

When you picture **mountain** climbers scaling Mount Everest, what probably comes to mind are teams of climbers with Sherpa guides **leading** them to the summit, equipped with oxygen masks, **supplies** and tents. And in most **cases** you'd be right, as 97 **per** cent of climbers use oxygen to ascend to Everest's summit at **8,850** metres above **sea** level. The thin **air** at high altitudes makes most people breathless at **3,500** metres, and the vast majority of climbers use oxygen past **7,000** metres. A **typical** climbing **group** will have **8–15** people in it, with an almost equal number of guides, and they'll spend weeks to get to the top after reaching Base Camp. But ultra-distance and **mountain** runner Kilian Jornet Burgada ascended the **mountain** in May **2017** alone, without an oxygen **mask** or **fixed** ropes for climbing. Oh, and he did it in **26** hours. With food poisoning. And then, five days later, he did it again, this time in only **17** hours. Born in **1987**, Kilian has been **training** for Everest his whole life. And that really does mean his whole life, as he **grew** up **2,000** metres **above** sea level in the Pyrenees in the ski resort of Lles de Cerdanya in Catalonia, north-eastern Spain. While other children his **age** were **learning** to walk, Kilian was on skis. At one and a half years old he did a five-hour hike with his mother, **entirely** under his own steam. He left his peers even **further** behind when he climbed his first **mountain** and competed in his first cross-country ski **race** at **age** three. By **age** seven, he had scaled a 4,000er and, at ten, he did a 42-day crossing of the Pyrenees. He was **13** when he says he started to take it 'seriously' and **trained** with the Ski Mountaineering Technical Centre (CTEMC) in Catalonia, entering competitions and working with a coach. At **18**, he took over his own ski-mountaineering and trail-running training, with a **schedule** that only allows a couple of weeks of rest a year. He does as many as **1,140** hours of endurance **training** a year, **plus** strength **training** and technical workouts as well as specific **training** in the week before a race. For his record-breaking ascent and descent of the Matterhorn, he **prepared** by climbing the **mountain** ten times until he knew every **detail** of it, even **including** where the **sun** would be shining at every part of the day. Sleeping only **seven** hours a night, Kilian Jornet seems almost superhuman. His resting heartbeat is extremely **low** at **33** beats **per** minute, **compared** with the average **man's** **60** **per** minute or an athlete's **40** **per** minute. He breathes more efficiently than **average** people too, taking in more oxygen **per** breath, and he has a much **faster** recovery time after **exercise** as his body **quickly** breaks down lactic acid – the acid in muscles that causes pain after exercise. All this is thanks to his **childhood** in the mountains and to genetics, but it is his mental **strength** that sets him apart. He **often** sets himself challenges to see how long he can endure **difficult** conditions in order to **truly** understand what his body and mind can cope with. For example, he almost gave himself kidney **failure** after only **drinking** 3.5 litres of water on a 100km run in temperatures of around 40°C. It would take a book to **list** all the races and awards he's **won** and the mountains he's climbed. And even here, Kilian's achievements exceed the **average** person as, somehow, he **finds** time to **record** his **career** on his **blog** and has **written** three books, Run or Die, The Invisible Border and Summits of My Life.