

THE NORTH FACE ENDURANCE SEVEN CHALLENGE

Written by ALI DAWSON

Running a marathon can be daunting, even for an experienced endurance athlete. But running seven marathons in seven states in seven days... Is Guy Andrews just overly competitive?

GUY ANDREWS is known by most as a former ironman champion. Often compared to fellow ironman champions such as Trevor Hendy, Grant Kenny and Guy Leech. Andrews won the Australian Ironman Championship in 1993 and is a three-time winner of the Uncle Tobys Ironman Super Series.

But with his professional ironman career over, Andrews is out to take on the best in the highly-competitive sport of endurance/adventure racing. Having already won the Anaconda Adventure Race and Queensland Championship earlier this year, Andrews recently set out to complete something no one had ever done: run-



ning seven marathons in seven states in seven days in The North Face Endurance Seven Challenge.

"I do a lot of adventure racing and I have my ironman experience, but I am not really a runner, so this was a daunting event for me. [I like]

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exploring my limits and pushing my personal perspective. I am a big fan of getting out there and having a go at something, no matter what your level is," Andrews explains.

While most marathon runners are content to run the 42km on relatively flat, even roads, Andrews opted to tackle tougher off-road tracks navi-

gated by Magellan GPS.

As a born-and-bred Queensland, a marathon in the Gold Coast Hinterland was first on the agenda. Kicking off at midnight in order to adhere to a strict travelling schedule, Andrews and his support team

were confronted by driving rain and treacherous conditions. Thinking he was prepared for most situations, Andrews found the weather difficult to overcome.

"I was really surprised at how quickly the storm front could turn the track from an accessible trail to a mixture of rock ledges, muddy pools and fallen debris. The mist also limited the scope of the head lamp I was using and slowed the time considerably".

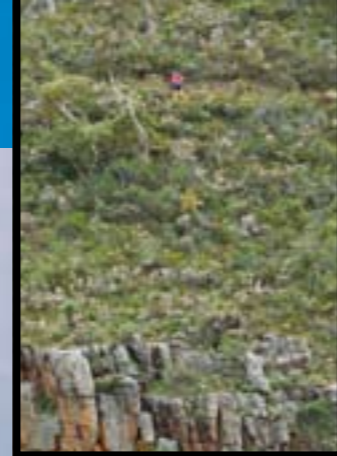
With visibility down to only three metres, Andrews managed to negotiate through the tough terrain in the middle of the night. After running more than 42km and having no sleep at all, the 35-year-old and his team

flew to the Northern Territory for the second leg of the race.

Hot and dry conditions in the country's centre are always going to prove difficult for even the most experienced marathon runner, but Andrews was determined to take in as much of the landscape as he could. After the difficult run through the Gold Coast Hinterland less than 24 hours earlier, he could have been forgiven for electing to run an 'easier' course. But he chose to take in the sights of the famous Laparinta Trail at Alice Springs. Wanting to reach the Simpson's Gap by the leg's end, Andrews upped the distance to a punishing 46km.

"I might have been asking for trouble by running those extra kilometres. But it's so beautiful here in the outback; you get in rhythm and keep going!" Andrews exclaims.

After his desert run, it was on to Western Australia for Andrews, who



was feeling strong despite running two marathons in two days. Setting out just before 5am in order to take advantage of the cooler conditions, Andrews battled the tricky Bibbulmun Track outside Perth. For a 'non-marathon' runner, the pace was quick early, with the half-way mark being passed in just over 2.5 hours.

"I felt really strong this morning, and the medical tests showed I wasn't too dehydrated after the heat in Alice Springs. I set a pretty good pace early, and the track was treating me well in the first 15-20kms," Andrews explains.

Despite some difficult hilly sections that caused him to drop his split times, he continued on and reached the finish line well inside his anticipated time. According to the former ironman champion, completing the Western Australian leg was very rewarding:

"I was stoked to get number three under my belt. I was really surprised at how difficult the Gold Coast run was, and I always knew the Alice would take a lot out of me. But I think I have bounced back from those well".

Continuing to make his way around the country, Andrews next visited South Australia to take on the Yarrabilla Trail. Winding its way from the Norton Summit, through the Morialta and Black Hill Conservation Parks and following the Torrens River into the centre of Adelaide, Andrews was happy to see the leg broken up into a variety of bike paths and steep rocky inclines.

"The other legs have been pretty consistent; Gold Coast had a thick overhead tree canopy and was extremely soggy the whole way through, and Alice Springs was predictably hot and dry. We weren't sure what to expect in Adelaide. But it was a great run - definitely one of the most picturesque, as well as being physically challenging."

Feeling the strain of running 168km in less than 72 hours, Andrews

carried an ankle strain into his fourth marathon in as many days. But he credited his support crew for taking all necessary precautions in order to achieve their 7 marathons in 7 days goal.

"I had a great support crew. My physio Phil Walshe worked out a specific recovery session for me after every event, depending on my condition. I also had five pairs of off-road shoes, various hydration packs and other specific endurance running equipment".

Not wanting to miss out on Tasmania's amazing wilderness, day five saw Andrews and crew travel to the Tasman National Park. The fifth marathon was to prove the most difficult, with heavy inclines and tight trails testing him the entire journey.

Despite taking in the beautiful sights at Australia's highest sea cliffs at Cape Pillar, Andrews admitted he was a bit shaky as he ran the cliff's edge.

"I don't like heights at the best of times, but my body had taken so much in the last five days that it was pretty nerve racking. It was blowing at about 80kms an hour up there, so it was pretty tricky. I just looked straight ahead and kept going".

With his epic marathon running adventure closing in on the final



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race, the next stop for Andrews was Victoria, a state that has produced many champion distance runners in recent years.

Starting out at the Torquay Surf Club, the North Face crew wound its way down the coast along walking tracks and hiking trails, taking in some beautiful beaches on its way to Lorne. Despite the picturesque views, Andrews confessed he was too 'busy' to really appreciate them.

"It was a perfect day - blue skies, little bit of wind, and not too hot. But I wasn't too keen on taking it slow to take in the view. This one hurt, and I had to keep varying my pace to stop the cramps and fatigue. We were also running on sand for much of the way, and that made it tough."

After running more than 250km in less than a week, the finish line was in sight for Andrews as he began his final marathon in Sydney. Commencing at Manly Wharf on Sydney's Northern Beaches, Andrews traced the NSW coastline and wound his way through the heart of Sydney down to Circular Quay.

Not one to complete a task like this the easy way, Andrews elected to bring his journey to an end high above the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

Now able to boast the title of the only person to run seven marathons in

seven states in seven days, Andrews could hardly contain his excitement at his achievement.

"I am just so stoked to have achieved this. It felt so good to cross the finish line and have everyone there to share this with me."

This isn't the end for Andrews' marathon adventures. Andrews has joined forces with Formula 1 driver Mark Webber to take on the Webber Pure Tasmania Challenge. A six-day gruelling adventure race combining cross-country trekking, mountain biking, road cycling and kayaking, Andrews will be competing against the likes of Australian distance running king, Craig 'Buster' Mottram.

In the long term, Andrews is looking forward to running a competitive marathon (just one at a time, however!). He has clocked 48 minutes for the City to Surf in previous years, but admits adventure races take priority at the moment.

"I have plans to try something similar every year. Next I would like to attempt seven marathons on seven continents in seven days. My imagination is my only limitation!"

For now though, Andrews is taking a break from running sandy hills, muddy swamps and grassy trenches. Well deserved, I'm sure all would agree! ☺