

Trans Am '95: The Sound of a Well-Tuned Engine, Run Hard

by Jesse Dale Riley

Day 1: "All day long, water — ptooy!" said Dusan, finally sipping on a beer in the parking lot of the Best Western in Rancho Cucamonga. The 53 miles since Huntington Beach had been little more than an inconvenient morning errand for him, and he was content for now to relax and forget about the two months ahead. Behind him David Horton had run well and strategically, giving up just 15 minutes to finish in 7:41:41, and next, three minutes later, came the inimitable Ed Kelley, who was once again prepared to sacrifice the whole race to win this stage but failed to do so for the first time in three years. Pat Farmer and Manfred Leismann, who shared the early lead (doing 7:30 per mile) crashed and finished fourth and sixth, respectively. Eiko Endo made an inauspicious start to her quest for a new woman's record, missing the last turn and wandering around frantically for 25 minutes before her crew found her.

Day 2: Coolest weather ever for this stage, as Dusan and David once again out-classed the field.

Day 3: Dusan had asked me how long this stage was the day before. "Sixty kilometers," I said. "Only?" he asked with a smile. It was party time, and he knocked it out in barely five hours on another unusually mild day (70s at the start, 90s at the finish, and of course no humidity in the desert). Still he gained just five minutes on David and only 11 on Manfred in third. This was the last day Ed Kelley would make any impression at all on the leaders (fifth in 5:50:25) as the eventual Big Six, all of whom would go on to beat Ray Bell's 1993 record, would take all the top spots on the following day's stage. Ray himself still sat innocuously in sixth place overall, an hour ahead of little Nobuaki Koyago, who turned out to be the real lion of the group, lightning fast and utterly without fear. However, Nobu had just done 500 miles at the Sri Chinmoy Seven Day a few weeks before, his first multi-day, so he thought it wise to marshal his strength and lay back for a while. Pat Farmer was fifth overall and had given up almost three and one-half hours to Dusan already, but in the next 18 days an epic series of stages would cost him less than an hour as he fought to test the talented Slovenian.

Day 4: "You gonna give me a dollar again?" I asked Mike Sandlin in Barstow, the day before this 53-miler into Ludlow, California. In 1993 on this stage he had come in out of the sun at the finish line, pulled out a sweaty dollar bill and offered it to me, saying (with just a little sarcasm) that the entry fee was too low and this stage was

worth way more than we were charging. Sure enough he had a dollar in his hand after finishing eighth in 10:48 this time. Don Winkley, proudly bringing up the rear (in 13:15), was far away in his mind, trudging over the sands of the Sahara in the Marathon des Sables alongside the runner they call The Camel. He ran to beat only the demons of boredom that quietly stalked him during those endless hours on the road.

Day 5: Ray Bell came out of hiding and strung out the pack from the start, averaging 7:26 per mile (3:16 marathon split) on the way to 3:33:03 for 28.5 miles. Still, Dusan and Patrick, working together, didn't let him get away, finishing just 3:46 behind with David only seven more minutes back. Manfred's quads died after a fast start and he walked the last several miles, beginning a pattern we would watch him suffer through repeatedly on the way to New York. Michiyoshi Kaiho, back again after finishing third last year was not a happy camper. He was running nearly as fast as in '94 but he was buried in 11th place, with little chance of seeing the lead pack even on a good day (he won four stages last year). Moreover, his feet were a mess. He'd gotten blisters right away and they were out of control. His feet were lovingly and skillfully taped by his crew, but tape doesn't take the place of layer after layer of skin that was now long gone. Because of that, Don came home in front of Kaiho, having dedicated the stage to Gary Cantrell and the infamous Barkley Marathons, and running way off the road through the sagebrush, climbing in and out of the rocky washes as if they were the Tennessee wilderness.

"It's a four-man race," said David Horton, assessing the day's results and counting out the now-injured Ed Kelley and Manfred Leismann, who were still ahead of Ray overall. "And three of us don't have a chance unless Dusan gets injured." In his mind David, whose analysis proved essentially correct, had already given up. As we'll see, he set out on a different path than the others by conceding the game so early.

Day 6: Traditionally a punishing, strategic stage featuring a 25-mile climb at the start, this day turned into another brutal showdown as Dusan and Patrick ran 8:30 miles all the way and made Ray and David work just to stay within one and two miles, respectively. Manfred walked all the way.

Day 7: Dusan, Patrick, and David once again ran far in front of the others and Ray began, I'm sure, to question whether the pace would ever slow down. Ray let the first three go for the moment and concentrated on increasing his margin on Nobuaki Koyago, running easily just a few hours behind. Manfred, too, with less than an hour on

Nobu, started running again to keep his spot.

Day 8: This day proved a high-water mark as the leaders rolled into Las Vegas at eight minutes a mile and were done well before 10 o'clock in the morning. After 340 miles Dusan was averaging 7.2 miles/hour (Ray's 1993 record was 5.96), David just over 7, Pat 6.7, and Ray 6.3. And Nobu looked like he wasn't even trying yet. You could tell Dusan, who had an ego that matched his running ability, was pissed off that David managed to stay so close to him: he was tired of forcing the pace just to ditch some American he'd never heard of. Likewise, Manfred, also an experienced international, resented the emergence of Nobu, another unknown. They all made the running look so easy at times, but the personality conflicts revealed the pressure and fear they often hid on the road. By now Kaiho's feet were just blood and raw flesh. Our sponsor, Mr. Okada (president of MoonBat Co.) who was now Kaiho's boss (he offered Kaiho a position in the company after the 1994 event) tried to smooth the way for a seemingly inevitable DNF by advising Kaiho to withdraw. It was a typically Japanese face-saving gesture and drew a typical response: Kaiho chose to stay and fight on. Fight On ("Ganbatte!"), that's what spectators yell at a marathon in Japan (and MoonBat staff did so for our runners, too, of course), where we would say more casually, "Go for it."

Day 9: A rare truce up front as the distance, 55 miles, proved too intimidating for a fight. Ray tried to break away on Las Vegas Blvd. at eight minutes a mile, but the other three worked together to keep him close and then catch him before they were out of the city. They finished together in Moapa in 8:44:07, still a stage record but the slowest winning time yet. Manfred tried to ditch Nobu in the middle of the stage, then crashed and walked in the last five miles, gaining just 3:25 at the end.

Day 10: Manfred crashed and walked in again, this time blaming it on his crew, and finally lost fifth place to Nobu. At the start at 5:00 a.m. a sentimental Alan Firth, crew for Mike Sandlin, had noted the brilliant pink skies coming up over the mountains and murmured, "Beautiful morning." "Yeah, just makes you want to get up and run on the freeway," replied a slightly more jaded Mike, who couldn't believe he had been persuaded (mainly by Ray Bell) to return to this hellish race after 1993's DNF.

Day 11: Manfred stormed through this stage with the leaders and angrily took back fifth place from Nobu.

Day 12: David sat in his hotel room this morning and thought, why bother? Why keep running for seven more weeks when I'm already so tired? When he did emerge to start the stage, he was a different runner, running now just to finish, just to keep his sanity, just to survive. Dusan pushed in front and ran alone for once, winning by almost three miles.

Kiyoto Nagata in 12th place finished a

difficult series of stages and now began to push the pace. Soon he would find his form and catch some of the runners ahead of him, but his decision to attempt to overtake Mrs. Endo in eighth would eventually unravel his quest to be the oldest finisher ever (at 58).

Day 14: Dusan broke away again the last 15 miles into Monroe, Utah, and put another half-hour on Pat, while Pat finally passed David for second overall. Ed Kelley was really struggling now, his early speed-induced problems having turned into a full-fledged groin pull. He was way last today, 35 minutes behind Don.

Day 15: Manfred re-injured his Achilles and lost half of the three-hour margin he'd made on Nobu in the previous four days. Australian TV showed up to do a big shoot on Patrick, and he obliged them with a sprint finish, but Dusan nipped him at the end nonetheless.

Day 16: Dusan and Pat had a big argument out on the course today after they had pulled ahead of everyone else. Dusan told Patrick, in essence, we're the best two runners in this race, let's sit on it and work together to keep the others from challenging us. Patrick replied that he was here to win and he intended to test Dusan all the way to New York. After some more testy words Dusan backed off and let Patrick win by 12 seconds for Aussie TV. Manfred walked again and was left, this time permanently, in sixth overall by Nobu.

Day 17: Nobu took the lead for the first time and held it for 23 miles, then faded badly at the end to finish fourth.

Day 18: With the Australian TV crew filming from helicopters, Dusan and Pat put on another big show, sprinting the last two kilometers after doing eight-minute miles all day. Dusan won by four seconds.

Day 19: Another tense sprint to the finish in the ghost town of Cisco, Utah. Dusan won by a second and then said to Patrick, very sarcastically, "No injuries. I'm sorry." Pat was just seething and pointed a finger at Dusan and replied, "I'll be in New York. Will you?"

Day 20: Finished off the Western deserts today. It had gone by so much quicker than any of us could remember. At the finish in Fruita, Colorado, Dusan boxed out Patrick in the finish chute for the stage win. Manfred had to walk most of the stage again and finally began to give lots of time to Nobu.

Day 21: Patrick tried to break away early, hoping Dusan wouldn't want to sprint at the start of a 56-mile stage, but Dusan reeled him in and they finished uneventfully together. Ray passed David for third overall.

Day 22: Patrick, who usually set the pace, was too tired to run hard and tried to hold back the lead pack, but Nobu blasted off and it was once again a brutal struggle. After 32 miles down and eight to go they were starting to string out as Dusan pushed for home, when Pat told his old friend Ray Bell to go ahead. Ray knew that something was seriously wrong. Pat shuffled in from

there with the dreaded Trans Am Disease: shin splints.

Day 23: Dusan sprinted away once it was clear that Patrick was hurt and by the end of the day his overall lead went from less than five to more than eight hours as Pat finished 11th. It was Dusan's race now, no doubt about it.

Day 24: Ray passed Pat for second overall and consequently Dusan's overall lead grew to almost 12 hours. This was during the worst part of the Midwest heat wave and we had temperatures in the 90s even at 8-9,000 feet near Vail. Snow was melting at the upper elevations so quickly that the roads were flooding in places and we had to cut part of the course on Days 23 and 26. Pat was dead last, only an hour ahead of the cut-off. When he got to the finish in Frisco, the Australian media were circling like vultures, figuring he was going to pull out. As a final insult, the power failed for half an hour just as Pat was about to go into his hotel room and the hotel got hot and Pat had to walk up to the third floor. It was just torture for him.

Day 25: A shocker as we lost two runners today after losing only one in the first 1,000 miles. Mike Sandlin pulled out early in the stage, burned out and ready to go home, and Ed Kelley missed the cut-off by four minutes as he just refused to take it easy and rest his long-standing groin injury. Pat struggled again, but got acupuncture treatment from Kiyoto Nagata's physio and was running pain-free, if slowly, into Denver the next day.

Day 28: Nobu and Dusan tied for the win, and Pat was third, a minute behind.

Day 30: Nobu blasted off with four miles left and handed Dusan only his second sound defeat of the race, beating him by just over four minutes.

Day 31: Once again Nobu blasted at the end to win by three minutes over Dusan.

Day 32: Longest stage of the race (60.6 miles) and Dusan decided to make a statement, resentful that the other runners were still challenging him. He pulled through 50 miles in 6:38 on the way to an 8:08:34 but gained just 26 minutes on Pat and Ray and was clearly struggling — for the first time — by the finish.

Day 33: Dusan worked hard to do nine minutes a mile and the others were only too happy to humble him, leaving him in sixth, his worst finish of the race.

Heading home

The second half of the race was vastly different as Dusan learned the hard way to adapt a more conservative approach. Within four days after his injury he returned to fast times, but it wasn't the same. Some days he came in limping with blisters (which he'd never had before), hungry, and drenched in sweat. He had a fear of new injuries and was starting to realize how much he had to lose by overextending himself. He had a big lead, after all, and knew he couldn't lose it if he finished in one piece in New York.

With the power vacuum at the front, Nobu took the situation in hand and won every stage from Days 37-43, often in brilliant times, until he himself became injured after the stage into Pittsfield, Illinois. By then Nobu had passed Pat for fourth overall, but Pat regained fourth while Nobu recovered from shin splints during the many long stages in this part of the race. When the stages got shorter the last nine days he once again went on a tear and won eight straight, closing to an hour behind Patrick at the end.

For Ray, the results showed why he'd won Trans Am in 1993. He moved into second quietly and was never challenged from behind, as he always managed to stay near the lead.

David Horton found the race so much different than he'd envisioned. He expected to do well competitively and still see the country, meet people, and enjoy the down time. Instead he lived every day with the fear of the next day's events. The pace was so fast there was no time to enjoy the scenery — he saw only the road and the sweat-stained shirt of whomever he was running with. A race with no heart, that's what it seemed like.

Manfred Leismann in sixth, even with all his injuries, still beat Ray's 1993 record (and of course the best previous time by a German), and he seemed content with that. Jun Onoki in seventh was a true believer in Trans Am and will remember it, I think, as one of the great adventures of his life. He

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ran as fast as Dave Warady did in winning the '92 event, but never even won a stage. Eiko Endo beat Lorna Michael's 1993 women's record by 33 hours and clearly still had a lot left. She was often advised to play it safe and just finish with the record, so she came through well.

Kiyoto Nagata made a month-long effort to catch Mrs. Endo for eighth place but eventually overextended himself and withdrew on Day 48 near Indianapolis. He'd had problems with dehydration in the desert (he'd gone to the hospital to take IV fluids on Days 2 and 3) and they returned as he picked up the pace in Illinois and Indiana. He was especially worried about being hit by a car during a dizzy spell brought on by dehydration, so he wisely withdrew.

Mr. Nagata's withdrawal left Don Winkley, the amiable 57-year-old sandbagger, as the oldest ever finisher. Among other reason, Don went slow to train for the upcoming Sri Chinmoy 1,000-mile and still finished in good shape. Michiyoshi Kaiho finished his second straight Trans Am in high spirits, and even gave me presents in New York after I'd put him through two more of the hardest months of his life.

It appears clear now that Trans Am is over. Our sponsor, MoonBat Company of Japan, gave us \$75,000 to pay off the debts we'd incurred in the four years we've organized the race, but felt they couldn't continue to put money into the race. Michael Kenney and I owe everything to them: they made our dream come true and kept us from defaulting on our loans (much of it guaranteed by my family) and being disgraced, a fear we've lived with for so long. For me organizing this race has been unforgettable, an experience beyond anything I could describe to you now. I'm so happy we decided to go for it, even though I know now we were crazy to think we could pull it off. Maybe that's what saved us.

MoonBat Trans America Foot Race

Huntington Beach, Calif., to New York, N.Y.
2,906.05 miles June 17 - Aug. 19, 1995

1. Dusan Mravlje, SLO	427:59:00 !
2. Ray Bell, FL	+16:50:31
3. David Horton, VA	+21:27:51
4. Pat Farmer, AUS	+33:14:50
5. Nobolaki Koyago, JPN	+34:25:58
6. Manfred Leisman, GER	+53:32:18
7. Jun Onoki, JPN	+89:07:04
8. Aiko Endo, JPN	+123:46:01 !
9. Michiyoshi Kaiho, JPN	+141:54:26
10. Don Winkley, TX	+307:37:43
14 starters	! = course record

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Six Eggs and a Burger Help Menard Repeat at Badwater

by Ben Jones

This was the eighth year Hi-Tec Sports USA, Inc., has put on the race from Badwater, Death Valley, to Whitney Portals. It is regarded as an extreme event. It seems to be even more popular now along with the Eco-Challenge, Extreme Games and the Raid Galouises. So far, no one has been in Badwater and the Raid. This year there were four competitors from the Eco-Challenge and the Extreme Games: Marshall Ulrich, Cory Shane, Lisa Smith, and Whit Rambach.

The main extreme is always the heat of 120-130° at the start with 100-degree cooler temperatures 146 miles away at the top of Mt. Whitney. The risk of heat exhaustion, heat stroke, and dehydration is great all 135 miles to Whitney Portals. Those who go to the top risk electrocution from lightning strikes during summer storms, as well as hypothermia from worsening weather. En route, there can be sidewinders, scorpions, tarantulas, rabid bats, mountain lions, and bears for additional thrills. (There have been no problems with these during the race in previous years, but it is good to be forewarned.) Sleep deprivation and accompanying hallucinations are other interesting factors.

Physical training and adaptation to these elements is about a third of the battle.

The next third is physiologic. Three of the surfaces of the body have to make it: skin, gastric lining, and urinary tract lining. The skin must be protected from direct and reflected sunlight and feet have to be protected from getting blisters. The gastric lining must be presented with the perfect balance of fluids, calories, and electrolytes. Otherwise, dehydration from hyperemesis (vomiting) may occur. The urinary tract lining is influenced, also, by the same balance of fluids and nutrients, and, if not, either hematuria (blood in the urine) or worse, no urine formation at all, can occur.

The last third is mental attitude and adjustment. It helps greatly to have trained on the course for what I call "imprinting." Practicing on various segments of the course and watching the environment slowly go by really helps in doing the event. Knowing ahead of time what kind of emergency may happen makes for a safer passage. I have an advantage of having treated about every kind of emergency between the low and high spots. A prerequisite to actually doing the race might be to crew it one year. By the way, it almost wore me out more to crew it than to do it this year.

Bill Menard returned this year after winning the men's running race last year. He

set a priority in 1995 to do the "Grand Slam," which is completing four of five of the following 100's: Western States, Leadville, Wasatch, and either Old Dominion (Virginia) or Vermont. He might even add Angeles Crest for the "Western Slam." He almost buckled at Western States, had it not been for getting held up at a medical aid station. He and another front-runner took a wrong turn at Old Dominion and went 15 miles out of the way and got disqualified for riding in a truck back to the missed turn. That meant he had to do Vermont, which was the weekend prior to Badwater. He finished that one in around 20 hours. I called him two days before the Badwater Race and told him that Joe Schlereth was injured at Western States and would not be coming and that Marshall Ulrich was attempting to do the Badwater Race self-contained with a 200-pound bike cart! He told me that he would check the airlines and, if it did not cost a lot, he would come.

He called back and said it cost a fortune, but he was on his way anyway. His crew member, Dave Burke, also had about two hours to get ready. They arrived in Las Vegas about 18 hours before race time. They still had to face jet-lag, get some sleep, rent a car, and purchase provisions. Nevertheless, he got to the race in time and started with the idea he would not win. Never further back than fifth, he gradually nibbled away at the runners in front. No time was wasted taking aid. He does not like gum drops, pretzels or jerky. Instead, he slurped down small jars or cans of mushrooms, tomatoes, etc., "anything I would ordinarily eat." He sent Dave ahead to Panamint Springs resort at 72 miles for a breakfast order of six eggs and a half-pound of hamburger cooked about medium. It was ready for him when he arrived. He gulped it down in five minutes and was off to win another buckle and \$500. He goes to a lot of races and does altitude training in multi-level parking garages. Bill is more than happy to talk about his training methods and run strategy. His approach has to be appreciated and admired.

David Jones' arrival was preceded by phone calls from the media in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. He flashed through the course smiling all the way. He did admit to feeling the "blast furnace" effect upon arrival at, appropriately enough, Furnace Creek Ranch. After Bill Menard passed him, the two crews exchanged messages about encouraging each other to do some walking. His crew admitted to being more used to attending tennis matches, so this was a real change.

Judy Overholzer crewed Keith Pippin in 1993 and was injured before the 1994 race, so she entered the walk division instead and won it. This year she entered the