

**SHE** may have wrestled with lions, set fire to her rival's hairdressing salon and torn strips off Simon Cowell on screen, but off it Amanda Holden is about to face her biggest challenge.

The actress is one of 37,000 people taking part in today's Flora London Marathon, pounding 26.2 miles of the capital to fulfil a long-standing dream and raise money for charity in the process.

Famous for her roles in television dramas *Cutting It* and *Wild At Heart*, and for holding her own against fellow judges Cowell and Piers Morgan on the reality series *Britain's Got Talent*, she has been in training for six months.

Here, Amanda, 37, who has a two-year-old daughter, Lexi, with her music executive fiancé Chris Hughes, 35, chronicles the hilarious highs and hamstring-tearing lows...

### Friday 18th OCTOBER

MY FIRST run. I pant for two miles around a park near my house in Richmond, West London, before wilting under a hot shower.

I used to practise gymnastics and go for the occasional jog, but this is the first proper exercise I've done in about five months. I let things slide while filming *Wild At Heart* in South Africa. I didn't put on weight, but I could feel the muscle-tone going round my bottom and the tops of my thighs and I felt blobby and out of condition.

I decided to do the London Marathon the week before I flew home. I called Born Free, the animal charity of which I'm a patron, and said I wanted to run it for them. Then I told as many people as possible so I couldn't back out.

The first thing my fiancé Chris said was: 'You're mad but you've always been a stubborn little git so I'm sure you'll make it.'

Colleagues gently questioned whether it wasn't perhaps a bit too drastic a way of shaping up.

Simon Cowell was impressed but only for five minutes until he became distracted, as is his way.

Piers Morgan kept going on about how much training I'd have to do and how hard it would be. I told him I'd like to see him try. It really would be a case of Run Fatboy Run.

The marathon was always on my check-list of things to do, along with jumping out of a plane and wing-walking. It usually fell around my sister's birthday, and we watched it while she unwrapped her presents.

I loved Bernie Clifton running in an ostrich costume, and the guy wearing a diving suit who took a week to finish. Strangely, I never thought they were mad - I was always just a bit jealous. I may, of course, live to regret that.

### Monday 12th NOVEMBER

A SHOCKING start to the week. I was running along the Thames towpath at 7am with my personal trainer, Gareth, when we saw a man lying in a bush.

We stopped to make sure he was all right, and as soon as we tried to wake

him we realised he was dead. I called the police. Three squad cars and about 12 officers turned up. They suspected he had killed himself.

Needless to say, our training was over for the day. It felt very surreal. But as I walked Lexi in the park later, the shock hit me.

That aside, training is going OK. I am running four times a week for four miles at a time, and doing lunges, squats and stomach crunches to build up my body strength.

To my shame, I missed a session last week. We'd got back from our cottage in Norfolk at midnight and the next morning I was so shattered I told the man on reception in our block of flats to send Gareth back home when he arrived.

There's never a day when I bound-out of bed think: 'Hurray! I'm going for a run!'

When it is so dark that I can't even see my feet, I wonder what the heck I am doing. But I always feel great afterwards.

### Sunday 23rd DECEMBER

WOKEN up at 6.45 with an arm edging across my body. It is Chris, pulling me in for a cuddle and saying that five more minutes in bed won't hurt. He is rubbish at early-morning motivation.

I force myself into my leggings, long-sleeved T-shirt and jacket, warm Lexi's milk and put her in bed with Chris while I go outside for a five-mile run. We will spend Christmas at our cottage in Norfolk, so this is my last session before the holidays.

I've just come back from four days in New York, where everything went a bit pear-shaped.

Gareth had designed a training schedule for me to do there, but I spent my time shopping and drinking frozen Margaritas instead. I owned up on my return. He is a proper girls' trainer, and said as long as I'd walked up Fifth Avenue with shopping bags I'd done some exercise.

My *Cutting It* friends Angela Griffin and Sian Reeves are a bit jealous I'm doing the marathon. Like all the women I've told, they want to know how much weight I've lost.

But the truth is I've put on 3lb of muscle. At 5ft 5in tall, I've gone from 8st 4lb to 8st 7lb. Chris says my body

# MY MARATHON DIARY

## By Amanda Holden



**IT'S ALL MUSCLE:** Trainer Gareth Traves, left, gets Amanda into shape

**'Gareth is a proper girls' trainer. He says that even carrying shopping up Fifth Avenue is good exercise'**

feels firmer but my thighs are bigger and I don't look as good in my skinny jeans.

In addition to porridge for breakfast and a potato for lunch, I've started eating pastries in between meals and sometimes have a glass of red wine in the evening. Still, if I'm going to be a martyr, I need some kind of reward.

### Friday 18th JANUARY

WAS pestered by Piers this morning. We've started filming Britain's Got Talent and are staying in hotels around the country.

I was using a hotel treadmill, and he jumped on it afterwards to try to better my time. He did on a couple of

occasions, but he didn't seem to get that a marathon takes a lot longer than a treadmill session.

He's so competitive, it's hilarious. He's even sponsored me for £1,001 because Simon donated £1,000.

I think the real reason he followed me was to see me in a swimsuit because my training also includes swimming in hotel pools. He tried

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