



Sri Chinmoy 2,700 Mile Race

Six Runners Chase a Legend

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On an overcast, humid Thursday morning, on June 13, 1996, six intrepid runners attempted to run a distance equal to that from California to New York, without travelling further than a few city blocks in Jamaica, Queens, New York. It was the first, and ultimately, only Sri Chinmoy 2700 Mile Race, a unique test of endurance and staying power, set in the neighborhood and run only on sidewalks.

The requirements were few: average 57.447 miles (92.452 km) per day for 47 days to finish, and 50 miles per day to stay in the race. The weekly cutoffs were 385 miles per week, with a 1,600 mile cut-off for four weeks. Everyone started together each morning at 05:00 and the course closed at 23:00 hours each night.

The concept of running 2,700 miles on a loop course had been the vision of founder and director of the Marathon Team - Sri Chinmoy. We had been sponsoring multi-day races since 1985, and after a fantastic and large trio event (1300 miles, 1000 miles and 700 miles with 62 total participants) concluded in October of 1991, Sri Chinmoy announced after the awards ceremony, on camera, that he would be happy if his Team would put on a 2,700 mile

race in the near or distant future. It took us nearly five years to bring the event to fruition, as we canvassed the surrounding areas of Queens and Brooklyn, to find a running course or area suitable for all-day running. Our final option, after rejection from some parks officials and community boards, was a .5488 of a mile (883.2079 meters) sidewalk loop near Thomas Edison Vocational Technical High School, the Joe Austin Playground, and two side streets in Jamaica Hills, New York. The school principal and local police precinct captain allowed the event and encouraged us.

Although the field was small compared with most ultras, all of the runners were talented veterans of multi-day competition. **Georgs Jermalojevs**, 53, of Riga, Latvia was perhaps the top runner, with three consecutive wins and course records in his last three multi-days. Foremost among those three was his world-best time of 16 days 14 hours for 1,300 miles in the 1995 Sri Chinmoy Ultra Trio.

His stiffest competition would come from Trans-America veteran **Ed Kelley**, 38, from Sacramento, CA. Kelley loves to race, and having been across the States four times on foot, he knew what to expect. When we picked him up at Newark airport, Ed was supremely confident of running close to 70 miles a day.

Trishul Cherns, 39, Canada's best male multi-day runner, had looked forward to this race for two years. He often dreamed of running 60 miles a day, then driving home to his Ozone Park, Queens apartment instead of crashing on a cot in a leaky tent like previous multi-days. Trishul had set a Canadian 48-hour record the previous year at La Rochelle, and held over 20 Canadian records at various distances.

Jesse Dale Riley, 33 of Key West, Florida was the fourth male competitor. Jesse had been co-director of the Trans America race from 1992-1995, and was also a writer and observer on the US ultra-running scene. He had even participated in several of our multi-days, having fallen just 25 miles short of 1000 miles in a race. He was eager to run and test what he learned from watching the David Waradys, Ray Bells and Istvan Siposes of the super-long running world. His hope was to run himself into shape and make the cutoffs. He helped the great Al Howie run across Canada in 1991, running nearly 2000 miles in the four month saga.

Two women filled out the field of six runners. The best American female multi-day runner, **Suprabha Beckjord**, 40, from Washington, DC, was entered after a year off from

multi-day racing. She held American bests for 700 miles, 1000 miles and 1300 miles, and more importantly, was a tough, relentless competitor. Her ability to stay focused and alert for days and days would help her in the 2,700. Her lack of blazing speed was not a negative, for she had steely determination beneath her calm demeanor and petite size.

She would also be helped by her friend, Canadian runner **Antana Locs**, 37, who lived only a few blocks from the race and worked at the United Nations when not running ultras. Not only was Antana a Canadian women's record holder and best women's multi-day specialist, she was the first woman to ever finish the difficult 1,300 Mile Race three times within the 19 day cut-off for women. She also had the previous year off from long multi-day races to train for this one, and looked forward to big days ahead in this race.



The six runners contemplate the task ahead, as Sri Chinmoy meditates at the start of the race.



Sri Chinmoy, a bona fide spiritual master from India, living in New York since 1964, was unique in his philosophy of incorporating physical fitness into a practice of meditation and spiritual activities. He felt that running was a perfect metaphor for the human journey; it kept the body fit, helped the individual to deal with the problems of life, and offered an avenue of joy in the transcendence of personal achievements. Running also offered balance from the intensity of meditation.

Sri Chinmoy said, “Try to be a runner, and try all the time to surpass and go beyond all that is bothering you and standing in your way...Be a real runner so that ignorance, limitation and imperfection will all drop far behind you in the race.”

The race started shortly after a powerful silent meditation by Sri Chinmoy. Edward Kelley and Georgs Jermalajevs raced for several hours after the start, checking each other out. Georgs had some congestion in his chest, a remnant from his battles in the damp air of the Sri Chinmoy Ten Day Race only a month earlier. Ed was known as a fast starter and would have to be held in check if he were to survive this long race. Trishul Cherns ran cautiously, hoping consistent effort would pay off as the weeks progressed. The two ladies began their relentless assault on the distance, not stopping at all on the first day. Suprabha Beckjord pushed her way into second place overall with 74.08 miles on the first day, trailing only Georgs, who stayed later than everyone and totaled 82.32 miles. Ed Kelley stopped earlier than everyone else with 71.89 miles, confident and pleased with his effort. Jesse Riley walked most of the first day, then finished the last hour running to 50 miles. Antana ran 70.24 miles, and Trishul reached 62.5 miles, both happy and capable of more. The police special events coordinator came out to see the race, as did several people from the neighboring apartments. The school principal even made an appearance to check on the race as our travelling roadshow got through its first act.

The course was not as bad as we thought it might be. Despite a concrete surface, it offered some shade and a change in scenery, with basketball, handball and softball games

nearby, and soccer games on the adjacent field across from the staging area. There were also vendors and kids hanging out, with families walking by from the nearby apartment buildings. The close proximity to the city neighborhood was a change from our normal secluded race site on Wards Island, where encounters with people were less frequent. The runners slept within a few minutes of the race course every night in apartments rented for the race or in their own homes. Trishul had a 13-minute commute home every evening.

Georgs expanded his lead the first week, running close to 70 miles a day, most of the time smiling and wondering when someone would run with him. Ed Kelley hung back for a few days to acclimate his body to the shock of high mileage. He managed 60 miles a day, despite blisters aggravated by the damp weather and rain showers that prevailed every few days. Suprabha and Antana glided into the rhythm of the race, posting 60+ miles per day and going home as the summer sun completely set. After five days Trishul's left shin started to inflame. He began a week-long test of nerves and walking ("It's not easy to walk 50 miles a day you know") as reality set in. Jesse Riley ran hard on the seventh day to make the 385-mile cutoff.



Georgs averaged 68+ miles per day for 15 days, but also realized the value of rest. He would finish early in the evening and ride his bike one mile back to where he was staying, returning to the race in the morning. He found this process was letting his legs unwind and loosen up at the same time. Trishul topped 60 miles on Day 16 to reclaim his running prowess. The effort marks on his face subsided, and his demeanor was changing for the better. Ed Kelley, who had fallen behind Suprabha for third place was now on the rebound. He climbed to within five miles and was asserting the grind with his 2:28 marathon ability.

Georgs Jermolajev moves along smoothly in the first week

With 31 days to go Georgs passed the 1,000 mile split in 14 days 3 hours, which would have placed him in the top 20 all-time for 1,000 miles if this were a 1,000 mile event, but he had 1,700 miles to go! He built his lead to 101 miles over Suprabha and Ed, but became a

little hobbled by a sore Achilles tendon. He backed off for a few days and sliced off the heel counters from his shoes with a razor blade to reduce the swelling in his heel and Achilles tendon. It seemed to work.



Ed Kelley on Day 38

day, as they approached the staging area. The misty clouds broke open and then a silvery sunlight shone on their faces. They were a picture of capacity, strength and confidence. We were fortunate to have seen these people every day of the race.

At the end of three weeks Jesse Riley had made the 385-mile weekly cut-off for the third time by running almost 70 miles on the last day. By the fourth week the pressure grew too much for him, however. On Day 22 he

Ed's favorite pastime: eating while cooling in the ice bucket....

In a video interview, Ed Kelley said, "You have to have a spiritual dimension within yourself to be able to complete these kinds of races. You need the spiritual strength to energize the physical. You need the concern and love of others to help you focus on your goal."

One evening after a hard day of running in rain showers and blustery winds, five of the six runners were approaching the lap counter area at the same time (a rare occasion). Each runner had that special glow, an aura of youthful vigor and energy we might see once or twice in a regular length ultra or multi-day. They were radiating an inner dimension beyond physical boundaries. I saw it in their eyes and their faces. In spiritual lore they say the eyes are the window to the soul. If this is true, then these warriors had become their true selves on that



barely managed 29 miles. He gave it his best shot, but it wasn't enough. He stayed for the remainder of Week 4, totaling 1400.53 miles (2253.93km) a personal distance record by 425 miles. The other runners were sad to see him go, but resigned to the task ahead. The next day he headed to the bus station as more showers drenched the running course.



Suprabha Beckjord on Day 18

Georgs, on the other hand, used many different strategies. He formulated a plan for success: run when he could, walk fast, and stay on the course. He walked for several hours in the morning, often at speeds of 13 to 15 minute miles, mixed with light running. As he warmed up light running increased to faster paced speeds. By late afternoon and evening he began the daily search for solid mileage totals. Georgs passed 2,000 miles in 29 days, an average of two sub-15 day 1,000's-back to back, and still going strong.

The enforced daily curfew definitely helped the runners gain sufficient rest to continue each new day. Georgs, Suprabha and Antana seemed to perform better with a longer overnight break than the 'go as you please' format would offer. You could see their renewed energy each morning. Suprabha and Antana were mentally and physically tough. Suprabha used her arms in a classic shuffle rhythm with her legs, pushing herself across the ground. Antana used more power in her running, using leg speed and balance to propel forward. Both ladies took only two or three short breaks, building their totals to 60-62 miles or more each day.



Antana Locs on Day 5

Week Five: The Journey Beyond the Legend

On Day 38 Suprabha took day leader honors, but Georgs passed 2,500 miles. This was the farthest anyone had ever run in a certified race. Our 2,700 mile race had no precedence other than from an 1880 Welsh pedestrian named **William Gale**, who once walked 2.5 miles every hour for 860 consecutive hours, in an attempt to finish 1,000 consecutive hours of 2.5 miles (November 21, 1880, to January 1, 1881). He walked 2,405 miles, 92yds in 41 days, 16 hours. His records were verified in that attempt, since the distance was measured, but it was a solo effort. Cross continent runs and journey runs cannot be certified, and so their fastest times are course records.

Thus the runners in the 2700 were breaking new ground, and setting new marks, male and female, beyond 2000 km and 1300 miles.



Sri Chinmoy blesses the running course as his vision starts to reveal itself

To the casual observer this race was a lesson in pain and torture, self-inflicted or otherwise. To a student of physical exercise it might have appeared to be a good idea gone extreme. But to ultra runners this was a new laboratory without vehicle breakdowns or brushes with semi-tractor trailers. This was a chance to test one's abilities, to run further than most could ever dream of running. The rules and course confinements only served to highlight the talents of the runners. The five remaining runners were all confident of making 2,700 miles. They were to be victorious because for a period of several weeks they conquered themselves. They travelled a linear mountain and escaped down the other side.

With only a week to go the reality of five finishers became even more impressive. Georgs Jermolajevs picked up his pace on the last day, running 73 miles in 14 hours to finish in 40 days, 11 hours, 49 minutes. He ran without fatigue or pain. Georgs averaged 66.681miles(107.313km) per day for the duration of the journey. About 100 people hurried home from work or left early to watch him finish and share in his elation. He came across the line with clenched hands and tears of joy.

Ed ran past and hugged Georgs, happily screaming Georgs' name as he continued on, still 100 miles left and another two days of running until he would be finished. It didn't matter. A fellow warrior had done the nearly impossible, and surely Ed would follow. Indeed, Edward Kelley finished almost two days later in 42 days, one hour, 14 minutes and 44 seconds, as broad satisfaction and joy shimmered on his face. He averaged 64.209 miles (103.334km) per day, overcoming serious blisters and the formidable mileage.



Suprabha needed another day to finish her journey, reaching her goal of self-transcendence in 43 days, 0 hours and 46 minutes. Her facial expression had hardly changed since Day 1, as she confidently shuffled her way into everyone's hearts. She averaged 62.746 miles (100.980km) per day.

Suprabha reflecting on the amazing race experience

Antana Locs needed 44 days, 4 hours and 27 minutes to achieve her goal. Overcoming sore knees for weeks, she beamed happiness as the finish line tape gave way beneath her last stride. She averaged 61.108 miles (98.343km) per day, slipping into legend with her powerful stride and cheerful heart.

Only Trishul remained in the race, needing a full day until evening to realize his seemingly impossible goal. With his finish of 45 days 15 hours and nine minutes, he had reached beyond himself and found the capacity and grit to hang on and reach the goal, averaging 59.171 miles (95.227km) per day.

At the awards ceremony two days later Sri Chinmoy announced his intention to have this race every summer. “Next year the goal will be 3,100 miles! In our philosophy, we believe in self-transcendence. So now we shall see who can do it.”

Sri Chinmoy saw indelibly the amazing progress and success the 2,700 Mile Race brought to the runners and his students who helped and supported the race. This event was a steppingstone to new achievement that somehow would be revealed. The runners ignited the search for athletic and inner perfection at the same time. The words ‘self-transcendence’ had become mainstream in the consciousness of the athletic world, and remarkable in the spiritual realm.

The next step was the 3,100, the world’s longest certified race, whose infancy would be the harbinger for even greater achievement.

Sahishnu Szczesiul

Twenty-seven hundred miles, twenty-seven!
My heart becomes delight-fragrance-Heaven.

Lyrics to a song composed by Sri Chinmoy on the occasion of the race

Sri Chinmoy 2,700 Mile Race Jamaica, Queens, NY June 13 – July 30, 1996
 .5488 mile (883.2079 meters) paved loop 6 starters



1. Georgs Jermolajevs, 53, Riga, LAT
2700 miles: 40 days+11:49:07

1500 miles: 21+23:29:55
 3000 km : 27+21:47:30
 2000 miles: 29+14:49:44
 4000 km: 37+11:29:10
 2500 miles: 37+14:08:28

*** All new world best times



2. Edward Kelley, 38, Sacramento, CA USA
2700 miles: 42 days+01:14:44

1500 miles: 23+06:25:10
 3000 km : 29+01:04:58
 2000 miles: 31+02:27:28
 4000 km: 38+22:54:18
 2500 miles: 39+02:05:17

** All new USA best times



3. Suprabha Beckjord, 40, Washington, DC
USA 2700 miles: 43 days+00:46:04

1500 miles: 23+22:45:05
 3000 km : 29+22:52:25
 2000 miles: 32+01:22:40
 4000 km: 39+13:14:07
 2500 miles: 40+00:27:30

** All new World and USA best women times



4. Antana Locs, 37, Jamaica, NY (CAN)
2700 miles: 44 days+04:27:23

1500 miles: 24+12:34:35
 3000 km : 31+23:18:50
 2000 miles: 33+02:46:00
 4000 km: 41+01:24:58
 2500 miles: 41+04:50:30

** All new Canadian best women's times



5. Trishul Cherns, 39, S.Ozone Park, NY (CAN)
2700 miles: 45 days+15:09:27

1500 miles: 25+11:11:23
 3000 km : 32+22:46:06
 2000 miles: 34+03:36:09
 4000 km: 42+08:05:30
 2500 miles: 42+12:19:04

** All new Canadian best men's times

6. Jesse Dale Riley, 34, Key West, Florida USA

1400.53 miles= 27days +13:41:33

50.798 miles per day/ 81.752 km