by one rep!—but when I saw I could do

over 200 push ups non-stop I thought, 'This has to be some kind of record.' So I started researching the current World Records and realised they could be achievable for me, and I haven't looked back!"

Then fellow personal trainer Lee Ryan, based in Dubai, approached Eva with the idea of taking part in a burpee challenge together. "I thought to myself, 'I can do burpees, so that should be easy enough,'" she laughs.

"Even when I checked out the woman who held the previous record for 7,500 burpees and the guy who held it for 10,000, I thought it looked easy—but once I started training for it, I had to take my hat off to them because it really was a horribly challenging physical event!"

So at 10am on a Friday morning, Eva, Lee, and their supporters gathered at the Dubai Autodrome—fittingly, in the midst of the Hankook 24H Race—and prepared to



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burpee their way through to 10am on Saturday. It aches just thinking about it, but for the first eight and a half hours, Eva did burpees non-stop. As in, absolutely zero breaks. "I was doing between 10 and 20 burpees a minute up until the

8.5 hour mark, by which point I was well over 5,000 reps—and that's when I surpassed the previous 12 hour burpee record. So I allowed myself to slow down a little, take a break, and have the physiotherapists work on my neck, which was

really sore from constantly looking down."

Eva drew on her competitive spirit to power through: "It was great having Lee beside me, because it pushed me to keep up with him or even a bit ahead of him. Even though we were there for each other, you can't take the competition out of me when it's there instinctively. It was a 'me versus me' challenge, but it still felt like Eva versus Lee!"

Then, after 22 hours and 12,000 burpees, Eva made the fatal mistake of removing her training gloves. "It was probably the worst thing I could do because once they were off I couldn't get them back on again—my hands looked like mashed potato!" Regardless, she'd well and truly smashed the World Record. "Finishing was exhilarating," she says. "It was almost as good as childbirth—almost! At the end of labour you have a child; at the end of 12,003 burpees you have a World Record—and the same enormous relief that the pain is over. My husband drove me home afterwards and I fell asleep in the car. He woke me up to tell me I was doing burpees in my sleep!" she laughs. "It was as if my body couldn't switch off."

But in the end, it was all worth it: Eva now has six World Records under her belt and the challenge raised, at the time of going to press, Dhs77,000 for the charity World Child Cancer. After that, you'd think she'd be putting her feet up but nope, she was back in the gym the next day ("And, yes," she says, "I have done some burpees since—very, very slowly!) and now plans to smash another two records. In April she's aiming to ace the time for running the London Marathon wearing a 10 kg backpack, and after that she's set herself a Guinness World Record pull-ups challenge. No rest for the wickedly fit! ■

## BURPEES: THE LOWDOWN

Eva and Lee were doing 'Guinness World Record', or GWR burpees—which involve jumping down into a plank position and then straight back up—but there are dozens of variations on this tough exercise. "You can try a forward jump, a reverse burpee with a backward jump, a one-arm burpee, a TRX burpee, a chest to floor push up burpee..." says Eva. "So think about the range of movement you want to achieve and the muscles you want to focus on before deciding what kind of burpees to incorporate into your workout."

Even if you're struggling with an injury or your fitness levels are low, the burpee can work for you. "You can walk through a burpee and it'll still give you a workout," says Eva. "It just depends on your ability and your goals."

The key to killing burpees, she says, is to focus on explosive power, using your body's own momentum. "With a GWR burpee, you start by standing upright, jump your legs back explosively together—not one at a time—adopt the push-up position, and then jump your feet back to where they started."

Why are they such a powerful—and painful—move? "Burpees pretty much work your entire body," Eva says. "You'll feel your quads, hamstrings and glutes working, you'll engage your back and your core, and it'll get your heart rate up. It's a complete full-body exercise that works all your muscle groups and provides high intensity cardio."

"I think it's one of the most hated exercises," she jokes. "That's why I really don't see anyone breaking our record for a while—only crazy people would do it!"