

Trans-Am Part III: Reaching The Promised Land

by Jesse Dale Riley

From the Mississippi River you can just about see New York City. Maybe you know, trotting along, that it's a three-weeks' journey on foot; maybe you're badly injured and struggling to make the daily cutoff (three and one-half mph, or just over 17 minutes per mile); maybe you know that the hills up ahead in Pennsylvania are far worse than anything the Rockies can throw at you; or maybe you're just running out of money and enthusiasm for life on the road, separated from family and friends and the common luxuries that you crave. But it really doesn't matter. We had all reached the point of no return, and even if we sometimes felt like lemmings making an instinctive but gratuitous pilgrimage off the edge of a deadly precipice, we couldn't stop now just because we're unsure of a happy ending. Our only hope was that when we ran out of road, the scene that awaited us would fulfill the promise of our bitterly hard efforts.

August 1 (Day 43): We crossed the Mississippi this morning leaving Hannibal, Missouri, and word filtered through the pack that Richard Westbrook, standing third overall, had shin splints and was dead last and behind pace to make the cutoff. He rallied a little later in the day, but he faced more than a week of painful rehabilitation and long, depressing days at the back of the pack, often miles behind the next-to-last runner.

Junk food was high-tech body fuel by now. Athletes who hadn't been on such a diet since they were eight years old asked only for baloney sandwiches, soda by the quart, potato chips, and Ding Dongs. Marty Sprengelmeyer was at the point nearest his home in Davenport, Iowa, and when his friends came down he got them to buy boxes of Twinkies which he passed out to his grateful competitors, including Peter Hodson who'd never before had one. Marty's Milky Way bars also proved popular, especially with Emile, who hoarded an entire case of them.

August 2 (Day 44): The doctors make ready to pull Ed Kelley, currently fifth overall, with a grossly swollen liver. He'd never been healthy during the race, and the preliminary diagnosis was hepatitis. Dave Warady is rapidly building a big lead over his injured competitors, and he starts to lay back in the middle of the pack. "No sense in running fast," he says in an unusually serious mood, "you just get injured." Peter Hodson takes the stage and is rewarded with a picture in the Springfield, Illinois, newspaper. When we passed through Springfield the next day bystanders had no difficulty recognizing the Alien, and gave me candy

and gum for him.

August 3 (Day 45): Emile takes the stage into Decatur, blowing away a local road runner who turned out to pace him the last few miles. The Decatur Running Club makes dinner for us, the first club along the route to really greet us. Tom Rogozinski, still very much injured himself, finishes and leaves dinner to get driven back onto the course and pace Richard for four miles. Even among the runners, who reached the limit of exhaustion every day, this was considered a rare and heroic gesture.

Ed Kelley gets to stay after his blood tests come back negative. In deference to his liver, however, battered by dehydration, longstanding stomach problems, and a bad cold, he's ordered to slow down the pace and carry several bottles of fluids at all times. He's also forbidden to drink beer after running, something most of the runners like to do. "You might as well just kill me now," he says.

August 4 (Day 46): Peter Hodson takes his last stage win today. He's also the only taker when a local family offers beds in their house, dinner, and a swimming pool, all only two blocks away. The runners are so tired and so bonded to one another that they rarely take advantage of off-site facilities that take them away from the start/finish line and the rest of the group.

August 5 (Day 47): The doctors draw blood for a research project from everyone who's willing. Although the results won't be due for some time, the runners' health generally showed marked improvement during the run, based on the difference between these tests and the ones from Huntington Beach the day before the start. Milan wins the first of a record seven straight stages today. At dinner in Rockville, Indiana, a beautiful waitress comes on to Peter, leaving him shook up and unable to concentrate during the next day's run into Indianapolis, and he fades badly nearing the city.

August 6 (Day 48): An Indy cop threatens to arrest Milan, leading the stage, for pissing near the road. We've been so used to being in the middle of nowhere that the big cities always break our rhythm. It's not just having to be civilized. There's the traffic, noise, all the stoplights, extra turns, bad neighborhoods, and quirky things like Milan's death-defying attempts to retrieve coins laying in busy thoroughfares. In the name of good luck he risked his life many times, but it's difficult to steer the runners away from dangerous habits that enable them to shake off the pressure of performing hour after hour, day after day.

August 7 (Day 49): The Indy cops call ahead along our route to notify the officers today that we'll be pissing alongside their

highways, but nobody gets caught. "F—ing American Puritanism," says one of the Germans in disgust. One of the themes of the race has been the difficulty the Europeans have had with the different customs here: you can't strip naked for a massage; you can't drink beer on public property; you can't expect traffic to give way. Maybe it's just that these sort of events get more respect over in Europe than here, which is pretty ironic.

Richard, last again, tried to down a massive milkshake the last few miles and groans his way into the finish. Normally he waits until he's done, then gets an ice-cold quart of milk and puts at least half a pint of chocolate-milk sauce in it. Distance the last six days was 314.65 miles, a six-day PR for many of the runners.

August 8 (Day 50): The Ohio River RRC, organized by ultrarunner Ron Hart out of the Dayton area, turn out to welcome us into Ohio. Two of the journey runners, Celine Mercier and Carol Carter, complete their first full stages today, and so did one of our doctors. Distance PRs were the norm for our crew people, not just the athletes, as everyone was pulled along by the energy of the event.

August 9 (Day 51): Our first day on Eastern Time, but nobody told Peter, who's always scrupulously early in rising (that's saying a lot, since we normally wake at 3:30 a.m.). We had to hold the start for him, and he was angry for the first time since I've known him. Richard was back among the front runners into South Vienna, and we stayed up late at our stopover, the high school, to watch the Olympic Marathon on TV.

August 10 (Day 52): The double hat trick for Milan, his sixth straight stage win, breaking Tom's record. Concern is growing that Milan will get injured.

August 11 (Day 53): The last really dull day, waiting for the end. Injuries and fatigue, fighting traffic, shovelling down food, taking vitamins and medication: they're all just part of the grind.

August 12 (Day 54): Milan finally lays back and Richard takes the lead heading for St. Clairsville, Ohio. Emile reels him in, however, and the two begin a rare late-stage duel for the win. With several miles left and the terrain turning brutally hilly, Emile is 2:44 behind and closing. Soon the pace dips to seven-minute miles and it's becoming difficult to mark the turns ahead of the two runners, who are over an hour clear of the rest of the group. Our finish-line van is nowhere to be found since they're unaware that the pace up front has greatly increased.

Emile's nickname is The Red Devil and the finish is right in front of Red Devil Stadium, next to the rec center where we're staying. We pick out a finish line about three seconds before Richard reaches it, Michael stops his watch, and I bike back to the last turn just in time to direct Emile, who then finishes 80 seconds after Richard (about 300 yards). Emile is furious!

He won't shake Richard's hand afterwards and complains bitterly for the whole rest of the afternoon and evening to a tired, unsympathetic, but captive group of ultrarunners that Richard was paced. Everyone in the race had benefitted from pacing at one point or another, since unlimited pacing was a rule I'd insisted on from the start, but that didn't stop Emile, who was clearly under the impression that he could still win the race and that every second counted. With ten days left, he was a mere 38 hours out of first place.

August 13 (Day 55): Most 5:00 a.m. starts were about as exciting as punching a clock at work, but morale is high today as Emile continues his protest just before the send-off. I offer to throw him out of the race, and we spend the first several miles absolutely screaming at each other as we head into Wheeling, West Virginia. Emile's in the lead and Dave Warady, Tom, Ed Kelley, and Richard are straining to keep up just to get in on the fun. One thing's clear: nobody wants Emile to win the stage.

Tom passes Emile (who had stopped to complain at one of the aid stations) halfway through the narrow part of West Virginia and heads for the Pennsylvania border. He hadn't won a stage in 16 days and wasn't fully recovered from the stress fracture of the foot that he'd pounded on for six states, but Tom is from Pittsburgh and you can't let your home boys down.

The distance had been re-calculated and it turned out that this was the longest

day of the event, 60.25 miles. Tom's stride was still skewed from the injury and he needed a dozen Tylenols to get through the day. At all times he carried two more pain pills in a tiny plastic bottle in one hand and when traffic cleared that was all you heard: click-click, click-click, click-click. "Maybe next year I'll be sponsored by the Betty Ford Clinic," he said, "now that this race has turned me into a drug addict."

It reminded me a lot of what I'd read about the Bunion Derbies of 60 years ago when Tom's family and friends started showing up. They placed little signs along the way to encourage him and brought presents. One was a T-shirt from his brother that had a map of the race route on the back and he changed into it for the stretch run into Monongahela, Pennsylvania, which is due south of Pittsburgh. On the shirt were various cryptic references to incidents in Tom's past, each at a different point on the map, but where New York City should have been the symbolism was clear: it said, "The Promised Land."

Emile never gave up but couldn't close within a mile as Tom won in nine and one-half hours.

August 14 (Day 56): Incredibly steep hills during the first half of today's run, and Emile made a statement with a strong win. A crew from ABC was back to do some filming at the finish. They were the only ones who'd come out to the desert to film us and they were our only hope for a good news segment that would help sell the race

for next year.

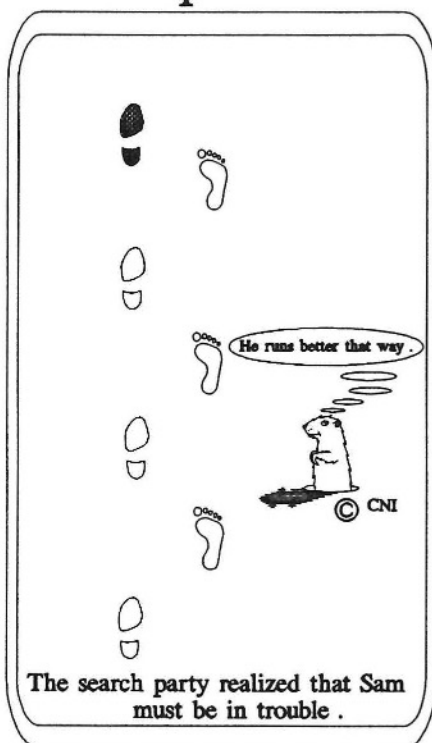
August 15 (Day 57): Chris Gibson, one of the better ultrarunners in the East, turned out for a training run and asked permission to win the stage. I said it was fine with me, but Chris laid back in the middle to talk to some of the runners while Emile stormed ahead. By the time Chris made his move, still very fresh, Emile was refusing to give back the final half-mile margin, and they both blitzed the last several miles. Chris failed to close on the intense Frenchman and took second coming into Schellsburg.

August 16 (Day 58): Emile makes it three in a row in one of the great scenes from the race. He had duked it out early with Peter Hodson, Milan, and Richard, but Richard pulled away at 20 miles and left Emile in fourth, a mile back. Mindful that no lead is safe from Emile, who had run quite slowly in the desert and was consequently the healthiest guy in the race, Richard pushed the pace on the hilly and gradually climbing middle section.

Eventually we climbed into a heavy fog and visibility was down to about 50 feet. At a sign that marked the mountain summit, Richard "celebrated" the way the runners generally did — with a piss break. By now I figured Richard was clear by a couple of miles, but no sooner had he stepped off the road than Emile rips out of the mist, looking like the Angel of Death, and dematerializes just as quickly a few feet down the road. No way could he have known we were there, yet he pounced on us like a night bird.

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Emile had done the hard part, reeling in an opponent he couldn't see, and now he stormed down the hill doing sub-eight miles, knowing that no one could pace off him in the fog. There were only 13 miles left to McConnellsburg from the summit, but Emile never saw Richard after that and won by over two miles.

August 17 (Day 59): A brutal climb to start, then a roller past the battlefields of Gettysburg and into New Oxford, Pennsylvania. As the race winds down each runner has his daily agenda. John Surdyk wants to break 700 hours total time and hold onto 12th place. Helmut Schieke in seventh is nursing his eight-week-old hamstring injury and wants to finish healthy enough to race well against Kouros in a European stage race in September. Milan has fought his way to second from sixth after a month of brilliant running, but he's barely holding off Tom and is hoping someone will beat Emile so there won't be enough stages left for anyone to break his record of seven consecutive wins. Ed Kelley knows he can't hold off Emile for fifth, but Richard in fourth knows Emile can't catch him and consequently he'll have the masters title. Tom wants to catch Milan, but his foot won't cooperate for the kind of effort he'd need. Oh, yeah, and Dave Warady's winning and bugging me to know if there's a Best Western in New Oxford.

Stefan Schlett has a sure cure for boredom. He's in ninth place, one of the all-time tough guys (big coincidence: he's German!), and he's very disappointed with race management. By mid-July we had covered 1,000 miles of mainly wasteland and most of the field was ready to quit. Just when it's getting interesting, though, we get to Colorado: it's cool, we've got shower facilities most nights, decent food, and real roads to run on instead of rocks and sand. Very boring, and all the thoroughbreds ahead of him decide to stick with it. So now it's payback time. Stefan wants to win this stage.

Armed with beaucoup painkillers, he moves through the pack. He gets Dave, he gets Peter, then Richard, then Emile. Pulls along side Milan. "You want to make the challenge?" asks Milan, speaking English for my benefit. It's like the 40th overcast day in a row and a duel between these two is the most fun we're likely to have. But no, they run together, trying to catch Tom. The Young Stallion is cruising into the finish, no problems, he wins by about a mile. A disappointed Stefan has to settle for a second-place tie, but at the tape Milan stops suddenly and lets Stefan nip by all alone for second. Another day in Paradise.

August 18 (Day 60): Milan leads Richard, Tom, and Emile into Lancaster, Pennsylvania. With so few days left, everyone seems willing to push the pace and Milan is less than a mile in front when he starts to bonk with ten miles to go and stops at a Coke machine. The machine doesn't take bills and after he wastes five minutes getting change at a laundromat it eats all his quar-

ters! Milan had become critically dependent on Coca-Cola during the last month of hard running, to the point where he wouldn't drink much water anymore, and by the time I caught him ten minutes later with an ice-cold quart, he was having a major anxiety attack. It took three miles to calm him down (for one thing, his lead was not so small that he was hesitant to stop and drink), but he recovered his form and pulled into the finish three minutes ahead of Richard, who in turn was closely pursued by Tom and Emile.

Lancaster was the very first stopover to get organized (preparations started eight months before), thanks to ultrarunner Will "The Ambassador" Campbell, who seemingly knows, and is owed favors by, everyone in town. We had plenty of high-class junk food at the finish and a big dinner that evening with the Lancaster Running Club, but the best part was that Will and his wife Sarah opened up their house to us. We had some difficulty persuading the runners to walk the 300 yards to the house, but once there they didn't want to leave. A private home was something most of these guys hadn't seen the inside of in two months! Soon there were athletes taking naps on the couches, athletes doing laundry, athletes thumbing through magazines in rocking chairs on the porch, athletes in the shower, athletes listening to classical music on the stereo and chatting over glasses of ice water, and, of course, Emile and Serge Debladis were in the kitchen begging for some meat to eat.

It must have been a bizarre afternoon for Will and Sarah, but for us it was a chance to fully appreciate the wonderfully normal lifestyle that we'd soon return to.

August 19 (Day 61): Emile stomped everyone on the stage into Kutztown, where *Runner's World* hosted a beautiful dinner, complete with gifts and a slide show, for the athletes, crew, and organizers. It was strange to see those slides. The runners had rarely paused to consider the nature of their ordeal, because just surviving it had taken all their energy, but now that we could see how beautiful it had been, we could admit to ourselves the difficulty and danger we'd faced.

August 20 (Day 62): Tom dusted off Pennsylvania with another win and Milan dug in to keep from losing too much of his 90-minute lead over Tom. Emile passed Ed Kelley to move into fifth place, the only place that changed hands in the last two weeks. Dick Sitter of Erie, Pennsylvania, reached the Jersey border and declined to finish the stage into Washington. He'd been with us for eight days, since St. Clairsville, Ohio, with the goal of running across Pennsylvania, and in so doing became the only local runner to complete more than two consecutive stages.

We got only a few dozen stage runners during the race, mainly because it was just too difficult for ultrarunners to communicate with us on the road. This was definitely our fault, but we hope by next year to rectify this, because pacing and camaraderie with

athletes along the way is the future of this event.

August 21 (Day 63): The penultimate stage was just as gnarly as any other day, only the runners had a lot less to lose and four of them put the hammer down. It was no coincidence at all that these were the four who were still close in time, and it points up the aspect of organizing this race where I was the most ignorant. I learned the hard way that there was no such thing as "going for the finish." It wasn't enough to make it all the way to New York: these guys competed, fighting for every second's advantage if it could improve their standing, and only held back when the risk of injury, or of not having any reserve for tomorrow, became too great.

There were only two stages left to win and Emile wanted them both. Ed Kelley made the challenge, hoping to put a hurt on Emile and maybe take back fifth place from him. Milan stayed with them, paranoid that Tom would torch the stage as only he can and re-take second. Tom felt that Milan wasn't showing any respect, and soon the scene resembled that movie "It's a Mad, Mad World," only without cars. The course was unbelievably hilly, but no one seemed to notice. Stopping for water or Gatorade from the aid stations was for wimps; there would be no breaks until Dale Beam arrived in the van with food and Coke.

Dale showed up at 17 miles, but even then Ed Kelley didn't stop, blowing by the other three as they ate breakfast, standing at roadside. "This is stupid! Why are we doing this?" said Tom, laughing. He and Milan accused each other of forcing the pace, then quickly agreed to lay back a little. Emile stoked up for another push and set out after Ed. Within a couple of miles he caught the man from Hollywood, and as Ed started to fade, Emile put it in warp drive, intentionally humiliating his rival and finishing in South Orange, New Jersey, 90 minutes ahead of him, a lot of time to gain in just the last 30 miles.

Our stopover was a church, our place to sleep was normally a children's day-care room. There were old bathrooms and no showers, just a hose outside. *Runner's World* bought us ten pizzas. Dave Warady's running club back in Huntington Beach sent out a pacer for the last stage and he arrived with his sleeping bag and crashed with us. Rich Innamorato pulled in to scout the last stage with Michael Kenney. Michael would get only two hour's sleep tonight, since he still had to write up and photocopy tomorrow's turn sheets. God knows it wasn't pretty, but Michael and I had bet our lives that we could make it this far, and the runners hadn't let us down.

August 22 (Day 64): Time trial number eight was a 30-mile stretch to the George Washington Bridge, down Riverside Drive in Manhattan, and over to Columbus Circle at the foot of Central Park. For the seventh Saturday in a row, Dave Warady, his wife Kelly Babiak, and I set out alone one hour

before everyone else. Richard Westbrook came out to the street and gave us the thumbs-up sign, one of maybe a dozen witnesses to the start. The New Jersey portion of the stage was pretty complicated and I worried that the others would get lost, but eventually the news came that for once there was a cease-fire among the runners, and they were sticking together. Except for the two Frenchmen, of course. Emile sped ahead and took the stage, making up half an hour on Dave but still finishing behind him, as we'd planned. Dave cranked out seven miles an hour for the first time in the race, knowing Emile would come after him, and got injured the last ten miles and had to work to conceal a limp.

Waiting for us at Columbus Circle was a crowd of about 100 people: Sri Chinmoy Marathon Team members, friends and families of the runners, beaucoup press and TV, Ted Corbett and Fred Lebow, Harry Abrams, the last man still living from the Bunion Derbies, and several representatives from *Runner's World*. Dave finished and was engulfed by reporters, and then after a good wait came most of the pack, who separated and finished in order of their overall standing, then started celebrating on the spot. Even Michael Kenney, who saw disaster around every corner and so always had us well prepared for it, was able to smile and laugh. It's funny how often a moment's euphoria is bought with a year's work.

Ultrarunner Tom McGrath hosted our

victory dinner at his pub, O'Flanagan's, later on and we got to watch a five-minute segment on ABC News about the race during the meal. There's no easy way to break up a group as close as we had been, but somehow the baggage was sorted and we all did what we had to do in heading to our lodgings or getting out of town that night.

In my mind are stored more memories about this event than I could ever tell, but before I finish I'll give you a quick snapshot of each of the finishers to picture if you can. I remember . . .

Tom Rogozinski ripping downhill into the Virgin River Gorge, ten miles west of Mesquite, Nevada, kicking so high and looking larger than life, even as the wall of the gorge rose up over him.

Bonnie Bush, Marty Sprengelmeyer's friend, telling me how upset his wife was when she found the cancelled check to us that indicated he'd entered the race secretly weeks before.

Helmut Schieke limping into Kelso, California, with a pulled hamstring, and the temperature 106° in the desert, shaking Michael Kenney's hand and saying honestly, "Very nice race. Very well organized."

John Surdyk, who swore to me that no media would ever cover this race, making the front page of his hometown *Chicago Tribune*.

Dave Warady inviting me to sit at an overloaded table for the *Runner's World*

dinner in Kutztown, Pennsylvania. When I hesitated because I knew there weren't enough chairs or place settings, Dave got up, stripped the next table half bare (it was reserved for non-running guests), made a spot for me, and said, "It's a serve-yourself world, Jesse."

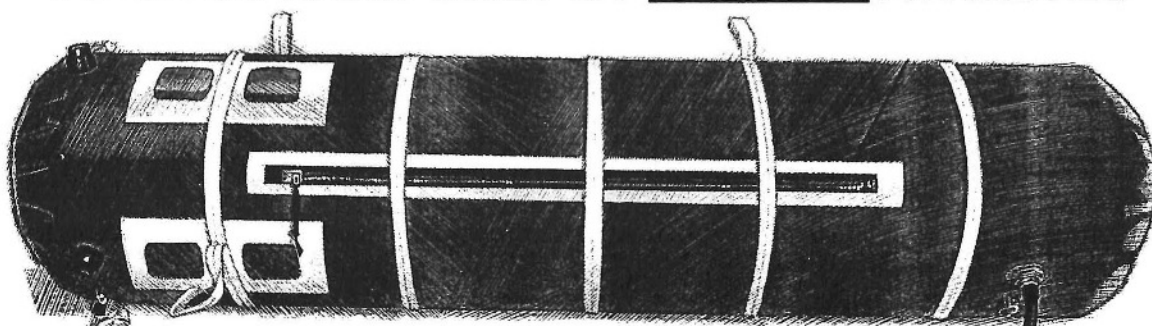
John Wallis becoming a totally different person — proud, relaxed, and energetic — when his wife arrived.

Ed Kelley shaking my hand after the race, though we'd argued and fought for the whole 3,000 miles.

Richard Westbrook telling me: "When we were in the desert, the volunteers used to pull up in vehicles and ask, 'Do you want any ice?' and I always wanted to say, 'No, I don't want any ice. I just want to drink 180° water from those aid stations at the side of the road.'"

Stefan Schlett asking me, on a decrepit highway in the Utah desert, what maps we had used in scouting the course. When I said the AAA maps mostly, he said he used them as well, but he knew this particular road wasn't on it. How did we find so many side roads that paralleled the interstates? I said that whenever we saw a road near the freeway, we'd get off at the nearest exit and double back to see if it connected. Some days we did hundreds of miles like that, and innumerable dead ends. Stefan, a former paratrooper who had done lots of reconnaissance, nodded and said, "Now I see how much work it was."

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Serge Debladis, whom I've never heard speak any English, stepping into the Bagdad Cafe on Day 4 and saying, "Om-burger!"

Peter Hodson learning how to pick up American girls by flaunting his heavy British accent.

Emile waking with a start each morning at 3:30 a.m., as if he were being stalked by predators in his dreams.

Milan dashing across busy intersections in cities, against red lights, protected only by the "peace" signs he made with his hands.

"It's a shot in the dark that hits the heart" — that's my favorite saying. When Michael and I took our shot at organizing Trans-Am we expected to get written off, and trying to beat the odds was a rule that came naturally to us. If the event is going to progress, however, it needs more than two guys with something to prove, trying to do it all and not succeeding.

An experienced race director would be a good start, especially while the race is in progress. A doctor who could remain with us on the road would do wonders. Does anybody know a well-connected publicity person? We could use some good advice on sports promotion agencies: what they charge, what tasks they take on, company names and contact people. Over 80 percent of our stopovers have no local coordinators. And always there's the desert to worry about — right at the beginning, when the runners aren't yet acclimatized. Three more volunteers, another 30 bags of ice a day, some Kool-Aid, and a few cartons of ice cream would have gotten our guys through it in style. If you can help or advise us in any way I hope you'll contact us in Eugene or call or write me at home (614 Dey Street, Key West, FL 33040 (305) 296-2962).

If you're wondering what it was like to be a Trans-Am volunteer this year, then perhaps Dale Beam, the best volunteer we had, should have the last word. Here's what he wrote to me a month after the finish:

"The caravan held together amazingly so. I miss everyone and the great challenge, and the great crossing, so, so much. I am having great trouble in mobilizing my energies to do the regular things I now must do.

"We all tried the best we could — the directors, Barry, Bill, all the volunteers, and of course the runners, who understood their task well, though they could not have understood what others were going through.

"They were afraid for their success and survival. We all were, of course. But we did work together, stick together, and have an understanding. Thank you, God, for sparing us from major mishap. We had our close calls and great scares . . .

"It stuns me. We made it to Central Park, as a splendid team, needing each other. We served our separate tasks, there was just enough of us, and the Great Master waved his wand . . .

"Now, tell the story . . ."

Full results were in the October issue.

Elements of Strategy for the Trans-Am Race

by Jesse Dale Riley

"We found that the early leader usually doesn't finish." This was the result of research that Dave Warady and his coach, John Loeschhorn, did in preparing for this year's Trans-Am after studying the Bunion Derbies, the trans-Texas race in 1986, and the very few other long stage races that they could find information on. Future participants now have this year's race to study, and in so doing they can avoid a lot of misconceptions that plagued our athletes. Below I've listed all the points that come to mind, in no particular order, and after that I'll review each of the 28 starters and their individual progress during the event.

1. It's not a 3,000-mile race, it's 64 races in a row. Experience in long races will help you finish but not win, because only good speed and rapid recovery will allow you to maintain a consistently high cruising speed each day. Good 50-mile runners dominated this event (average distance each day was 46 mi) at the expense of the four transcontinental veterans (Ed Kelley, Helmut Schieke, Marvin Skagerberg, and Al Howie) and veterans of the Sri Chinmoy races in New York like Marty Sprengelmeyer and Stefan Schlett.

2. No racing in the desert. The first 11 stages are by far the hardest, hottest, and most isolated. Work your way into them gradually and don't force the pace.

3. There are two basic strategies: running to finish and running to win, and they don't even remotely coincide. Pick one before the race and don't get dragged into someone else's plan, because the pressure to compare yourself to the others in the race is intense. Don't run to win without having a handler, at least for the first three weeks.

4. Scout the course. Without leaving your hometown you can easily arrange to have mail dropped to you (c/o General Delivery) at towns en route with medical supplies, running shoes, cookies, and so on. Map the route and find out the population of the towns along the way. It doesn't take much research to find out that until Colorado you'll be in the middle of nowhere most of the time.

5. Don't get caught without cash. A race is no time to be looking for money machines or converting foreign currency. When buying things offer traveler's checks first, then your credit card, then greenbacks. Carry enough of each to get you through the next week.

6. Even pacing is equal effort, not equal speed. You will be fitter as the race goes on and run faster with proper pacing, so the miles at the end are more important for

making up time than the ones at the start. It takes about three weeks for your body to adjust to the daily grind of running so far, and after this point we saw a noticeable increase in the overall pace of the runners.

7. Altitude isn't a big factor. We don't hit altitude until Day 12, and we topped out on Day 25. Because of the gradual acclimatization and cooler weather, the runners ran as well in the mountains as on the flats.

8. Handlers make all the difference, especially in running errands after the stage and in helping their runner's attitudes.

9. Drink more water and less electrolytes in the heat, less water and more sugar when it's cool. Also, you'll be unable to take as much sugar and food early on, when your stomach's not used to it. Force down water in the desert and don't become dehydrated — the dry air is very tricky. Coming into the race a little heavy doesn't hurt.

10. Older runners won't recover as quickly, day to day, as younger runners of equal ability. This is a young man's race, with the top nine finishers averaging 37 years old, but the other 19 averaging 49. The top three averaged 30 years old. Everyone who dropped out was over 40.

11. Walk before you have to crawl. No one even came close to running every step of this course, and those who tried paid dearly for it. Being in a hurry just fries your quads and takes away from your eating and drinking rhythm.

12. Sooner or later you'll be forced to grind it out under very stressful conditions. The finishers dealt with injuries, dehydration, week-long struggles to beat the cutoff, fainting spells, severe weight loss, colds, chafing, blistered sunburns, you name it. It's normal for a race like this and there's no easy way to get to the finish line. In spite of it all, you'll learn to laugh about it. As John Surdyk said, "We make our own fun out here."

Below are race synopses for each of the 28 starters, again in no particular order.

1. Peter Hodson: Plenty of talent and a noncompetitive style pulled The Alien Warrior through with relatively few problems. He won four stages. Scratched himself from the race with stomach problems after Day 14, but recovered overnight. Finished the race injured, unusual for him, with shin splints. PRs: about 3:05 marathon, about 128 miles for 24 hours, solid multi-day experience.

2. Leon Ransom: Finished only one stage within the time limit (Day 29) but racked up about 1,300 miles.

3. Emile Laharrague: He bet heavily on the collapse of all the leaders and took it very easy in the desert. Although his strategy didn't bring victory, he was by far the