



RUNNING WITH..

DEAN KARNAZES

Dean Karnazes' 30th birthday was a turning point. The boozed-up executive left his friends celebrating his birthday in a San Francisco nightclub and, from nowhere, felt the urge to run. So he did. He kept running for 30 miles. And he's hardly stopped since. Running Free's Julia Buckley meets the bloke they call Ultramarathon Man...

Words by Julia Buckley

RF: Did you run as a child?

DK: I started running home from kindergarten at age six. Then, I ran my first marathon at age 14. But I didn't run again for fifteen years after that.

RF: When was your first long run?

DK: It was my 30th birthday and I was bored with my life and wanted to do something wild and intense. I was in a nightclub and something just took me. I got up, walked out of the club and ran 30 miles through the night. It was the first time I had run since age 14.

RF: Wow, that was quite a way to end a night out! Was that when you decided to become an ultra-runner? (Ultra-races are distances longer than the standard 26.2 marathon.)

DK: Pretty much. It wasn't a fast 30 miles - nor was it very pretty - but I made it. It shocked me to learn what the human body is capable of achieving.

RF: What was it like to complete your first ultra-race?

DK: After my first hundred mile, the Western

States 100-Mile Endurance Run, I couldn't walk for a week. I remember trying to step down off the curbside on my way to the office and falling over. So much has happened since then, never in my wildest dreams did I think it would lead me to the place I am today.

RF: Training must play a huge part in your life now, do you ever have time for anything else?!

"I got up, walked out of the club and ran 30 miles through the night."

DK: I run about 75 to 200 miles a week and also cross-train with other sports I love - mountain biking, surfing, snowboarding, climbing - to maintain upper body and core strength. I train constantly and really don't have any "spare time." What spare time I do have, I spend with my family. People talk about the sacrifices they make to achieve their dreams and I've definitely sacrificed my spare time. I have absolutely no social life whatsoever. That is fine by me, it is the price I must pay and wouldn't trade it for the world.

RF: And what about our diet? You don't look like you eat too many cakes!

DK: Recently, I've been following a program that I call "The Neanderthal Diet." The premise is straightforward, when choosing the foods I eat, I use this simple filter: would Neanderthal Man have access to this food? Pasta? Nope. Ice cream? Uh uh. Bread? No way. Fruit? Sure,

he'd find a tree. Vegetables? Yep, he could pull it from the ground. Fish and lean meat? If Neanderthal Man could catch it, he could eat it. That is how I eat. Back in Neanderthal days it was all organic, so I try to eat as many organic foods as possible.

RF: You're clearly 100% committed to your running, which is more important for ultra-running, the physical or mental side?

DK: It really requires a combination, but I would say that mental toughness is most

important. For instance, it's been said of the Western States that you run the first 50 miles with your legs, and the next 50 miles with your mind.

RF: What goes on in head during those long hard runs?

DK: I try to be present, to stay aware and in the moment in my head during difficult runs. Instead of seeking out milestones, I use a technique I simply call, "baby steps." Rather

to me, as it does to every distance runner.

RF: So what keeps you going when it gets really gruelling?

DK: I like pain (more laughter). No, really, the more gruelling the endeavour, the more satisfying the accomplishment.

RF: Which of your achievements are you most proud of?

"I like nothing more than to go running for days on end alone...being in front of a TV camera made me really tense"

than looking at the mileage markers and thinking about the distance still left to cover, which can be daunting and overwhelming at times, I just concentrate on taking one step at a time and not getting ahead of myself. Even if there are still many miles in front of me, I don't think about that. I stay in the moment and just put one foot in front of the other, taking baby steps to the best of my ability. This seems to work better for me than seeking out set milestones during long hard runs.

RF: Do you experience 'runner's high' during ultra-runs? If so, how long do you stay up there?

DK: You don't necessarily experience 'runner's high' for lengthy periods during an ultra, it's more like dullness of pain at certain points - followed, unfortunately, by excruciating pain afterwards. For me, the runner's high and euphoria kicks in post-ultra and can last for days or sometimes weeks.

RF: What's the toughest part of ultra running?

DK: Waiting around the starting line. I don't like that pent up energy and nervousness. I'm fine once the starting gun goes off, but beforehand is murder. Standing idle stresses me out (laughs).

RF: What's the closest you've ever come to quitting during a race?

"Anyone can achieve greatness on some level, even if they're just "average" like me."

DK: Oh, I've had some spectacular failures (laughs even more!). The best way to build mental toughness is to push yourself to failure. Until you fail, you don't know how far you can go. I always encourage people to embrace failure and learn from the experience so that you can go farther in the future. The races I've stopped are when I've felt I could do lasting or permanent damage to my body if I kept going. That doesn't happen often, luckily, but it has happened



For more on Dean visit his website at: www.ultramarathonman.com

"I like pain...really!"

RUNNERS