



LIZZY HAWKER

# PEAK PERFORMER

Competitive spirit and a true love of the great outdoors are the keys to this world-class athlete's success

**E**ndurance – it's more than just competing in ultra-distance races. It is more than simply running. It's the lifestyle of never looking for the easy way out. It's an exploration towards the edge. For each of us this 'edge' will be in a different place. It is the journey to find that edge that maybe teaches us more about ourselves."

Listening to the thoughts of Lizzy Hawker on endurance running, it is immediately obvious that she is a different breed of athlete. Different not just because the 33-year-old has dominated the ultra-running scene since entering it five years ago, but because she blends a bloody-minded competitive spirit with a deeply philosophical nature.

## RUNNING PHILOSOPHY

Ask about her approach to training and she quotes: "The artist is nothing without the gift, but the gift is nothing without work," (French writer Emile Zola). Enquire about what motivates her to run up and down very big mountains as fast as she can and she says: "Alone, in the clear air and searching sunlight, we are afoot with the quiet gods and men can know each other and themselves for what they are," (quoting British mountaineer Albert F Mummery).

It could sound pretentious, but any suspicions are dispelled by the quiet and earnest manner in which Hawker talks about her love of life off the beaten track.

"My passions are mountains, the wilderness and running," she says. "This way I get to combine all three. When I'm running in the mountains I get to know myself more."

It's a part of her that didn't exist until five years ago, but since then Hawker has become UK and World 100km champion; holds the world record for running from Everest Base Camp to Kathmandu (302 miles,

10,000m of ascent, in three days, two hours and 36 minutes); has twice won the Ultra Trail du Mont Blanc (UTMB) – 166km through France, Italy and Switzerland; and last year, despite battling a stress fracture, she narrowly missed out on becoming the first person to win it three times, finishing second in what was her first race after a five-month lay-off.

But it was Hawker's first UTMB in 2005 that was the tipping point. "I had entered as an experiment," she recalls. "I didn't even think to buy trail shoes until a friend suggested it a week before the race."

Whether the last-minute shoe purchase changed the course of history is difficult to say, but Hawker, having started as an unknown at the back of a field of 2,000 runners, went on to win – changing her life forever.

Having grown up in East London, Hawker's passion for the outdoors was sparked by a trip to the Matterhorn in Switzerland, aged six. Hawker has wide-ranging ecological interests – holding a PhD in polar oceanography – and she now lives in the Swiss Alps, earning money from teaching trail-running courses, writing the odd article and from race winnings. It's a nomadic existence for such a successful athlete – her achievements are arguably the equal

of Paula Radcliffe's, only in a different kind of running – but Hawker wouldn't have it any other way.

"If I wanted money I'd do another sport," she says. "In fact, I ran the London Marathon in 2007 in 2:47 and have been asked if I'm tempted to run the road marathon for London 2012. A home Olympics is a big incentive – but I'm not sure it's enough.

"If I'm on the roads then I'm not

## 'MY PASSIONS ARE MOUNTAINS AND THE WILDERNESS'

in the mountains and I don't like the idea of that. It's a tough decision, and one I wouldn't have to make if ultra running was an Olympic sport, but we're still working on that one!"

When pressed on the reason for her success, she commits to no more than a self-deprecating word or two about not liking to lose, and a shrug of the shoulders. Ask Mozart how he composed his first symphony at the age of five, or Maradona how he scored his wonder goal in the 1986 World Cup and you'd likely have received a similar response. Some people are born to do what they do. ▶



## ULTRA APPAREL

Lizzy Hawker's tips on what to wear when you go long

### 1 THINK ABOUT FUNCTIONALITY

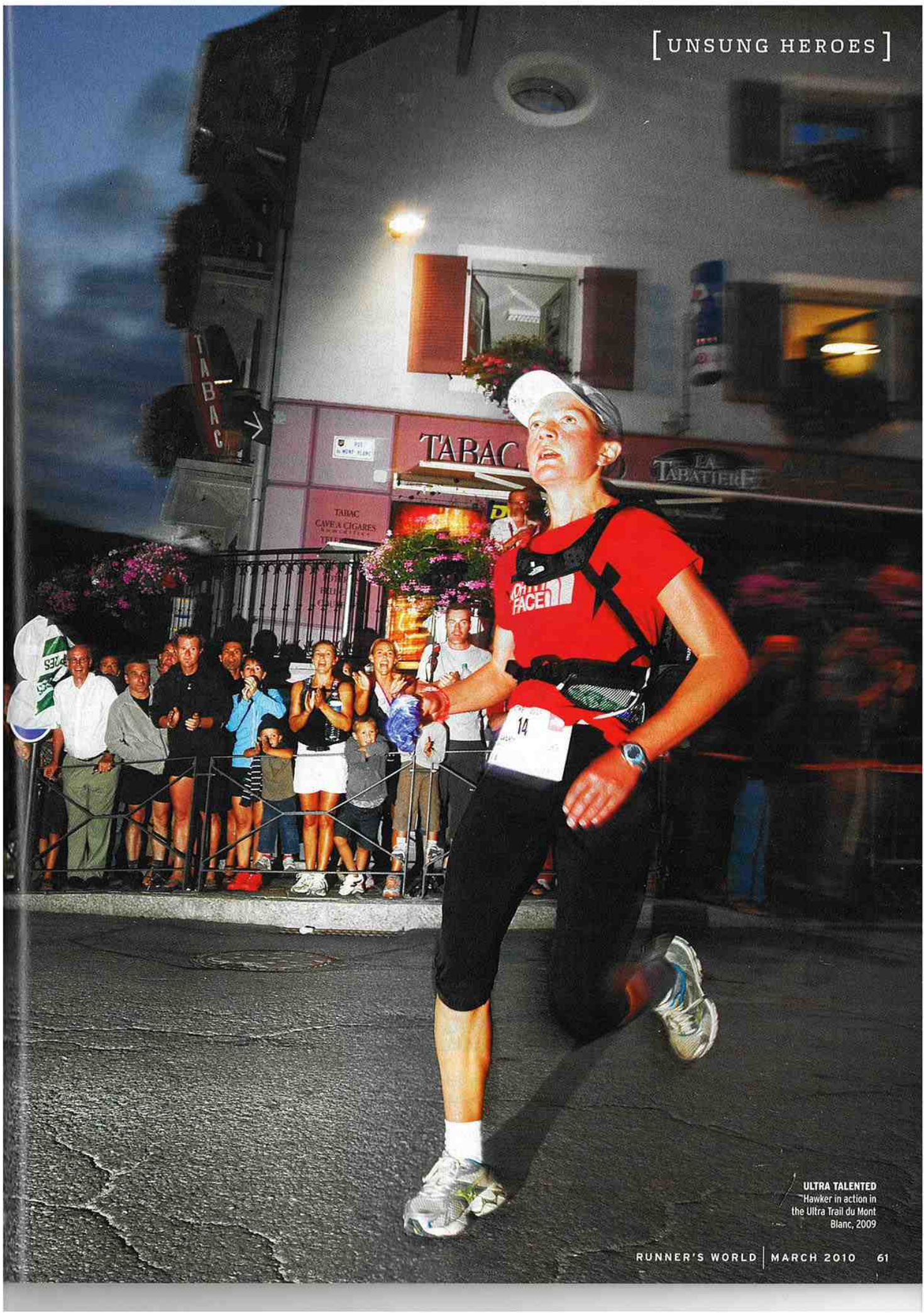
"When you're on your feet for a long time, and possibly running through different weather conditions, you need adaptable kit. Everything needs to do more than one job and it needs to be lightweight."

### 2 GO FOR COMFORT

"Pick brands that are specialists in adventure or mountain sports because that way you'll know that all the technical features of the kit will be covered and you can focus simply on whether it fits and if it feels right."

### 3 BE VERSATILE

"Make sure what you buy is adaptable, as you don't want to carry much," she explains. "Lightweight long sleeve tops and jackets with detachable arms are good staples, and shorts should be loose and give freedom of movement."



**ULTRA TALENTED**  
Hawker in action in  
the Ultra Trail du Mont  
Blanc, 2009