



TRULY HELL ON GRAVEL

BY BRANDI LANE, RD

**HELL ON
GRAVEL RUN**
EL DORADO, KS //
JULY 9
 2,2' // 50K

Elevation gain:
minimal

The course includes dirt and gravel roads, prairie and rolling hills, near wheat, soybean, cotton, hay, sorghum and corn fields. Runners should expect exposed terrain and be prepared for hot temperatures.

Mike Osterholt of Kearney, Nebraska, smiles early in the 50k race, on his way to a first-place finish.  RICK MAYO
/ MILE 90 PHOTOGRAPHY



JULY in southern Kansas: we were wondering if the temperatures would prove the name of our event accurate. After much sweating and checking the weather, we inhaled a muggy breath of fresh air. The temperature was going to be stifling and the gravel roads were going to be hot.

The 50k runners toed the line at 5:30 a.m. With a little light on the eastern horizon and a warm breeze, they were off. As race director, I was relaxed for a split second, and then I started to worry about everyone on the course. Who was I going to take to the hospital due to dehydration? Who was going to get lost? Who was going to DNF? How are my volunteers?

I compiled a text to all the volunteers so they knew what

to expect, could communicate with each other and keep eyes on each runner. I am very lucky to have volunteers who care and understand that this mental and physical accomplishment for each runner is important. The volunteers know they play a vital role in runners reaching the finish line.

The 50k runners had 31 miles of Kansas terrain, farm animals, hills and heat to battle. During the first hour of the run, the sun was behind the clouds. We knew if the runners had a little extra something in their bag of tricks, it was time to push it out of their comfort zone and gain mileage while taking advantage of the shady conditions. We got word from our aid stations that everyone was on pace and looking good at mile 17. Then the

sun started to creep out and worry set in. In each past edition of the race, we have had one participant who was dehydrated and had to be taken to the hospital. Was this year going to follow suit?

As the heat rose, runners faced the part of the course nicknamed the “Ankle



TOP: Jamie Gibson took second place in the women's 50k.

 RICK MAYO / MILE 90 PHOTOGRAPHY

ABOVE: Derek Hightower runs over the “ankle-breaking” large gravel.  RICK MAYO / MILE 90 PHOTOGRAPHY

Breaker.” This straightaway section, miles 16-18, features rolling hills and large gravel. The terrain separates the runners who have trained for all elements from those who think Kansas is flat.

The final turn off this ankle-breaker section is a relief, but also a reality check as runners ask themselves, “What do I have left?” Many miles left ahead is daunting enough, but then to add full sun and gravel? The mental challenge usually means one or two DNFs.

As the runners dread their way toward the finish line, the

thought of medals, belt buckles, custom finisher’s awards and pride drives each foot in front of the other. The skies seem to open, gravel turns into clouds and the determination is there just to get the race done. As the runners near the finish, they can hear family, friends and spectators cheering them to make it to the finish. The Hell on Gravel 50K proved to be a great way to see the beauty of Kansas, while testing mental toughness. (And, I’m happy to report, I took no one to the hospital this year!) ▲



Angela Stewart does a cartwheel across the finish line. 📷 RICK MAYO / MILE 90 PHOTOGRAPHY



Hell on Gravel Run

El Dorado, KS // July 9

🏃 2.2' // 50K

1	Mike Osterholt, 49, NE	4:19:54
2	Derek Hightower, 21, KS	4:21:17
3	Marc Plummer, 27, MO	4:27:56
4	Stephanie Cundith, 47, KS	4:48:07
5	Doug Smith, 46, KS	5:26:56
6	Jamie Gibson, 39, KS	5:38:14
7	Mason Greene, 47, KS	5:43:11
8	Matt Magnuson, 47, KS	6:09:37
9	Paul Cornwell, 20, IL	6:42:34
10	Angela Stewart, 41, AR	6:52:54

*See page 39 for key

This cookie was made to celebrate adventures. It tastes like a 100 miler, devilishly awesome but still a bit healthy. 🐾

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