

Star-Telegram

Running around the entire world, one marathon at a time

Fort Worth lawyer Bill Berenson travels the world one marathon at a time.

BY JOHN HENRY - SPECIAL TO THE STAR-TELEGRAM

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Attorney Bill Berenson has run a marathon in every state of the United States and plans to run one on every continent in the world by the time he turns 70. RON JENKINS / STAR-TELEGRAM

As a personal injury attorney, Bill Berenson works a mile a minute, and as an accomplished long-distance runner, he has set a marathon pace not too far from that standard.

Lawyering is his livelihood. Running is his life.

Last year, Berenson met his goal of 50 by 60, running a marathon in every state by his 60th birthday, something he accomplished in 10 years.

More impressive still is that he has qualified for the Boston Marathon in 40 of those 50 marathons.

Berenson is returning to where he discovered his passion, poised to confront a new endurance test at this year's Cowtown Marathon races, set for Feb. 28 and March 1 with the start and finish on the grounds of the Will Rogers Memorial Center.

He will take on the race's 50-kilometer ultramarathon course.

"After I finished my 50th state I was looking for a new challenge and what better place to begin that than with the Cowtown Ultra Marathon," Berenson said.

Berenson's journey to the Lone Star State is a familiar Texas story. Like many of Texas' pioneer greats, he's a Tennessee guy originally, a native of Nashville who packed his bags for undergraduate study at Texas in Austin. SMU law school was next and a new home in Fort Worth followed.

His first marathon was the Cowtown, at age 40, and it was unintentional. Berenson had what seemed a rational plan: He would run the half-marathon, stopping at Mile 13, which was near his house on the old marathon course.

"But I stupidly kept going," joked Berenson, who finished that first race in a 4-hour, 17-minute stride.

Berenson didn't run another marathon for 10 more years.

His pace is much faster today. Of his 50 marathons, 10 have been under 3:30, with a personal best of 3:24 in Des Moines, Iowa. His average time is 3:35.

The average marathon finish for a man is about 4:30.

"I wanted to turn my life around," said Berenson on why running became his hobbyhorse. "I wanted a new passion. I wanted to be more healthy. And it definitely worked."

And he has a message: You can do it, too.

What is your typical workout each week? I only run three times a week. I'm a low mileage runner. About 30 miles a week.

You lead a busy life as an attorney. How do you fit in all the running? I've run at 4 in the morning and midnight before. If you really want something bad enough you make time for it.

What's the most difficult circumstance you've faced in a run? My personal worst was the infamous Chicago Marathon in 2007. It was in the 90s when we finished. It was grueling. They cut the race off halfway, but I finished. I finished in 4 hours, 22 minutes. It was a personal worst, but I finished.

On your wall at the office you have displayed your diplomas and such, but it's also loaded with marathon stuff. What is on that wall marathon-related that you're most proud of? There is a *Runner's World* cover signed by Sarah Reinertsen, who has only one leg. She's the first woman amputee to finish the Ironman World Championship in Hawaii. I met her at an expo and she wrote, 'Bill, anything is possible.' I look at that every day and it motivates me.

Your new challenge is to run on all seven continents by your 70th birthday. You're doing Paris this spring. They run marathons on Antarctica? That would be my last one [laughing]. I'll save that one for last. I'm looking into a couple of races in Africa [for a trip next year]. Mount Kilimanjaro has a good one.

You've also already hit Asia with a marathon centered around the Sea of Galilee in Israel. How was that? It was one of the best days of my life. I can't describe the feeling ... magical. I also ran my second-fastest time even with a head wind that slowed me down.

How has being a vegan improved your running? Becoming a vegetarian changed my life and made me a better runner. No question about it. I'm not here to try to talk you into becoming a vegetarian, but if you eat more fruits and vegetables, you'll feel better.

What have been some of your favorite sites in your 50 by 60? There's nothing like Boston and the crowds of New York and Chicago, but running by waterfalls in Hawaii, running away from moose in Alaska. Running right by the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. I've run down five mountains in the Rockies. It's been extraordinary way to see the United States.

Wait, what's this about the moose in Alaska? There was a moose protecting her calf right on the course. They were yelling at us, "get away, get away!" because the moose was glaring at us.