

71, and he's still running

Why Walt Stack is called amazing

By Keith Peters
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SAN FRANCISCO — It's 9 a.m. The sun is fighting to penetrate a dense fog that hangs over the city like a down comforter.

At 321 Collingwood, Walt Stack climbs on his bicycle and begins a five-mile ride across town.

This morning begins like any other for Walt Stack — everyone calls him Walt — yet it is a day so different from those spent by the three-piece suit executives who occupy San Francisco's high-rises. But Stack at 71 is unlike any other man.

He is an adventurer, a running adventurer. For Stack, adventure is always on the run — whether it's a marathon in Greece, the Boston Marathon or a Fun Run in Golden Gate Park. He blazes his trails with the soles of his feet.

After Stack's five-mile bicycle ride across The City and over many of its steepest hills, he stops at the Dolphin Club, which he founded and has been president of for the past 13 years.

After changing into his running gear, he leaves Aquatic Park on what will be a 17-mile run across the Golden Gate Bridge to Sausalito — and back. After his return, he cools down with a 30-minute swim in the 50-degree water of the Bay.

Stack didn't begin his running career until age 58. Since then, he has run 91 marathons, nine 50-milers and three 100-milers.

He recently won the 70-and-over division at the 24th annual Pikes Peak Climb, ascending the 14,110-foot mountain in 5:30.51. In 1978, he was one of 68 men and women entered in the grueling Western States 100-mile Endurance Run. Only 28 people finished the race, and Stack was one of them.

That run lasted 37½ hours and took him across 16 miles of snow, up 20,000 vertical feet and across jagged rock waiting to tear into his flimsy running shoes.

The daytime temperatures hovered near 90 degrees with the thermometer plunging to 38 degrees at night.

Stack remembers brief encoun-



Photo courtesy of Runner's World
Walter Stack

ters with rattlesnakes — “they didn't bother us, and we certainly didn't bother them” — and fording the American River's raging currents.

Two weeks later, he ran in the San Francisco Marathon and finished in just over four hours.

He looks back on his Western States experience and simply says: “I just wanted to see if I could do it.”

And that has been Stack's philosophy on life. At 19 he became a merchant seaman and roamed the seas for 26 years, always looking for challenges.

He has continued to roam the world these past 13 years, running in Greece, Fiji, Auckland, Toronto and marathons in Boston and New York. He would like to run in England and South Africa and will compete in the annual Honolulu Marathon Saturday.

Stack, a bit of ham, isn't shy about publicity. And he's somewhat of a celebrity. His picture has been published in many national magazines, including Playboy.

Walt Stack is special, be there no doubt about it. Try pedaling, running and swimming with him some morning. You'll see.

FITNESS

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dustry alone is estimated at \$100 to \$200 million in annual volume in the United States alone, according to City Sports Monthly magazine. Add to that the numerous less-essential accouterments, and you have an industry estimated at \$300 million annually.

Running may have started a physical-fitness activity, but in one decade it has become big business.

Runner's World magazine of Mountain View, which was started in a basement by a Kansas runner in the late 1960s, is slick and fat with advertisements. Newer magazines such as Running Times of Woodbridge, Va., and The Runner of New York City are healthy and growing. Apparently there are enough runners to read all three and enough advertisers to spend money in them.

Ten years ago, major corporations would giggle if you asked them to sponsor road races. Today, Pepsi Cola sponsors the Diet Pepsi 10,000 — a series of 10,000-meter runs. Sprite supports the Sprite 5 Kilometer Sprints. Perrier sparkling water sponsors several marathons and shorter runs nationwide and has begun running obstacle courses called "Perrier Par-courses."

Perrier's well-timed association with running in the United States is in no small way connected to a

huge 2,000%-increase in sales in just one year.

Other products, some of them slightly ridiculous to nonrunners, are earning small fortunes for their manufacturers.

Joggers can set out on their daily runs in \$65 shoes, \$100 warmup suits, headband radios and carry Shriek Alerts to discourage hungry dogs. There are such things as jogging bras, too.

Movies about running are being made as well. First there was "Goldengirl," the whimsical tale of a superhuman female runner (Susan Anton) who is programmed for world records and gold medals. Now there is "Running," the story of a dropout turned Olympic marathoner.

Television has had "The Jericho Mile" and the soon-to-be released "Marathon."

After all that, if you're not inundated with running, drop in at Baskin-Robbins for a Jogger's Jamoca.

There is no question that America is running-mad. But why?

Rev. Dr. Fred Graham of Michigan State says runners are seeking "secular salvation." Simply put, they want to live longer and not get old, Graham says.

Graham in a research study of the psychology of jogging analyzed the motivations of 100 runners over a five-year period. His findings appeared in Runner's World magazine.

Graham asked the runners how long they planned to do it. "Until I drop," said one. "They'll have to carry me out feet first," said an-

other. "I'm never going to stop running," said a third.

Dr. George Sheehan, a Red Bank, N.J., physician who is known as running's guru, is typical of most dedicated runners. He says in his Runner's World medical column: "Running pays off, and it pays off today. Exercise gives instant and exhilarating effects. There is a natural high to be obtained legally.

"Running has gone beyond fitness. The movement which began in pursuit of health has now become an experiential quest. Runners are no longer content with fitness. They are seeking a new awareness of themselves, a self-realization in the total experience of running."

To do this, many runners are obsessed:

—Jay Helgerson, 24, of Foster City, has run a marathon a week since January and wants to make it 70 straight before the year ends. His travels will take him through 49 states.

—Marcy Schwam of San Francisco broke two world records this year when she became the first American woman to run farther than 100 miles in 24 hours. Schwam, 26, methodically clicked off 113 miles, 1,183 yards in one day. After a 13-hour rest, she went back to circle the track 129 more times to better her own 48-hour world mark.

—Don Choi of San Francisco ran 204 miles during a 48-hour period in May.

—Al Arnold, 50, in midsummer ran across Death Valley and up Mt. Whitney in 84 hours, covering 145

miles.

—Frank Giannino of New York, after tearing a ligament in his knee four years ago and being told he would never run again, last April finished a run across the United States. The 27-year-old covered 2,987 miles in 60 days and six hours, according to Runner's World.

—Jerry Benson, who lost his lower left leg in Vietnam, last year ran in Chicago's Mayor Daley Marathon wearing a prosthesis. According to Runner's World, Benson was forced to remove his false leg due to irritation, and he finished the final 16 miles on crutches.

TOMORROW: Holistic health — what it is and why so many Americans believe in it.