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Primal: Men and women are attracted to the tough physical and mental challenge of a Tough Mudder course.

If you like a fitness challenge, prepare for the ultimate test, says **ALEXANDER FYNES-CLINTON**

So you think you're an exercise addict? Try this for an extreme endorphin hit. Tough Mudder, visiting Australia for the very first time, will have you begging for mercy.

"It's a 16km military-style obstacle course designed by British special forces," says event spokesman Alexander Patterson.

"Participants will be doing things like running through a gauntlet of hay bales that are on fire, climbing monkey bars that ascend upward like a pyramid over freezing cold water, dunking themselves through a dumpster full of ice water and running up and over hills and into mud pits.

"And then there's electro-shock therapy – 10,000 volts of live, dangling electric wire that'll knock a grown man on his arse – it's intense. On average, only 78 per cent of participants finish."

The brainchild of former British counter-terrorism official Will Dean, Tough Mudder is the antidote to an

increasingly clean-cut, scientific modern fitness culture.

"(Dean) identified that fitness was becoming so sanitised," Patterson says

"He was sick of heart-rate monitors specific-interval training and grown men shaving their legs and putting on Spandex to have a work out.

"He wanted to get back to the grittiness. Climb over this wall and get yourself a beer when it's all said and done."

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

So far, it seems a lot of people share Dean's vision. More than 150,000 have taken part in the 14 Tough Mudder events held in the US so far.

The response has been so overwhelming that the event will visit the UK, Canada and Australia in the coming months.

"There's a desire, even a need, to get out there and challenge yourself to

see how much mental and physical grit you have – to see if you can survive something that will at times test you, shock you and challenge you," Patterson says.

"Tough Mudder is an antidote to the modern world. You need more than ever to have that primal kind of experience to challenge yourself."

While Tough Mudder takes a lot of individual strength to navigate, the course couldn't be completed without teammates, with co-operation key.

"From the very first mile you're relying on your buddies to get through," Patterson says.

"A lot of the obstacles, you need your friends there to do it – and having them there makes completing the course worthwhile.

"When you're friend is slipping off the balance beam or has come through the ice and looks like they're about to die – it brings you together.

"We've had teams of 40 or 50 people and we've had pairs of two. There's no right or wrong way."

Patterson says interested participants should train across a variety of disciplines to succeed.

"If you have the upper-body strength of Keira Knightley, you should go and run a marathon. Our event requires all-around fitness.

"You have to be in good running condition, but pull-ups, push-ups, planks, squats and grip strength are all paramount.

"We get a lot of people who train through a lot of different exercises – they do very well."

Through all the shocks, mud and gruelling hill runs, there is a method to the Mudder's madness – charity.

"In the US we've raised over \$2 million dollars for a wounded veterans charity, and in Australia we'll be encouraging competitors to get behind Legacy, which supports war widows of fallen soldiers.

"There are people who are doing this for real. They're not just crawling under barbed wire for a thrill, they're doing it to protect us and it's important that we give back."

Visit: www.toughmudder.com to register for the Melbourne event on March 31 and April 1.