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JOURNAL ARTICLES

Parkour Basics

Part 4: The Tic-Tac and Wall Run

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Parkour is inherently vertical. For most of the rest of the population, the only vertical movement involves elevators or stairs, but for the traceur, every vertical surface is an opportunity to choose a different path. There are numerous techniques for scaling the vertical objects that lie throughout the urban environment (and innumerable techniques for surmounting those found in nature). Learning the basics of the tic-tac and wall run will give you a good understanding of the transference of momentum from the horizontal plane up and over the various vertical obstacles you may encounter.

The tic-tac is the foundation of these vertical movements, being a quick and efficient method for applying the momentum from your run along the ground to any number of objects that may aid in your ascent. In its most basic form, a tic-tac is nothing more than making your last step before take-off a boost off an object that gives you extra height and/or distance to make your next move faster or more efficient. You can use anything from small walls to benches or stumps. You should attempt to create a seamless transition between your approach run, your first step onto

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The Tic-Tac and Wall Run (continued...)

the object, and your final leap from it. Practicing this basic idea on a small retaining wall is a great way to learn the movement pattern of the tic-tac, as you can dial in running speed and coordination by creating a cadence that you follow for each successive step, ending in a powerful boost from the top of the wall into the air. From there it's a matter of focusing on your landing and retreat as you continue on your way.

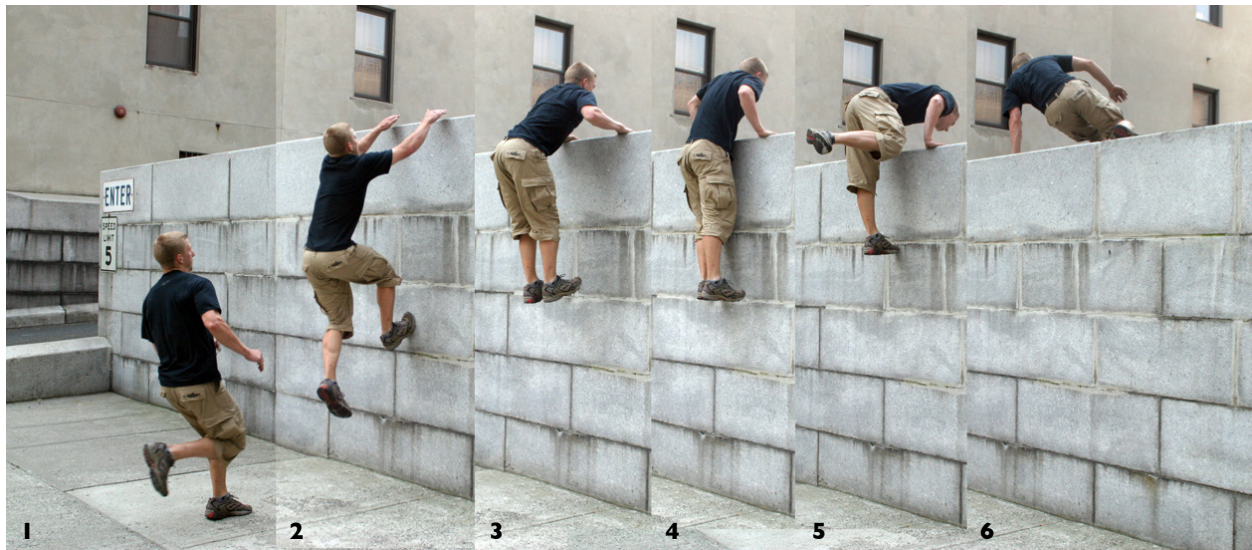
Once you learn to take advantage of any small obstacle that can add a boost, you can move to the more unlikely technique of using vertical surfaces to transfer the momentum from your run into a vertical path. Keeping a consistent running cadence, you will use your final horizontal step to boost yourself up toward the vertical surface in a lunge, then press down and out when your foot comes in contact with the obstacle, maximizing the vertical gain as much as possible on this step. With this technique you can overcome an obstacle or boost yourself to a higher level to continue on your way.

The precise balance between the vertical push to gain height and the horizontal push against the wall to maintain traction is of utmost importance, yet it is also highly individual. The proportion of these two factors

can vary a bit depending on the properties of the surface, the traction of your footwear, and your own strength, coordination, and flexibility. In general, I find it best to shoot for a perfect 50/50 mix of vertical and horizontal push, resulting in what would amount to a 45-degree angle of trajectory relative to the ground.

As you quickly explode from this powerful step onto the vertical surface, you should turn your head toward your path of travel and continue the striding motion by propelling your trailing knee and your hands up and out in the direction you intend to continue. The steps for all good jumps and landings (as discussed in last month's issue) apply here, as you will tuck in the air and then extend toward the ground as you approach your landing area. Roll, crouch, or transition directly back into a run as the situation dictates and you'll be on your way.

It takes a bit of practice to find the proper coordination for this movement, but as the pieces begin to come together you'll begin to realize the amazing amount of height and distance you can obtain with the tic-tac. The trick is essentially to maximize your vertical gain and use this to sustain momentum through your finishing leap and on into your chosen direction.



Run directly at a wall that is slightly higher than body height using even, powerful steps and a steady cadence.

Take your final step about three feet away from the base of the wall. Lean your upper body slightly forward and try to maximize your vertical momentum.

Carry your momentum all the way to the beginning of your pull.

Once you master the transition into the pull, you will find your way into a quick support on top of the wall.

Kip your hips rearward to go directly into your topout

Apply the basics of vaulting technique to carry you up and over the wall.

The Tic-Tac and Wall Run (continued...)

Once you begin to grasp the concept of the tic-tac, two more movements become possible: the pop or tap vault, which uses a quick step on a medium-sized wall to boost you directly into a vault, and a wall run, in which you use one or more steps to gain vertical height up a taller object, most often to grab the top, perform a quick top-out, and continue on your way. Though we have been making a gradual progression from ground-level to ever-higher paths, the wall-run seems to be more of a stepping-stone to the pop-vault than vice versa. Once you grasp the technique for overcoming taller objects, the transition to the faster technique on smaller obstacles will come much easier.

If you have mastered the balance of vertical and horizontal thrust required for maximizing your travel

in a tic-tac, the wall run is merely a matter of applying this technique in a slightly different plane of motion. To execute it, run directly at a wall that is slightly higher than body height using even, powerful steps. A steady cadence on your approach leads to better coordination as you reach the obstacle. Take your final step about three feet away from the base of the object. If you were standing still, you could place your foot on the wall at about hip level with only a slight forward lean. As you propel yourself toward the wall, your upper body will lean slightly forward and you will be trying to maximize your momentum up and over the top. As your foot makes contact with the wall, all the basics of the tic-tac apply, as you will attempt to maximize your vertical momentum by creating the perfect mix of horizontal



Approach a wall or small object with speed and confidence; maintain a steady cadence in your steps.

Make your last step on the ground a powerful lunge. The perfect mix of traction and vertical gain for your step on a vertical surface takes lots of practice.

As you boost off of the wall, turn your head in the direction of travel and propel your trailing knee up and toward your intended direction.

Tuck in the air, then extend to meet the ground before absorbing the impact.

The Tic-Tac and Wall Run (continued...)

and vertical thrust. Your body will begin to move away from the wall, but the vertical gain you created will allow you to grab for the top edge. If the coordination is spot-on, you will be able to retain your upward momentum to the point where you begin to pull your upper body toward the top.

At this point, your lead leg will be moving straight down. Bring your trailing leg up, bending at the knee and using its traction on the wall to counter-balance the pull of your hands. As you begin your upper-body pull, press down with this foot as much as traction will allow while kipping your lead leg back and up at the hip. If you coordinate all of these separate elements correctly, you should be able to carry your momentum from the approach, into the wall, upward a the wall, and directly into the beginning of your pull. From there, your kip will continue to boost you in a vertical direction as you pull your hands toward your chest while pulling your elbows behind you (imagine the transition of a muscle-up). If you get the coordination right, you will quickly transition into a support on top of the wall. As you become more adept at this movement, these separate pieces will come together as one smooth action, putting you on top of some surprisingly tall objects more easily than you may imagine.

Once you master the wall run, the transition to a pop vault will be relatively easy, since it's essentially the same movement pattern performed powerfully on a smaller wall. As you boost into the support, your kip will carry your hips above the top of the wall, and then the basics of all vaulting technique will take over as you tuck your knees up, elevate your hips, push off with your arms, and then extend toward the landing area and carry on your way.

These few basic movements will open up new and exciting possibilities for the paths you can choose within your environment. Once you are free of the obstructions that constrain you to the average horizontal plane, you can begin to imagine the potential for unhindered motion at any time, and through any area of your choosing.



Jesse Woody, age 26, father of two, has about eight years experience in fitness and nutrition (though a lot of that was time wasted on bodybuilding). He works in various capacities for the Woodberry Forest School in Virginia, including working with the outdoor education department and, currently, transitioning to head strength and conditioning coach. He's been practicing parkour for three years (and CrossFit for a little over one), though he's acted like a monkey his entire life. He is an administrator and frequent content contributor for the [American Parkour website](#).