

GOLD COAST 48HR TRACK RACE



Let the battle begin!

Martin "Phibes" "Flyer" Fryer competed in the Gold Coast 48hr event this year, his first 48hr event. With a series of successes over shorter distance there was an air of excitement at the prospect. The result was a distance of 346.116km, a national championship and 4th position on the all-time best 48hr distances run in Australia. Martin talks us through what he has labelled his absolutely amazing experience.

A RACE like this is a powerful emotional experience because it knocks your mind and body flat to the floor time and time again over several days without the luxury of a decent night's sleep. Somehow you have to pick yourself up, get out there again, start putting one foot in front of the other, and hope that the various aches and pains diminish as you warm up again.

The first day for me went fairly much to plan: to reach the 190–200km zone by the end of the day, as long as the overall stress level was kept low. In the first 3hrs, I was shocked to see Tony Collins and Shaun Scanlon belt out a few 10–11km hours, but I decided to stick to my own pacing schedule. The track started to get a bit hot for my liking during the afternoon, so my conservative run/walk plan was the way to go, giving me a reasonably

comfortable 6hr split of just over 55km. Most of my crewing on Friday daytime was done by my sister Justine, who did a great job of getting me through to the evening in good shape. Andrew Cohen and Ron Schwebel kindly helped out until Lisa (CoolRunning's (CR) Vegie Girl) turned up to crew for both me and CR Davo.

The 6hr race runners absolutely smoked the laps around us on Friday night from 7pm to 1am. That brought a new sense of energy to the track after we had been going for more than 10hrs. As they fought it out with a starting pace of near 14km/h, it made us 48hr dudes look like a bunch of snails.

As usual, I felt much better when it started to cool in the evening. By 9pm (12hrs) I had covered 106km with my running pace remaining quite consistent. Between 6hrs and 12hrs Tony had dropped his pace off, and Sean Swain (who was moving well early on) went off track never to return. I think his Kokoda effort a few weeks ago finally took its toll. Despite many interruptions for pee breaks (at least one per hr, at about 1.5 min each), I felt really good and belted out some great laps between midnight and 2am. It was all coming together, with one of my chosen music tracks playing over the PA system: the Church's "Under the Milky Way".

There were only a handful of competitors on the track in the wee hours, as some runners had elected to rest or sleep during the graveyard shift.

Tony Collins was one of them (which had me wondering whether I was doing the right thing staying on the track), so Robert Boyce and Deryck Skinner moved up into 2nd and 3rd spots. Robert has only been running for 3 years, so completing another 100 miles in 24hrs showed what fine potential he has for the future. Deryck, a 73-year-old walker with many Australian age records to his name, was smoothly and determinedly cranking out 7.5–8km/h with no signs of fatigue – absolutely

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remarkable.

Sometime before dawn I came off track, as I could feel some nasty blisters brewing. After some gross drainage and taping of the blisters, I lay down for some minutes with my feet elevated and tried to contemplate the enormity of what lay ahead. I managed to get back onto the track but was feeling pretty stiff and ginger, and wondered whether I would end up having to walk all of the 2nd day. As sunrise approached, I was feeling the effects of it all – lack of sleep, heatstroke from the day before and blisters that hurt with every step. Before I knew it,

we were getting close to the 24hr mark, when new 12hr and 24hr races were about to start. It was clear from the early morning sun that this was going to be a scorcher, which started to bother me even more. From the last results update at the 22hr mark, I was on track to go tantalisingly close to 200km, but with this pretty lame walk going it didn't look good. I decided to stop feeling sorry for myself, and that I had to get back into gear to have a go at 200km in 24hr (which is a qualifying mark for the Australian 24hr team for the World Champs next year). I worked myself back into a shuffle, then a slight jog and got moving. The official results show that I did 203.6km, so I got there. The 12hr and 24hr runners had now set off at a good pace, with Dave Waugh (24hr) and Mick Francis (24hr) looking particularly strong, and Andrew Cohen (12hr) loping along with a relaxed style.

The morning sun grew increasingly hotter, and I started suffering for those fast laps I had done. From 24–26hr my lap times slowed, reflecting a beaten man. At about 11am, Justine returned to crew for me and immediately asked me what I needed. I was in quite a state of despair and answered, "Direction!" I wasn't sure what the hell I needed to do to get out of this miserable hole, and dutifully left the track, shattered, and asked for help. Justine, Diane (Paul Every's crew & partner) and Val (Mick Francis' partner and crew) placed me in a chair and worked on me like a Formula 1 pit crew in attempt to bring me back to life. Justine gave me some biscuits to eat while my blisters were being done, but my mouth had no saliva in it, and the food ended up being one mighty ball of goop. I was feeling very light-headed and told the girls that my colour vision was going. My last memory before passing out was losing colour vision, head spinning like a general anaesthetic induction and hearing Justine say "spit it out", referring to the ball of biscuit stuck in my mouth. I was only out for a few seconds, but it seemed like an eternity. As I came to, I wondered where I was and what was going on; and when I realised that I was in the midst of this race, my heart sank. I could not imagine going on from here – I had gone too hard, I was stupid for not sleeping and I had recklessly burnt up energy and laps in the first day. I was now aware of the other runners staring at me slumped in this chair as they went by, and I knew this show of weakness would brighten up at least someone's day. The girls convinced me to lie down on a mattress trackside, the elevated my legs and iced my ankles and shins. After

a break of about 45 minutes, I was helped back onto my feet and encouraged to get back out on track. The bottoms of my feet burned and felt like mincemeat. My legs were stiff, but I had managed to relieve some tension in the gluts with a tennis ball massage. I then did only 14 laps of walking between midday and 1pm before I felt nauseous in the strong heat of the day and came in once again for rest. I still had a lead of close to 30km over 2nd place, so I just had to recover – running in the heat was too sapping anyway. Once again the girls worked on me and laid me to rest, this time for a quasi-sleep of about 45 minutes – I didn't get to sleep and my mind was spinning with mixtures of coherent and incoherent thoughts while the track loudspeakers cranked out some really bad taste songs that some of the runners had chosen. After this 65 min break, I was back on track in the afternoon sun.

2pm until 5pm was a testing period of purely walking – 63 laps until the sun lost its bite, then the breeze picked up and I started to run again. Surprisingly, after a few shuffle laps I could occasionally do a reasonably paced lap, which gave me confidence that all was not lost. I hit the 250km mark near sunset, so I now needed to

reassess what was a realistic goal, given the afternoon's carnage. The heat had given my Oz team mate Mick Francis (24hr) a bad case of heatstroke (he told me he was hallucinating – seeing boulders on the track), and I was disappointed to see him retire from the race after travelling all the way from WA. Another Oz team mate, Paul Every, also had a trying afternoon. Dave Waugh (24hr) was still moving effortlessly, and I was pleased to see John Pearson (CR's fat bloke) running/walking with exceptional discipline for a 24hr track debut.

The various pace charts I had written up had me shooting for the 240–260km range at 32–34hrs,

// I had worked out that I needed to cover at least 13km in the last 90min to make 350 – a ridiculously minor task under normal conditions, but a gargantuan task after this much time on your feet. //

so I was pleasantly surprised that I was still on track if I held strong. Tony Collins had been moving steadily during the afternoon and picked up quite a few laps on me. He looked in much better shape than me, and even though I still had a big lead I was far from certain of a win, as Tony is a legendary master tactician of 48hr events – as attested to by his multiple 48hr titles with

totals consistently over 300km, plus his 5 Sydney-to-Melbourne runs to boot.

The issue now (7pm, day 2) was whether to keep moving slowly all night and not rest, or sleep and do a better pace for the last 12 hours of the race. After a talk with Paul Every, he convinced me to take a 2 hour break – my only worry was that I would never want to get up again and would seize up. At 9pm, the 12hr race finished with a smiling Andrew Cohen having run a creditable 106.4km. My pit crew readied for my arrival and once again spoilt me rotten with giving me a wash-down and TLC. The alarm was set for an hour, and this time I went into a deeper state of rest. The pit crew's sense of optimism was infectious: as I dozed I sometimes would hear them having a good laugh, no doubt helped by the "raspberry cordial" they were enjoying.

After a 1.45 break, I was back on track and completed 274km at almost 11pm with less than 12 hours to go. I had changed into a long pair of Skins, and the positive effect of this and the rest break was immediately noticeable. I still had a good lead and did an initial walk lap, and then tried an efficient modified shuffle. It was working well, and I mixed up the laps with walking and speed



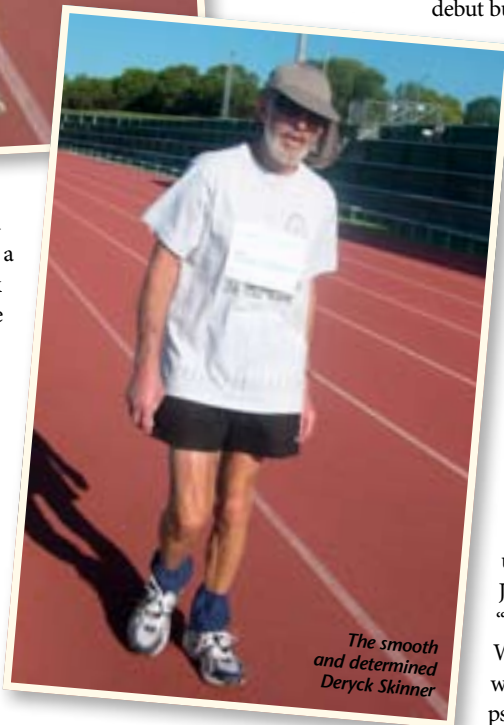
Martin Fryer easing his way into the race



David Waugh on his way to a Gold Coast 24 hour record

hours until this beast of a thing was over. Tony, Robert and Deryck had all slowed down a lot, so my focus changed from inter-competition to intra-competition: what kind of total could I build? I started doing the sums in my head and estimated (based on about 6km/h) that somewhere in the 330s would be a creditable finish. Hours 42–46 were spent in a great state of concentration, with all effort focused on momentum. Several personal landmarks were passed during this period, including the course record (315km set by Tony Collins) and the 200 mile mark (about 322km), and I was starting to suspect that maybe even 340km was possible!

As dawn broke for the 2nd time I was very, very tired, and I was not the only one. In the 24hr event, the talented David Waugh (CR Tugger) was sure to break the 200km barrier on



The smooth and determined Deryck Skinner

>> shuffling in a pensioner's kind of "fartlek" session. There was a long time to go, so I held back to a level that was comfortable under the speed trap.

The session from midnight to 3am was again dead quiet – very few people on track, and most of those were walking. Robert Boyce was doing it hard with blisters in the 48hr, and Deryck Skinner the walker had gone for a sleep. At one stage there were only 4, out of 20-odd competitors, on the track. It was eerily quiet, but the coolness was delightful, and another full moon night.

After 42 hours (3am), I knew that I was very close to the great 300km barrier and only had 6

debut but was reduced to a slow walk. Fat bloke (24hr) was doing it tough as well.

At 46 hours my total was 333.6km and I again began calculating the likely final total. I had done about 7.2km/h for the last 3 hours, so possibly 348km!

With 90 minutes to go, I asked Justine for a can of "V" energy drink. Whether the effect was physiological or psychological is not important. I suddenly

felt free from fatigue and started running every lap. I had worked out that I needed to cover at least 13km in the last 90 minutes to make 350km – a

For me some of the notable performances over the weekend included:

- Dave Waugh's brilliant 214km 24hr debut
- John Pearson's intelligent and gutsy debut 24hr run
- Robert Boyce's excellent 48hr debut
- Adam Barron's cracker 6hr record
- Deryck Skinner's awesome 259km walk in the 48hr at age 73.



Ron Clarke presents Martin Fryer with his award

ridiculously minor task under normal conditions, but a gargantuan task after this much time on your feet. With about 80 minutes to go, the ever-empathic Paul Every had sidled up alongside me and asked what I was up to. I explained that I was going for the 350. We asked Diane for a validated lap score so we knew what I had to do to make it. A few laps later she replied that I needed 27 more laps. The race was on! Paul started pacing me, and we started stringing together a bunch of laps similar to my initial running pace - it was hurting, but we were on a mission. We counted every lap, and after each one, Paul would try to egg me on. A local news crew had come trackside, and each lap a cameraman would run alongside us on the inside of the final bend filming our legs, our facial grimaces and even our butts! Soon we were down to 10 laps to go and had almost 40 minutes in hand. The crews were on their feet giving us great encouragement. We were both starting to fatigue, and I remember remarking that I didn't want to "chuck a Taipei" and seize up with the end in sight. So we eased off the pace and as each lap went by I could feel a huge well of emotion building inside me: we were going to make it.

350km (lap 875) was completed with 17 minutes to spare, but Paul and I were one lap high in our count, so it wasn't until we completed the next lap that Paul and I and our crews celebrated with jumps of joy, hugs all around and an outpouring of sheer exhausted bliss everywhere. All I can express is deep gratitude to all who were there during the 2 days: the organisers (Ian Cornelius and Chrissy), the volunteers (Kerrie Hall, Adam Barron, Nic and Rob), the crews (my sister Justine, Val, Diane, Mick, Andrew C, Ron S, Vegie Girl and Davo), the runners, and the spectators. And lastly, but by no means least, I thank my wife, Lynn, and my son, Luke, for their patience and support in allowing me to train for and achieve this indulgent dream. It was like being part of an epic movie that slowly unfolded to reveal new characters, new dramas and new twists at every turn.

RESULTS

48 HOUR

1. Martin Fryer	ACT	*346.116 km
2. Tony Collins	NSW	270.561 km
3. Deryck Skinner (W)	SA	257.877 km
4. Robert Boyce	VIC	239.200 km
5. Alan Staples	NSW	229.615 km
6. David Billett (W)	SA	227.515 km
7. Kupa Hokianga	JAP	219.324 km
8. John Timms	VIC	188.953 km
9. Deborah de Williams (F)	TAS	181.915 km
10. Stan Miskin (W) (81years)	VIC	149.672 km

24 HOUR

1. David Waugh (Rec)	QLD	214.052 km
2. John Pearson	QLD	184.971 km
3. Geoff Last	QLD	174.663 km
4. Paul Every	NSW	151.753 km
5. Lindsay Phillips	QLD	132.119 km
6. Ron Schwebel	NSW	117.566 km
7. Tina Fiegel (F)	NSW	105.470 km

12 HOUR

1. Andrew Cohen	WA	106.402 km
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6 HOUR

1. Adam Barron (Rec)	QLD	76.457 km
2. Robert Ware	QLD	72.616 km
3. Nic Moloney	QLD	67.936 km
4. Rachel Waugh (F)	QLD	56.000 km
5. Kerry Preston	QLD	54.153 km
6. Phil Lear	QLD	49.900 km
7. Dave Brelsford	QLD	44.400 km

(F) - Female; (W) - Walker; (Rec) - Record

*Postscript: Martin's final distance was actually adjusted to be 346.116km after a lap scoring error was corrected following the race.