

Up!

MARCH 2023

SPEED



Making the world a better
place - one page at a time

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Penelope The Truck

Up Front!

Welcome to the latest edition of Up! We write this welcome message having just returned from a long weekend in the wonderful setting of Kielder in Northumberland. For those who haven't been, Kielder is Europe's largest man-made lake and is surrounded by forestry and wildlife you have to see to believe (check out [Mike Tickell's article](#) in December 2021's issue). We don't know about you, but there's something about being by water that's strangely calming. Sadly our short break flew by in the blink of an eye ... all of which brings us to this month's 'speed' issue.

But don't be fooled - this issue isn't all about haring around. Sometimes it pays (in fact, it's absolutely vital) to take your foot off the accelerator, slow down, and stop for a while. Check out this month's article about Tai Chi - who knew combat could be so slow, graceful and controlled?

So take a deep breath, switch on the kettle, slow down and switch off. To quote W H Davies:

*What is this life
if so full of care
we have no time
to stand and stare?*

Bridget & Harry x



This month's front cover is by [Okan Caliskan](#)

Update!

PENELOPE THE TRUCK

We catch up with Kerry and Craig (and Penelope of course!) who we first met way back in October 2021

The last time we spoke, you were still in the UK getting ready to set off on your travels? Did you manage to get away as planned?

We can't believe it's been that long! We did, actually a month earlier than planned, leaving the UK in September 2022. It was a lot of hard work and wasn't without issues, but we sold the house to clear our debts, which wasn't straightforward (but is it ever?!). We ended up having to quit our jobs rather than taking a sabbatical, but our efforts in securing remote work were fruitful and we are able to fund our travels and keep the savings in the bank!



How has van life been? Is the reality living up to the dream?

The Schengen travel restrictions make things somewhat restrictive, but we decided to travel through most of Europe quite quickly to spend some time in Greece. We sailed from Hull to Rotterdam, travelled through the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Italy and sailed from Brindisi to Igoumenitsa (where we got the news the house had completed!) and then slowed right down, taking a ferry out to Kefalonia which was a game changer. As you can imagine, travelling 2,800km



in a month had taken its toll! After a few weeks R&R we ventured into Turkey, where we tried, and sadly failed, to get a year's VISA (Ikiamet) so we made a last minute decision to salvage some of our 90 days by heading to Cyprus, where we are now, and allow Turkey to warm up a little!

It's been a dream and so far everything has gone to plan without any major issues. It's better than we could have imagined.



You clearly prepared well before you set off on your travels. Have there been any surprises along the way, things that you hadn't anticipated?

The devastating earthquakes in Turkey and Syria meant a change of plan for our route, however, had we not come to Cyprus (where we

Update!

PENELOPE THE TRUCK

could still feel the ground moving on both occasions), we would have been in the Gazientep area at the time of the first earthquake which was a sobering realisation.

We hope to be able to help somehow as we travel back through the country, as long as we can do so safely and without causing any further problems.



Just part of the trawl from one of Kerry and Craig's regular litter picks

What's the pace of life like now, compared to your old life back in the UK?

I'm not sure slow covers it! The further East you get, the slower everything else seems to get too. When we think about the pace of life before we left, we are not sure how we survived it (although



at points, we truly struggled). Now we wake with the sun, take our time with a loose morning routine, take lots of walks, read books. I do around 2 hours of work maybe 4 days a week and we play lots of Uno!

Some people would absolutely consider it boring - but we do keep having to pinch ourselves at this lifestyle and the opportunity to just experience and enjoy the passing of time.



Update!

PENELOPE THE TRUCK

What's the best thing about your new life?

Without doubt, the almost immediate positive impact on our health. We have both lost some excess weight, Craig's heart concerns have gone away and he's not had a migraine since we left (he was getting these weekly). My hair is no longer falling out and we're both sleeping better than we ever have.

As for going forwards; not knowing where we're going to be tomorrow and what the view from our window is going to be. The freedom to choose and not having to answer to anyone but each other and ourselves.



Our general direction next is back to Turkey and head East (we have yet to visit Cappadocia and Mount Nemrut), then we would like to try and go to Northern Iraq before heading North to Georgia. From there, it really depends on borders and politics with Armenia, Azerbaijan, which would open up the potential to cross the Caspian Sea to Kazakhstan. But ultimately, who knows!



If you want to follow Kerry and Craig on their adventures, check out the following links:

<https://www.facebook.com/PenelopetheTruck>

<https://penelopethetruck.com/links/>

<https://www.instagram.com/penelopethetruck>



Wisely and slow. They stumble that run fast.

Shakespeare

Don't get so busy making a living that you forget to make a life.

Dolly Parton

Up Stroke!

ELLEN STEPHENSON

Meet an inspirational north-east 18 year-old swimmer with Mosaic Down Syndrome ... and an astonishing tally of over 100 medals!

Hi Ellen, thanks for talking to us. How old were you when you realised that swimming wasn't just an enjoyable pastime but was something that you were actually very good at?

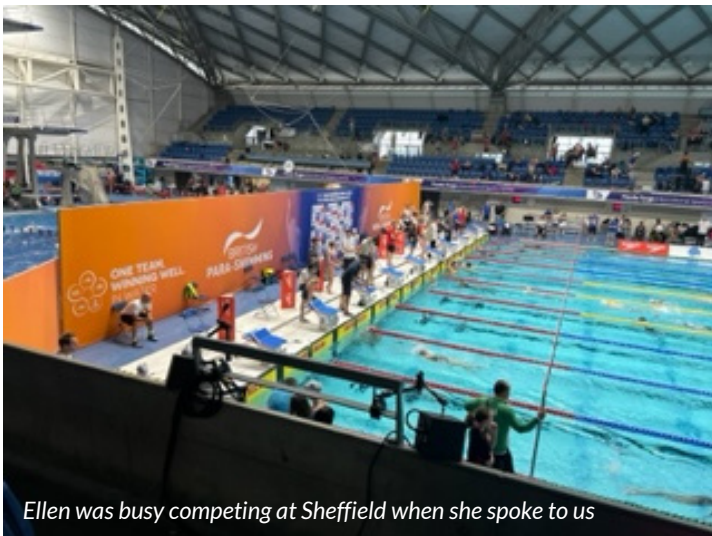
I have been swimming my whole life since I was a baby. Around age 10 I started competing and realised I loved it and started doing well in competitions.

Out of all the many medals you've won, are there any that are particularly special to you?

Yes. The medals I won at my first Down Syndrome European Championships in Paris.

Competing at the level you do must require a lot of commitment. What's your training regime like?

I train 5 times a week in the pool and land training. I am focussing this year on improving my strength and doing more weights in the gym. I do a lot of walking with my family, I also try to eat healthily and get plenty of sleep.



Ellen was busy competing at Sheffield when she spoke to us



It sounds like swimming has taken you all over the world. What are some of your favourite places ...

I loved competing in Canada and Sardinia was really nice.

We understand you're campaigning for Down Syndrome swimmers to have their own category at the Paralympics? Can you tell us why you believe this is important.

Swimmers with Down Syndrome have both physical and learning disabilities, but in the Paralympics they have to compete in a category for swimmers with learning disability. This is an unfair category and swimmers with DS are not able to compete at Paralympic level - even the best swimmers in the world.

So, what's next on the cards for you?

This year I am hoping to compete in the Global Games in France in June and I am going to the Down Syndrome European Championships in Italy this September.



Word Up!

YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF SPEED

Speed Trials

(On the aesthetics of shelf stacking)

She is petite, slight, hardly reaching
the third shelf, her method precise, nimble -
a river of bottles laying claim to space.

I might have suggested she put lemon
beside Lucozade for symmetry,
balancing rainbow lines of light.

But I'm in a hurry, muzak is making
my mind long for quiet spaces.

Ah, my favourite still water is on the top
shelf at the back, where even my long arms
cannot stretch. My back protests.

Should I call a lad?

Female solidarity forbids.
I approach the sylph, she searches
for a ladder, hauls across a set -

firm as the Hillary step on Everest.
Leaps up, lithe, cheery, conveys a bottle
smooth as a bucket in an oasis.

She's now on jams, preserves -
placing them one at a time,
pacing her day in honey jars.

Rona Fitzgerald

Three schoolboys in the playground
arguing over speed,
the eldest sets the bidding off
he thinks he's got the lead.

"My dad he is the fastest
in his racing car,
two twenty miles per hour
he's the quickest dad by far"

"Pah!" pipes up the second boy,
"my dad's faster yet,
flying twice the speed of sound
in his supersonic jet!"

"You think that's fast"
the youngest said
"my dad's a council road man, see,
he finishes work at five o'clock,
yet he's in the house at half past three!"

Graham Bell

Blast

A hurricane force,
a whirlwind tour,
a rush of wind,
a right hard blow.

Get tied to the mast,
withstand the storm,
becalm yourself.
Take a slow, deep breath,
know when to pause.
Wind down, take five,
make time to
unwind.

Gerda Pickin

Playing Up!

HARRY GALLAGHER

Meet Carol Kaye, the best and baddest bass player you've never heard of.

Have you ever wondered what it is about music that makes us dance? Particularly things like disco or soul music? Well, wonder no more! It's a primal thing – it's all about our heartbeats.

Studies show that our body's breathing and heart rate can change rhythm and even synchronise to the music we're hearing. More than that, have you ever seen a dancefloor filled by pulsating dance music that's being played in 3/4 time (waltz time)? Not likely. That's because we respond most easily and viscerally to music which mimics our own heartbeat – and the faster the drum beat, the faster our heartbeat.

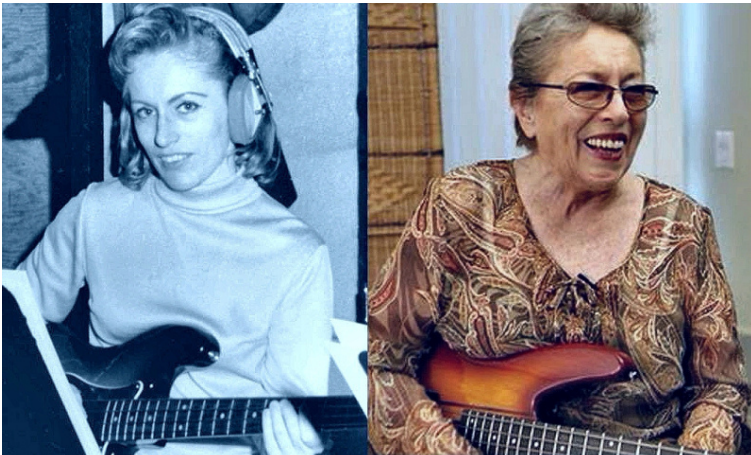


Photo copyright [here](#)

Musicians and music writers used to call it 'four on the floor'. Think Motown. You know the sound, right? All the best Motown records had that same groove going on, that sound that said, "You got to get up and dance!" And if you've ever sung along or danced to any of those classic Motown records, then you've heard Carol Kaye.

The name may not be familiar but her playing will be.



A key member of the supreme session musician team that came to be known as The Wrecking Crew, Carol Kaye's CV reads like a who's who of popular music aristocracy. Not that she's impressed with fame or any of that business: "I'm a player and you don't live on fame. Fame is phony. It's like a prison. You know, that one star that called it that, she was right, it is a prison. You have to be careful about that." So that's us told!

But let's go back to the beginning and find out how this remarkable woman started on the path to her life's work. Carol Kaye was born almost 88 years ago in Washington DC. She started out playing guitar as a young child and – such was her ability – by the age of 13 had moved to teaching it, as well as playing live gigs in various bands. By 1957 she was playing professionally in sessions for producer Phil Spector. One day in 1963 a bass player didn't turn up to a session at Capitol Records. Seamlessly, she switched instruments to cover for him - and never looked back.

Within a few years the legendary producer Quincy Jones had labelled her "the best bassist I've ever heard", adding she "could do anything and leave men in the dust". In 1967 Paul McCartney attributed his bass playing on the Beatles' legendary Sgt Pepper album as being inspired by her work on The Beach Boys' seminal Pet Sounds album – during which time Brian Wilson said she was "the greatest damn bass player in the world". As tributes go, they don't get much higher than those 3.

Playing Up!

HARRY GALLAGHER

But it wasn't all roses in the studio. Often, she'd be asked to play with drummers who just couldn't keep time. Bold, fearless and above all highly professional, she steered lesser players into keeping the beat, that ruthless call to move our feet. Speaking about one such drummer who will remain nameless, she recently remarked: "He was not my favourite drummer. I used to help him keep his time together because his time sense was not good. He got his experience playing in strip clubs. The other drummers got experience in big bands and jazz clubs which are more advanced. You don't get your sense of time by looking at some girl's butt!" This woman is not to be messed with!



She still views it as her work and has no time for pop's surrounding fripperies – she's just glad to be still working. Acknowledging her 88th birthday coming up on March 24th, she recently said, "Can you believe that? I'm glad I can still play. That's the wild thing. I can still play and teach!"

But let's end this short feature on "the best damn bass player in the world" with a list of some of the more famous of the 10,000+ records

she has played on. We'll take all those Motown records she played on as a 'given' – and we're talking The Supremes, Stevie Wonder, The Temptations and The Four Tops here - and instead sign off with a look at a tiny portion of her other work. You ready? Here goes ...

The Batman theme

The Beach Boys – Good Vibrations

Richie Valens – La Bamba

Ike & Tina Turner – River Deep, Mountain High

Righteous Brothers – You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'

Simon & Garfunkel – Scarborough Fair

Glen Campbell – Wichita Lineman

Frank & Nancy Sinatra – Something Stupid

The Hawaii 5-0 theme

Dirty Harry film soundtrack

Noel Harrison – The Windmills Of Your Mind

Joe Cocker – With A Little Help From My Friends

Butch Cassidy & The Sundance Kid film soundtrack

Barbra Streisand – The Way We Were

M*A*S*H theme

Mission: Impossible TV theme

Bullitt film soundtrack

The Crystals – And Then He Kissed Me

The Addams Family theme

Wonder Woman TV theme

Did we mention how versatile she is? That's me exhausted and off for a cup of tea and a listen to something quiet and soothing.

You ready, Carol ...?

<https://www.carolkaye.com/>

ckaye900@gmail.com

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9idtdWAAEA>

Line Up!

JENNIFER C. WILSON

Our resident marine biologist lines them up at the podium

There are so many avenues to explore when it comes to speed in the marine environment. As I'm finalising this article, the first episode of 'Wild Isles' has just aired, the mighty Attenborough showcasing the best of British wildlife. It features the species which is always my first thought when it comes to marine ecology - *Orcinus orca*, the killer whale.

As the second-fastest marine mammal in our waters (~35mph), it definitely deserves a mention here, but it gets pipped to the post (literally) by another regular around our coastline, the common dolphin, which can reach up to 37mph.

Thinking about being pipped to the post, I do rather like the idea of a 'Marine Ecology Olympics'. (This feels like something a future instalment of the 'Finding Nemo' franchise could, and should, explore.)



Pushing on with that theme then, what would our categories be, and our winners? Clearly, I needed to put some thought into this, because who doesn't love a bit of scandal-free Olympic excitement in a year with no Olympics actually taking place?!



We'll start nice and easy, with the sprints, and I think to be fair, we should split things into fish and mammals.

For marine mammals, we've already mentioned the killer whale and common dolphin, but actually, dig a little deeper, and some of the 'great whales' are actually pretty fast themselves. The blue whale, the largest animal to have ever graced our planet, clocks in at 35mph, with some evidence suggesting that if they really put their minds to it, they can sprint significantly faster in bursts of rapid speed. Thinking about how fast the cars go past my house, the idea of a blue whale sweeping past at the same speed is frankly terrifying!



If it's a little unclear for marine mammals then, for quick-as-a-flash fish it's slightly more agreed upon. And so... (Ed: Insert quick montage of swimming fish, to the background of 'Proud' by M People) ...

In bronze position, a solid effort from the tuna, which can reach speeds of up to 46mph.

In silver, the Wahoo (*which yes, does sound like the cheer you would make if you'd just won a silver medal, at 48mph*).

And in gold, we have... Three species. Because of

Line Up!

JENNIFER C. WILSON

course nature cannot be that neat and tidy! Therefore, we're sharing that prized medal between the swordfish (60-80mph), sailfish (68mph) and marlin (80mph). Yes, most of the time this speed is again in bursts, but still – these are not creatures you're going to want to mess with.



What about the other categories then? Synchronised swimming feels quite obvious, especially if you've ever been lucky enough to watch dolphins leaping over each other. Here's where I

get to tie in both Scotland and history, and a recommendation for you – the best dolphin-watching I've ever experienced has been from Fort George, not far from Inverness. Now open to visitors (but still containing an active barracks), it was originally built in response to the 1745 Jacobite rising, to control activities in the area. I've never not seen dolphins from the ramparts. Being on a headland, the waters of the Moray



Firth rush past, which means that at certain times it can be the marine equivalent of a rollercoaster for the animals. Yes, there's always an element of communication, perhaps 'showing off' is involved, but watching them, it definitely screams 'play' to me.

There's more dancing in the fish world; the beautiful Mandarin fish dance as part of their courtship ritual. As I said there, Mandarin fish are beautiful, but others aren't that blessed. Take the male mantis shrimp, for example. Yes, they're



colourful, but after a bit of 'paddle display' (and what girl won't have their eye caught by THAT?), the male and female again hit the floor together, moving in tandem, if the male gives a good enough 'performance'. But don't worry, gents – the sea isn't all about the men having to attract us picky girls! It's been shown that in some cichlid species, males prefer females who can display a larger pelvic fin. This preference has, over time, meant that females have grown fins which are relatively disproportionate to the rest of their body. It seems it has also been used in a very similar way to some male fish too, being used to 'scare off' other females once one spots a male they want to claim for their own. Perhaps we're erring into wrestling territory here, and a whole other set of medals to be given out!

I fear I've wandered too far from the path of 'speed' just now, so I will bring things back with something

Line Up!

JENNIFER C. WILSON

a bit philosophical.

Because perhaps the speediest thing in the ocean could be the sea herself...

Going back to that classic, educational, documentary that all marine biologists should refer to as often as possible (yes, I mean *Finding Nemo*), you should be aware of the East Australian



Current (EAC). Now sadly, this is where the film is SLIGHTLY misleading. Whilst we watch Crush and Squirt help Marlin and Dory get swept along at a frantic pace, in reality, the EAC travels at a far more sedate 90cm/s (~2mph). But hey, we'll allow them a smidge of artistic licence. Even the fastest of the great ocean currents, the mighty Gulf Stream, is only around double that, at ~4.5mph. You could still outrun it. Probably. Mind, those are the marathons of the oceans, not the sprints. Think Paula Radcliffe, rather than Usain Bolt. The Usain Bolts of currents are your 'tidal races' or 'tidal rapids', where bodies of water are forced through (relatively) narrow passages, resulting in swift currents, and other formations such as eddies, waves, or even whirlpools, like at the stunning Corryvreckan (yes, the water feature, NOT the Wetherspoons in Oban - although I've never been there that late at night...). Here, nicknamed the 'cauldron of the plaid', underwater

rock formations result in your classic whirlpool, a major tourist attraction for those brave enough to try and kayak or swim through it. In terms of speed, waters rush through the area at ~8.5knots, which equates to ~10mph.



Even in British waters though, that can be beaten by the Pentland Races, in the Pentland Firth, between the Orkney Islands and the Scottish mainland. Here, speeds can reach up to 16knots, or ~18.5mph. Not as fast as a speeding blue whale perhaps, but still up there, water-wise. I'm personally not that keen to be thrown around at that speed in the middle of open water, that's for sure!

So there we have a whistle-stop rush through some of the speediness found out in the oceans. And I would especially like it if you took away the phrase 'not as fast as a speeding blue whale' to be used as often as possible in common parlance. Thank you kindly!

As well as being a full-time marine biologist, Jennifer also writes historical fiction.

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/jenniferwilsonwriter/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/inkjunkie1984/>

Blog: <https://jenniferwilsonwriter.wordpress.com/>

Word Up!

YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF SPEED

How Time Slows

The car is parked: "Back in a sec" announces his departure,
Patting empty phone pocket, my heart thumps a panicked beat,
Until I think: "Don't be daft. it won't kill me."

Awash with a gut-deep pang of longing,
I imagine my mobile, charging, safe at home:
And berate such forgetfulness, stupidity,

My screen-free-eyes meanwhile, drift across the winter-grey street,
Vicious March-winds scratch at pedestrians,
Tree branches bend, bowing to evade its blows.

A disposable coffee-cup, scooped into a moment of joyful dancing,
Abruptly drops, lifeless, as the gust abandons its plaything.
I look at the clock: three minutes.

Restless, I examine my surroundings to discover:
A parcel receipt, three scrumpled tissues, broken pencil, half a pen, gold
sweet-wrapper (thankfully empty, sticky none-the-less),
Spying a bin, items disposed of, I return to my seat, wondering: Now what?

Minute 4.

With a wave of anxiety at productive-opportunities-lost, I cast around,
The building opposite is of solid construction:
Should I count the bricks?

Julie Wilson

Next month's theme is: ENGLAND

Feel free to interpret the theme as you see fit and send up to 3 poems
(no more than 20 lines each please) to: admin@positivelyup.co.uk

Full submission details can be found on our website: <https://positivelyup.co.uk/poetry-submissions>

Move Up!

LONGSANDS REHABILITATION

Physiotherapist Jacqueline Claydon guides us through the slow but powerful art of Tai Chi

Tell us a little about the history of Tai Chi.

Tai Chi started in ancient China thousands of years ago and is based on traditional Chinese medicine and martial arts techniques. It has now evolved into a mind-body art that is practised around the world. We don't know a lot about the early history of Tai Chi as it was often a closely guarded secret within a village. Martial arts were about building an army to protect the village, so they didn't want others to know their secret techniques. Tai Chi remained 'behind closed doors' for centuries, with students following the teachings of a particular Master. It's only more recently that Tai Chi became more open and accessible to all, but we need to respect that we have a lot to learn from those generations of knowledge before us. I have often been astounded by the extent of knowledge the ancient Chinese had about the body and how it works, and our western medicine is only just catching up.



Master Chen

The origins of Tai Chi are often shrouded in myths and legends. One legend claims a famous Taoist priest of the 15th century, Zhang Shanfeng, had superhuman abilities and immense internal power. Zhang Shanfeng is often credited as the father of Tai Chi. Tai Chi as we know it today is believed to follow on from the teachings of Master Chen



Wangting in the 16th Century. Master Chen was a retired Royal Guard of Chen village, Henan Province. He created the Chen style of Tai Chi, from which all other styles developed. There

are 5 major Tai Chi styles, which are characterised by different types of movements. The oldest, Chen style alternates soft gentle with explosive, forceful moves. I predominantly teach movements from the Yang Style - created by Yang Luchan in the early 19th century and includes more gentle movements, and the Sun Style - created by Sun Lutang in the early 1900s with its lively steps and more upright posture. I think this variety of Tai Chi styles helps make it interesting and accessible to everybody, whatever your interests and abilities. You may find you have a favourite style of Tai Chi, but learning a range of styles can be complementary and enhance your understanding.

Tai Chi is based on graceful, almost balletic, movements. How can such slow, gentle movements be effective?

Not all Tai Chi movements are graceful! If you watch someone practising Chen style Tai Chi, it's much more combative and evident it originates from a martial arts background than the Sun or Yang style that I include in my classes. However, no matter which style you practise, they all follow a set of principles that were created based on the laws of nature, helping you achieve harmony of body and mind.

As a physiotherapist, I have been drawn to Tai Chi by the proven benefits for people with

Move Up!

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arthritis, diabetes, Parkinson's and those who fall. But you don't have to have a health condition to feel the benefits. Tai Chi is physical exercise, and we know it has physical benefits such as improving your flexibility, muscle strength and fitness levels.

Increase flexibility

Tai Chi involves regular stretching of muscles and joints. This can increase flexibility which reduces stiffness, keeps joints mobile, and thus can relieve arthritic pain.



Improved muscular strength

Tai Chi is a dynamic exercise that strengthens your muscles and requires controlled muscle activity. Strong muscles help protect joints by keeping them more stable, reducing risk of injury and enabling people to be more active. Studies have shown it to be effective in strengthening muscles by 15 to 20%. So you need to be realistic – Tai Chi is going to help you protect your joints and 'firm up' your muscles, but you are not going to develop bulky muscles like you would weight training. Moving slowly improves your muscle coordination and control. Learning to control your steps, trains you to balance better.

Improved fitness

You know that saying about a duck paddling underwater? Practising Tai Chi might look calm on the surface, but there is a lot going on inside! The physical exercise increases blood flow, which stimulates our cardiorespiratory systems, strengthens our heart and lungs, and increases our stamina.

But remember Tai Chi integrates body and mind and is not purely a physical exercise. This focus on the internal structures and power of the mind is the essence behind Tai Chi and its effectiveness. We know a positive frame of mind can positively influence healing. Tai Chi teaches you to focus the mind on your movements to attain mental quietness, or Jing. This positive state of mind can reduce stress responses in the body to improve relaxation and lift your mood. A positive mindset can help you manage your perception of pain and offer a greater sense of self control. And we can take this a step further. If we can achieve a positive state of mind and be better balanced in ourselves, and we will share that positivity with those around us.

Lastly, I cannot talk about the effectiveness of Tai Chi without mentioning the power of Qi. Eastern cultures have long believed that Qi is the inner energy of a person. The aim is to cultivate a smooth, powerful flow of Qi through the body to enhance healing. In Tai Chi, we try to move in a way that opens one's energy channels and allows the Qi to flow, bringing better health and vitality. Like Yin and Yang, it is the integration of all these external and internal components producing mind and body harmony that makes Tai Chi effective.

But Tai Chi's not simply a physical exercise, is it? Can you explain a little about the philosophy behind it and how this can help with wellbeing. You're right, Tai Chi is not purely a sequence of

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LONGSANDS REHABILITATION

choreography you are trying to memorise for a performance. With Tai Chi, you follow principles that guide you how to practise and refine movements to boost your internal energy, or 'Qi'. The set of principles include external components, such as our posture and moving with slow and continuous movements, as well as internal components, where we think about loosening our joints from within or having a mental quietness. In my class, we might only learn one movement in a lesson. And we might revise this the next week, and then revise it again before we move on. This is to make sure we get the external components right, so you can focus on the internal components. New students to Tai Chi sometimes find this slow pace of learning hard, as we are so used to learning everything quickly, but this ability to take life a little slower is not necessarily a bad thing.

I might make what looks like a straight-forward movement, but with all the different layers of Tai Chi principles you are trying to apply at the same time, you really have to focus your mind. For instance, when I take a simple step, I'm also thinking about the way I make that step – how I transfer my balance, when and how I breath, whether are my joints are loose, checking my posture. With all those things going on in the background, I can't think of anything else at all. I really have to focus my mind on my movements, and this helps me achieve that mental calm. And Tai Chi has been repeatedly shown to improve inner energy and health- which derives from this integration of external and internal principles. There is a growing amount of research that demonstrates health benefits for people with a wide range of conditions. In my physiotherapy



practice I often include Tai Chi in the early stages of rehabilitation after an operation or hospital admission. I find it's a great, gentle way for people to rebuild muscle strength whilst also restoring their energy and wellbeing.

In today's busy world, how important do you think it is for us all to take time out for a bit of self-care?

I like Tai Chi because I find it a real antidote to my everyday life. I'm always rushing around, juggling many responsibilities and thinking about a million things. But when I practise my Tai Chi, it helps me to press pause and put all those things to one side. I can feel that everything is just calming down. I'm calming down. My heart rate and breathing slow. My mind is less busy. I can't think about anything else whilst I'm practising. And after I've practised, I can feel a warmth and an inner energy. It helps me to put things into perspective and I am better able to deal with whatever the day brings. I sometimes use Tai Chi if I'm feeling a bit overwhelmed by my thoughts or the stimulation around me, and Tai Chi can help me reset before I think about the next challenge. Being able to make time for yourself in the day is so important for self-care. For me, Tai Chi gives me this. And I also feel really lucky I have some amazing people in my classes to practise my Tai Chi with and spread harmony.

<https://longsandsrehabilitation.co.uk/>

<https://www.facebook.com/LongsandsRehabilitation>

<https://twitter.com/LongsandsRehab>

Speed Up!

STEVE LOWE

On your marks, get set ... go!

Meep meep ...

This is one of the most memorable sounds of my younger years, laughing at the capers of the speedy-yet-flightless bird and his constant pursuer, Wile E. Coyote, whose total lack of success in capturing his high speed quarry inevitably resulted in a protracted raspberry and the trademark sounds.



Roadrunners are real birds, not imaginary! Also known as “chaparral cocks”, they are actually members of the cuckoo family found in the deserts of southwestern and south-central

United States and Mexico. Although they can fly, they generally run away from predators. Some have been clocked at an amazing 32 km/h (20 mph) while a few have also been clocked up to 43 km/h (27 mph).

Chuck Jones, for Warner Brothers, based the coyote on Mark Twain's book “*Roughing It*”, in which Twain described the coyote as “a long, slim, sick and sorry-looking skeleton” that is “a living, breathing allegory of Want; He is always hungry.”

Ironically, the coyote can run at speeds twice as fast as the roadrunner, so I carried this into later life as a total fallacy! Add to this the running gag of the Acme Company's products that fail disastrously (Acme comes from the Greek for peak, prime or zenith) and it's obvious that Looney Tunes was an apt title!

In nature, speed isn't everything (and sometimes it's relative) but it plays its greatest role if you are a predator (to catch your food) OR prey (to escape from harm). But speed comes at a cost and many fast predators are actually light, slim and lean - being sprinters.



Everybody will know that the cheetah is the fastest land mammal and at top speed, they can go 23 feet in a single stride and can complete four strides per second. This is because they have a long, flexible spine that allows them to cover those huge distances with each stride. They also vary their strides per second as they speed up, taking more strides per second as they run faster. But they burn out quite quickly as the energy use is high. Having a very light frame also means they are vulnerable to injury, and they need lots of rest!

At the other end of the speed range are familiar species that are synonymous with low velocities. Sloths even make it into one of the deadly sins!

They actually have an extremely low metabolic rate, allowing them to move in a languid fashion through trees. In fact, they are lucky to travel any

Speed Up!

STEVE LOWE



more than 37m a day - less than half the length of a football field! Mind you they also sleep for quite a time, so perhaps comparisons with teenagers are not as far off as I thought!

Also unlikely to get a speeding ticket, snails (and slugs) have been around for 550 million years, so their longevity cannot be denied. They move by muscle constriction (no legs) and use a bed of mucus (ugh) as a "roadway", allowing them to reach an average speed of 0.03 miles per hour. Mind you, that's quite fast for a snail. Slugs are a tiny bit quicker but that's no surprise given snails carry a shell on their back, equivalent to 30% of their body weight. Has to be stated though that not all molluscs are as slow. The Humboldt squid

can surge along at a jaunty 11.2m per second! And both they and octopi use jet propulsion, squirting out oxygenated water, quickly expelled out like a siphon, impelling them along quickly (usually in a screen of ink).

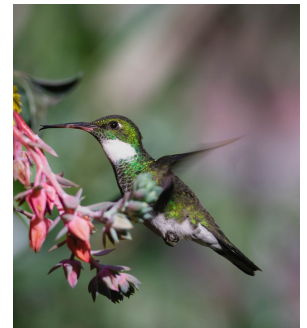
We don't have jet propelled birds (imagine that!) but the swift (as its name suggests) is quick - lightening quick. The fastest species, in level flight, they are superbly aerobic. Their shape adds to this ability and they manage to actually look fast, like an arrow. Only landing to nest, the rest of their life is spent on the wing. I enjoy seeing these birds arrive over my house (they have nested too) and evenings listening to them shrieking through the air makes me think these speed merchants are revelling in their skills.



Faster still is the peregrine falcon, although this is only true when they are in a steep dive, or stoop. Imagine a racing pigeon, itself no slouch, charging along nonchalantly, only to

be whacked out of the sky by a hungry peregrine traveling at 220 to 240 miles per hour - faster than a Formula One car driven by Valerie Bottas! Certainly maintaining that speed and accuracy whilst plummeting through the sky is a wonder.

Hummingbirds, as slight as they are, also come into the fast category. In this instance, it's the rate of wing beats that is high. Birds as light as 4 grams can beat their wings 50-60 times every single second! That's a



total blur and all that requires a high energy food, hence they enjoy a nectar/sugary diet in order to allow them to hover so accurately in order to probe deep into flowers (they act as pollinators in many cases).

Speed Up!

STEVE LOWE



At the total opposite end of the bird world though are flightless birds like the ostrich or emu. The ostrich can achieve 43 mph due to enormously powerful legs – making them the fastest animal on two legs! They also have amazing stamina that allows them to maintain high speeds for long periods – imagine a marathon in 40 minutes! Wow! And those wings, useless for flight, act to maintain balance a bit like tucking in our elbows when we run. Not that this would be a race that any human could win.

In the seas, the fastest species are fish. Black Marlin and Sailfish, both spectacular and powerful species, with the marlin reaching 82 mph. Given this

also accounts for travelling in the more resistant salt water, the characteristics of fast fish are slim, sleek body forms, powerful muscles and long lives, which also applies to the speedy tuna family, which have recently been recorded on the east coast of England where they were once commonplace.

Not even the most athletic of Olympic swimmers like Michael Phelps, would escape from the Mako Shark, its streamlined torpedo-shape powering its mouth full of razor-sharp teeth to an impressive 40 mph. But the related Greenland Shark is also worth a mention here as what it lacks in speed, it makes up for in stealth.

Feeding on seals and other marine animals, the Greenland Shark is almost imperceptible in its movement, with the occasional slow sweep of its tail fin propelling it slowly along as it sneaks up on its prey hidden by the darkness of the arctic waters. Living up to 400 years and growing up to 1.5 tons, you would think it would be obvious in an attack but it appears to be a successful top predator (and fossil records suggest it is ancient) and is thought to use short bursts of speed to complete its ambush. Interestingly, scientists have identified a natural “anti-freeze” in its tissues, explaining why it is considered poisonous. One of these amazing but rare animals was found dead on a beach in Northumberland in 2014 and is now in the Natural History Museum.



Photo credit [here](#)

Speed Up!

STEVE LOWE

However, having said all of this, we haven't yet met the fastest organism yet! When you think "fast," I would bet my house that you didn't think "fungus." As odd as this may sound, it's true.

A type of fungus called *Pilobolus crystallinus* (otherwise known as the 'Hat Thrower' or the 'Dung Cannon fungi') actually deserves the title



of one of the fastest known things on our planet. It can reach speeds exceeding those of an Olympic gold medallist and its acceleration is even more impressive!

Moving 0 - 20km/h in 2 millionths of a second, it can literally go from zero to one hundred in the blink of an eye (at its fastest, it moves 300 kilometres per hour, according to the video by which it was measured). Put this another way, that is the equivalent to a human being moving at 100 times the speed of sound. And all to ensure its spores get into the wind and find that next pile of poop!

Meep meep ...



An experienced wildlife professional, Steve currently works freelance with Northumberland Rivers Trust as well as undertaking work with volunteers on local heritage and archaeology projects.

His hope is to leave the world a better place.



Write Up!

Come and join Bridget and Harry for a quick chat followed by a precious hour of your own creative time. There's nothing like being able to set aside a little time in the company of other creative people and seeing what you come up with!

The next of these regular zoom session will take place on **Thursday 20th April, 7pm - 8pm (GMT)** with joining instructions on the Up! facebook group page.



Word Up!

YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF SPEED

Speed Freak

The exhilaration of acceleration
Spreads across his face
As he leans out of the window
Into that forbidden space

Head hung, teeth bared
In an unending joyful grin
Here's a canine wonder
Who loves going for a spin

Ears flapping
in the wind blown breeze
He's the epitome of felicity
Sitting with consummate ease

He sniffs the air
His fur is sleek
He loves the rush of velocity
Because he's a puppy speed freak

Aaron Wright

Hare's Folly

Tortoise goes steady
Hare hurtles, up for the chase
One rest lost the race

Aaron Wright

DREAM & UNDEAM

Music to my soul
Your rolling eyes
Open the door
To endless laughter
Dug from the depths of truth

Music to my soul
Bird in flight
Soars above cares
Buoyed in ethereal
Sublime in its own world

Music to my soul
The lapping river
Peace from the mountains
Endless supply of calm
Under the red sun.

Music to my soul
When the guns go dumb
Our hands warm in embrace
Our steps in a dance:
No more war, no more war.

Music to my soul
Blades of dream
Knifed me awake
To the real world.

Nattie O'Sheggy

Read Up!

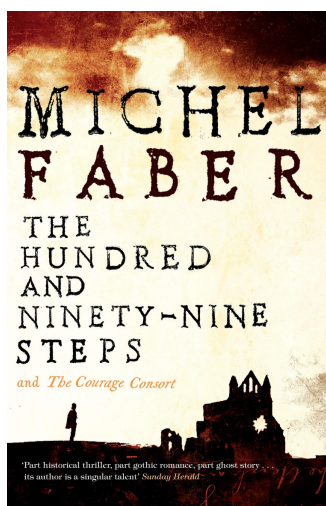
JENNA WARREN

Reads so quick, the pages turn themselves!



For this month's theme of 'speed', I thought I'd recommend some 'quick' reads: short novels and novellas. I've seen novellas defined in various ways, but for the benefit of this article, I'm going to look at books that are approximately 20,000 to 50,000 words long (but please don't quote me on this – I haven't counted!). They generally come in at less than or around 200 pages, so they're perfect to read over the course of a couple of days.

I realised while writing this column that all of my favourite novellas have some element of the surreal or fantastic. I'm not quite sure why this is. Maybe these reality blurring stories work particularly well when distilled into a shorter format?



My first recommendation is *The Hundred and Ninety-Nine Steps* by Michel Faber. This wonderfully atmospheric novella is set in contemporary Whitby, and follows Sian, who is staying in the town while she participates in an archaeological dig near the abbey. Sian is troubled by memories of her past and concerns about her health, and she's also being haunted by dark dreams. The dig leads her to slowly uncover the mystery of a murder that happened far in the past.

This novella is part ghost story and part historical mystery, and there's a romance element, too, so there's plenty going on in such a short book! It's beautifully written, and a fantastic evocation of Whitby. Anyone who knows the town will enjoy spotting familiar landmarks, including The White Horse and Griffin Hotel, where Sian stays. Faber perfectly captures the atmosphere of a place where the past feels ever present.

Mrs Caliban by Rachel Ingalls is a brilliantly weird and unexpectedly touching novella about love, grief, and what it means to be human. Dorothy lives in the Californian suburbs and is grieving the loss of her young son. Her husband is unfaithful and mainly absent: the couple barely talk to one another. One day, Dorothy starts hearing strange announcements on the radio: apparently, a monstrous sea creature has just escaped from the nearby Institute for Oceanographic Research. She wonders if she's heard this correctly – and then the sea monster turns up in her kitchen.

The sea monster is a humanoid aquatic being – a 'Frogman' – and his name is Larry. He's on the run from the Institute, where he was tortured and



Read Up!

JENNA WARREN

experimented on. It transpires that he attacked his keepers in order to escape. He begs Dorothy for help.

Dorothy hides Larry in the spare room. He turns out to be far better company than her estranged husband, and the two begin a passionate affair (I did say it was weird). However, Larry longs to return to the ocean, so Dorothy makes plans to help him.

This novella is bizarre and funny, but it also has a pervading atmosphere of melancholy. You never quite know if Larry is real, or some sort of manifestation of Dorothy's longing for connection. The ending is both sad and ambiguous, but it's still a beautiful story (partly because of this ambiguity). It's open to many interpretations, and it has stayed with me for a very long time.



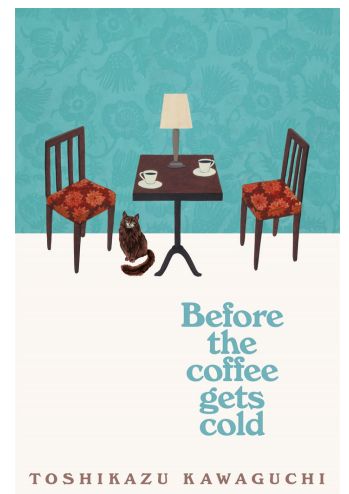
Another novella that uses magic realism to interesting effect is *A Good Year* by Polis Loizou. Set in rural Cypress, this novella takes place over the twelve days of Christmas, with a chapter for each day. It explores a community haunted by local folktales of the kalikantzari. According to folklore, these creatures are small, hairy beings, a bit like goblins. Every year, they come up from Hell to wreak havoc on the human world over the Christmas period.

Despo is recently married, and in the final days of her pregnancy. She's afraid of what's to come, and she finds herself thinking of these old stories and fearing the arrival of the kalikantzari. Meanwhile, her husband Loukas finds himself attracted to an Englishman, a newcomer to Cyprus. The lives of both characters are affected by superstition, and the novella is partly about them

overcoming fear and gaining agency. This is an unusual and intriguing story.

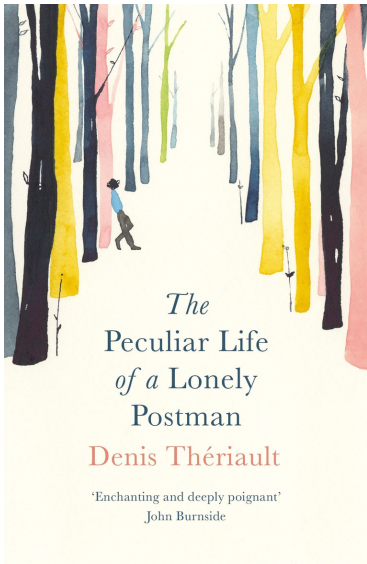
Before the Coffee Gets Cold by Toshikazu Kawaguchi is a gentle and magical short novel set in Tokyo. The action centres around a café where patrons can travel back in time to a point in their past. However, there are strict rules: the time traveller must sit in a particular seat (and only when the seat is vacated by the café's resident ghost), they must return to the present before the coffee gets cold, and they cannot change the past, even if they want to.

Through the course of the novel, we meet four different characters who wish to visit the past – and in one case, the future – for different reasons. Although they can't change anything, they all leave with new insight into the events they experience for a second time. The book feels episodic, almost like a collection of linked short stories, and it has a lovely touch of humour and whimsy.



Read Up!

JENNA WARREN



My final recommendation this month is *The Peculiar Life of a Lonely Postman* by Denis Thériault. The main character, Bilodo, is a postman who lives vicariously through others by steaming open and reading their letters. One day, he happens upon a letter containing a haiku, and he realises he's witnessing the romantic correspondence between a renowned poet and a teacher. When the poet dies in an accident, Bilodo is so keen for the correspondence to continue that he adopts his persona, writing haiku himself. He falls in love with the teacher through the medium of haiku. However, it's not long before this (admittedly rather creepy) correspondence comes under threat.

This is a surreal novella written with real beauty and delicacy, with a main character who provoked ambivalent feelings in me as a reader. It's very clever, and a masterclass in crafting an intricate plot in a short page count.

I hope you enjoy these speedy reads!

*Jenna Warren is a bookseller and writer from Teesside. She studied Theatre and later Creative Writing at university. She runs [Book Corner](#), an independent bookshop in Saltburn-by-the-Sea. Her debut novel, *The Moon and Stars*, was published in 2022 by [Fairlight Books](#).*



The hurrier I go, the behinder I get.

Lewis Carroll

*You must understand, young Hobbit, it takes a long time to say anything in Old Entish.
And we never say anything unless it is worth taking a long time to say.*

J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers*

*... haste can do nothing with these hills. I knew when I had looked for a long time
that I had hardly begun to see.*

**Nan Shepherd, *The Living Mountain: A Celebration of
the Cairngorm Mountains of Scotland***

Coming Up!

So here we are at the finishing post. Got your breath back? Here at Up! HQ, of course, we no sooner finish one race than we immediately begin preparing for the next.

Next month is of course April - the birthday of Shakespeare combined with the celebration of St George's Day. So we couldn't let it go by without an issue that celebrates the best of England.

We thought long and hard about this. I'm sure no-one needs reminding that our country has seen turbulent days recently, but despite this, England has much to be positive about and it's so important to hang on to that. After all, Up! is nothing if not about highlighting and celebrating the positive.

So next month's Up! will be jam packed with the best that England can offer. Until then remember to slow down, take time for yourself and continue to look out for each other.

Love
Bridget & Harry xx



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