

# Running the new gauge of economic health

Sam McKeith

Pat Carroll says that as the economy expands, so does his running group.

The veteran coach says the number of bankers, stockbrokers and accountants pounding the pavement under his charge has ballooned this year as workloads increase, pushing his group to a record 350 participants.

"They're all corporate types, that's the crowd, and with more work on at the office it's a good social outlet for them," Brisbane-based Carroll says.

"After they knock over an honest session they can hit the day and conquer a lot more."

It's not only Carroll's running group that has swollen this year — numbers at fun runs across the country are surging.

A record 10,000 runners competed in *The Sydney Morning Herald* Half Marathon yesterday — a capacity number for the event. Organisers had to turn away hundreds more in the past few weeks.

Entrants for Victoria's Great Ocean Road marathon, also held yesterday, were up about 40 per cent on last year, at 3575.



**A record 10,000 runners competed in *The Sydney Morning Herald* Half Marathon yesterday.**

Photo: STEVE CHRISTO

In Brisbane, entrants for the Twilight Running Festival in March surged by 50 per cent, to 3100. It included a half marathon and 10 kilometre fun run.

The founder and president of the

Australian Cool Running website, Kevin Tiller, says some firms are encouraging workers to take up running in an attempt to boost productivity.

"There is a bit of a push from com-

panies to get people out doing fitness and some are encouraging staff to get out of the office and run to stay fresh," Tiller says.

"You can go before or after work or at lunchtime, and it's a solo sport which suits many office workers. It's not like soccer where you have 22 people — you may have got long hours but that doesn't stop you going for a run at midnight."

He has also noticed plenty of online chatter from recently converted runners fleeing the expense of the gym.

"People are sick of the monthly fees, looking for a cheaper way to stay fit and saying, 'Why don't I keep the gym gear, lose the fees, and take up running instead,'" he says.

Brisbane running equipment store Intraining says sales are booming this year.

Manager Ricky Swindale says demand is strong for running shoes, breathable tops and pricey gadgets, and has soared for electronic running monitors.

"Heart-rate monitors and GPS systems are very popular at the moment," he says.

Swindale suspects many customers are running out frustrations from the office. "If you're down about something, whether it's money or the boss, you can go running and get the endorphins flowing."