

# Tale of the Ancient Marathoner



Jack Foster's  
Own Story



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# FOREWORD

If a friendship can be measured by the number of letters two people exchange, then I can count Jack Foster among my best friends. On my desk here now is an inch-thick folder of lightweight blue aerogrammes postmarked "Rotorua, New Zealand." They date back to 1970, when I started working for *Runner's World* and Jack started subscribing to the magazine.

I feel I know Foster about as well as I know any runner. And yet I've never met the man. Twice we should have met but didn't. I got no closer than a knock on his door.

I'd just sneaked through the gates of Olympic Village in Munich. Instead of going to the American dorms or to the discoteque where athletes idled away their non-training hours, I went straight for the New Zealand compound.

"Where might I find Jack Foster," I asked the woman in the team's office.

"Oh, he's right next door," she said, pointing back over her shoulder.

The door opened directly onto a main pedestrian thoroughfare of the Village, a wide sidewalk already crowded with athletes at mid-morning. The door was closed.

I knocked, feeling none of the awe or dread I might normally feel if I were about to interview a well-known runner—say, a Ron Hill or Derek Clayton, or even a then not-so-well-known Frank Shorter. If one of them hadn't answered after two knocks, I might have been relieved. But when Foster didn't answer, I was disappointed.

"Oh well," I shrugged. "I'll try again later." But a few days later the Israelis were killed and people who didn't belong in the Village couldn't go in any more. I wouldn't have missed anything there if I hadn't missed seeing the marathoner from New Zealand.

It was incidental, really, that Foster was one of the fastest men in the world—and certainly the fastest of his age. (He'd turned 40 that May 23.) I wanted to meet him not because he was faster and older than most runners, but because he said things about the sport that made such sense. And he'd had enough success to back up their validity.

When I mailed Jack a questionnaire in 1970, asking him to list data on his running for an article, he wrote back, "I feel flattered that you should ask me for a 'profile.' This has usually been reserved for the big winners. Must be the age fascination." Then he outlined a philosophy that younger and smaller winners might well copy. I've copied it myself, and quoted it (usually without naming the original source) more times than I can count.

"I don't think of running as 'training,'" he wrote then. "When I was asked about training and schedules last time, I told the guy, 'I don't train. I just go for a run each day.' He didn't quite figure that one. 'Training' to me is repetition 220's and 440's, tough sessions on the roads at or near five-minute-per-mile pace, etc. If this is what the physiologists and sports specialist

doctors have come up with to be a champ, then I must remain a mug runner and enjoy my evening sessions in the hills.”

The fact that Jack didn't start running until he was almost 33 years old, married, the father of four, and working, undoubtedly influenced this perspective. He started running for fitness and later it became enjoyable. He continued to run mostly for these reasons.

He said, “To run four hours a day like I've read some guys do would put it in the same category as going to work or bed—i.e., something I *have* to do. I run simply because I *want* to.”

He made a point of staying less than obsessed with the sport: “I'm not serious enough to force myself out every day, and usually there is one day a week when I don't make it. It has to be a pleasure to go for a run, looking forward to while I'm at work. Otherwise, no dice. This fact, that I'm not prepared to let running be anything but one of the pleasures of my life, is the reason I fail by just so much. However, this doesn't bother me. Nor does the prospect of running 2:30 or even 2:50 marathons in the future.”

Jack wrote this in 1970, and in the next few years after that there were no hints of 2:30-2:50 marathons. He ran 2:12, 2:13 and 2:14 in those years, then went down to 2:11 at the Commonwealth Games in New Zealand early in 1974. Only Ian Thompson beat him there. The two fastest runners in previous marathon history—Derek Clayton and Ron Hill—weren't close to Foster.

Jack came to the United States later in the year, to California. And I missed him again. I was away on vacation and didn't get back in time for the race. While running with a group the next weekend, I mentioned that Jack Foster had been in Los Angeles.

“Jack Foster!” one runner said. “If I'd known he was going to be there, I would have made a special trip down.”

This runner wasn't a hero-worshipper. He said he would have been eager to meet Foster if he were a 3:11 marathoner instead of 2:11. He liked Jack's ideas and wanted to hear more of them.

John Loeschhorn, who works with me, ran in L.A. He met Foster and said, “The guy's incredible. I looked at his training log. Fifty, 60 miles a week, never much more than that. And once every week or two, he skips his run and takes a long bike ride.”

Loeschhorn mentioned that Jack was writing a book. I checked with Jack about it. He wrote back, “It's true that I've put a few thoughts and experiences down on paper. You're most welcome to read what I've written.”

The few thoughts covered almost 100 hand-written pages, in which he casually dropped his philosophies on running in among descriptions of his world travels as an “ancient marathoner.” (The title is his own inspiration.)

The book can be read on two levels. It can be an inspiration for the aging athlete. Foster has lived out the dream of 30- to 40-year-olds who race after goals. He set a world record and ran in international competition after beginning at 32 as an overweight jogger who couldn't go more than a mile his first day.

But I prefer to look at this book as a chance to meet Jack Foster, a man who has important things to say to runners of every ability and age.

—Joe Henderson

# THE MARATHON

*The marathon is an odd event, at an odd distance, and as such it attracts odd characters. It is not a long event, compared with the 50- and 100-mile runs. But it is plenty long enough.*

*There really can't be a "marathon" tennis match or "marathon" dance unless perhaps they are held on the road between Marathon, a tiny village in Greece, and Athens—for this is where our race derived its name.*

*A Greek warrior from the ancient Greek-Per-sian wars was reputed to have fought in a three-day battle, and have run 280 miles for reinforcements. Then he was sent from the Plain of Marathon, where the Persians had landed and the battle was fought, to Athens with the news, "Rejoice, we conquer!" On delivering this brief but eloquent message, the soldier died.*

*In commemoration of this soldier's deeds, a race from Marathon to Athens was introduced when the Olympic Games were revived in 1896.*

*A similar race has been held in every subsequent Olympics and has become a classic in its own right.*

*My association with marathons came about accidentally...and rather late in my life.*

# AN OLYMPIAN AT 40

Race day was hot. Great for swimming or sunbathing, but we had to race 26-odd miles. I usually awaken early, and this day I was up at 6 a.m. I went out for a two-mile jog and some stretching. Even at that hour, it was muggy and warm. I wasn't looking forward to the race even though I'd been preparing for it since April. I accelerated for 200-300 yards across the wet grass of the soccer field and felt good. What a pity it was hot. A waste of six months' preparation on a hot marathon which wouldn't produce a good time. Time was what mattered here.

It was 6:45 a.m. The start wasn't until 3 p.m., more than eight hours away. I had to wait. That was all I'd been doing in the weeks I'd been here. Waiting. The days had been an endless round of eating, resting, running and sleeping—all part of the waiting for 3 p.m. on Sept. 10 to arrive.

Most days had been the same. Rise about 6:30. Light breakfast. Collect mail. Perhaps write some. Do a bit of washing. Run for an hour or so on the roads or at one of the tracks. Lunch. A sleep. Another hour's run. Dinner. A couple of beers. Wander around the Village. Then to bed by about 10. My mileage had shot up from my usual 80 to around 120 per week. But it was easy to do in two runs a day.

This Sunday morning, Sept. 10, I had breakfast alone. There was hardly anyone in the cafeteria this early. I went back to the room and wrote a couple of letters. Discus thrower Robin Tait went out to breakfast, and came back with some mail. He told me I was sure to get a medal today, that I was New Zealand's most consistent performer. We'd have to see.

The morning dragged on. Early lunch with fellow New Zealand marathoner Terry Manners. We sat and scoffed our jam butties. I noticed the little Belgian, Karel Lismont, eating his jam butties. He was the European Games marathon winner in 1971. He was sitting with Gaston Roelants, another Belgian great. Gaston, too, was eating jam butties. The best "fuel" for distance runners is carbohydrate and jam butties are a good source of that.

We wandered back to our rooms for a laydown and wait. There was not much else we could do but wait, conserve energy. I felt good, but this heat would slow us. I had a cold shower to try and lower my temperature as much as possible.

I put on my gear. String singlet, silk jock to reduce chafe. We'd chafe today alright, the extra sweat would see to that.

Although it was still over an hour before the start, it was time to go. We were taken to the warmup areas. Would you believe it? Over 80 degrees, 26 miles to race and there were some guys jogging around, an hour before the start, warming up! I lay down, almost dozing.



Finally, it was time to go onto the track. A last check. German thoroughness. Numbers pinned securely. Correct uniform, no hidden drinks, etc. Shepherded through the tunnel and into the arena like gladiators before Caesar.

I'll never forget it as long as I live. The size of the bowl. The noise. The thousands of thousands of people, dressed in every color. Officials everywhere, light pea-green suits, little white caps. Runners jogging up and down.

We were called to the line one by one. Seventy-odd runners. It took ages. Finally, "Foster... you-see-land-a... number six-eight-nine."

We shuffled about for 10 minutes until everyone was accounted for. Then, almost unexpectedly, we were running.

So this was it. The Olympic marathon. It seemed no different from other marathons. Well, a bit hotter, maybe. I was glad I hadn't been too nervous. It is a waste of energy, and I was going to need all I had. The aim was to stay as close as possible to the "guns"—Ron Hill, Frank Shorter, Derek Clayton, Akio Usami...

Around the track twice. I looked at the big clock. Five-minute mile pace. It was okay. Through the tunnel and up the steep ramp and onto the hard high road. Almost immediately there was a near accident as the press van in front cut the corner too close to us. It came to a halt, jamming Shorter, two others blokes and myself. Much swearing and thumping the sides of the van. The profanity seemed to hang in the humid air.

We were away again, having lost only 30 yards or so. Usami and another guy were pounding away in front. I felt like a fish out of water. Not running easily, gasping for breath. I began to look around. Clayton and Usami were already drenched in sweat. Hill looked cool enough, but wasn't flowing along. Shorter and Ken Moore looked okay. Terry Manners was right there, too, but very red and sweating profusely. No sign of Dave McKenzie, the other New Zealander.

Five kilometers in 15:50. I said to Ron Hill, "Hell, it's slow, but I can't go much quicker." He didn't answer, and I could see he wasn't going too well either. He had a lot of pressure on him. The Olympic filmmakers were featuring him as a centerpiece of the marathon part of the film, win or lose. And Ron knew he was going to lose.

We flogged along. Ten kilometers in 31:20. At least we hadn't slowed any. We had now entered the first part of the two big parks of the marathon route. Narrow, dusty, uneven paths and the first feeding point. Chaos! Runners were everywhere, grabbing drinks and sponges. The film men's van was churning up the dusty paths, and the helicopter, 50 feet or so above us, was sucking the dust up too. It was unpleasant. I was breathing hard, sweating even harder. If only it wasn't so damned hot!

Not even time to have a decent look at the bikini-clad girls who were standing near the fountains. Our bunch stretched out. Lismont, the Belgian, was really piling on the pace. I was running my hardest just to stay there. By the end of the park, we were in some semblance of a bunch again, covering about 100 yards of road.

At about 15 kilometers, Shorter started to pull away. I wondered why no one was going with him. It was as though we had all been attached to



Foster (689) starts alongside Ron Hill (289) in the Olympic marathon. (Mark Shearman photo)

Frank by a piece of elastic, and as he stretched it out it began to break, leaving runners in little groups of two and three, or alone.

Kenny Moore went past and I counted those ahead. I was 13th, laboring along and not running very lightly at all. I flogged it to 25 kilometers. I could see Legissa Bedane, Mamo Wolde's Ethiopian teammate, just ahead. I caught and passed him, but he rocketed past again only to come almost to a standstill. It was to be the last I saw of him.

A figure in white a long way ahead. I guessed it was Usami of Japan. He'd won a lot of big ones in the past couple of years, including the Little Olympics on this course a year earlier. But he wasn't going to do any winning today and knew it. He gave a limp smile and shook his head as I went by.

I passed two more I didn't recognize, then the tall figure of Derek Clayton was in sight. He was cheerful enough, but clearly not the man who had once run 2:08.

Another runner unknown to me was almost walking as we went out of

Englishcher Garten, the last park. I thumped along conscious of the mounting fatigue and stiffness in my joints. Jack Bacheler was now just ahead and he looked even stiffer than I felt. He is 6'6" and was taking about six-inch strides.

The unmistakable roof of the Olympic stadium was now in sight. Sixth, I thought. Great, a certificate. But I was knackered. Every stride was a huge effort. Almost without warning, Ron Hill and Don McGregor were alongside and sweeping past, and my sixth place and certificate vanished.

"Ang on, Jack," Ron called out. I picked up the pace and tucked in behind. A hundred yards was all I could manage. My legs were like rubber. Ron and Donny crept ahead. I tried hard to go with them, but it was useless. I had nothing left but will. I stumbled down the steep ramp down the track. The three-mile-long track. I would have dearly loved to plop into the water jump as I passed.

Later, I sat in the tunnel under the stands, blankets, shoes, bloodied socks, bodies, drink cartons littering the place. Guys were limping around, hollow-eyed, commiserating and congratulating. Sad faces, pain-filled faces, happy faces. Everyone talking at once and no one listening. But it was good to talk for once. The tension was gone.

Much later, we sat in the dining room. Dave McKenzie, Terry Manners and I together with Ron Hill and others. One often has a shot of melancholia after marathons, and as none of us had had a particularly good day this was no exception.

We finished up in the pub just outside the village, drinking liters of Spartenbrau beer. Later still, we went away into Munich with Bill Baillie, the former New Zealand runner, and his party to be led astray until the small hours of the next morning. I remember staggering back to the Village at 2 o'clock the following afternoon with Terry, but don't remember much else.

The Games were over. It was all sort of flat and depressing. Everyone was packing up in readiness to go home. Somehow, everything looked shabby. The Village had been "home" for six weeks. Once bright, colorful, alive, friendly, it now seemed a cheerless place. Bits of paper swirled around in the cold wind.

But my mood quickly improved as I thought back on the people I'd met in those six weeks and what I'd done on Sept. 10. A 40-year-old man competing on almost even terms with runners little more than half my age.

I thought of the day we'd run a pre-Olympic meet at Kempton, near the Austrian border. I was to run the 5000 meters. When time came to line up, there were so many runners the officials decided to split us into two races, A and B grade.

An official went along the rows of runners and seeded us. When he came to me, he said, "Ah, yes, you are Foster. Many years, no? Second race, please."

I went out fast and lapped the field, doing a time which would have put me fourth in the A-grade race. I decided there ought to be another method of seeding, since obviously age is no criterion.

# A BEGINNER AT 32

The compulsion to be active is with us all. From infancy, we are never still. As children, we are all go, impatient, never walking, running everywhere.

As we grow up, we are subjected to "the system." The system trains the child to exercise. Games, physical exercise are integral with schooling and other preparation for life ahead. But the same "system" looks with suspicion, even derision, at the adult who walks, runs or rides a bicycle to work and leaves a car in the garage.

We are probably influenced by our parents as much as we are by the system. My father died when I was seven or so. Tuberculosis was still a killer in England in 1938. My mother had also contracted the disease, but it was diagnosed early and she got better.

The result of this on me was that I was kept under observation at the local clinic until I was 15. Twice a year, I went for my checkup. In view of this, I was considered "delicate" at school and was not allowed to play football or do anything vigorous.

I was slow maturing physically, and this caused me to be withdrawn. Other robust lads left me to myself, so that I began to enjoy being on my own. I am uncomfortable in a crowd of people even now. Perhaps this lonely attitude helps in being a long distance runner.

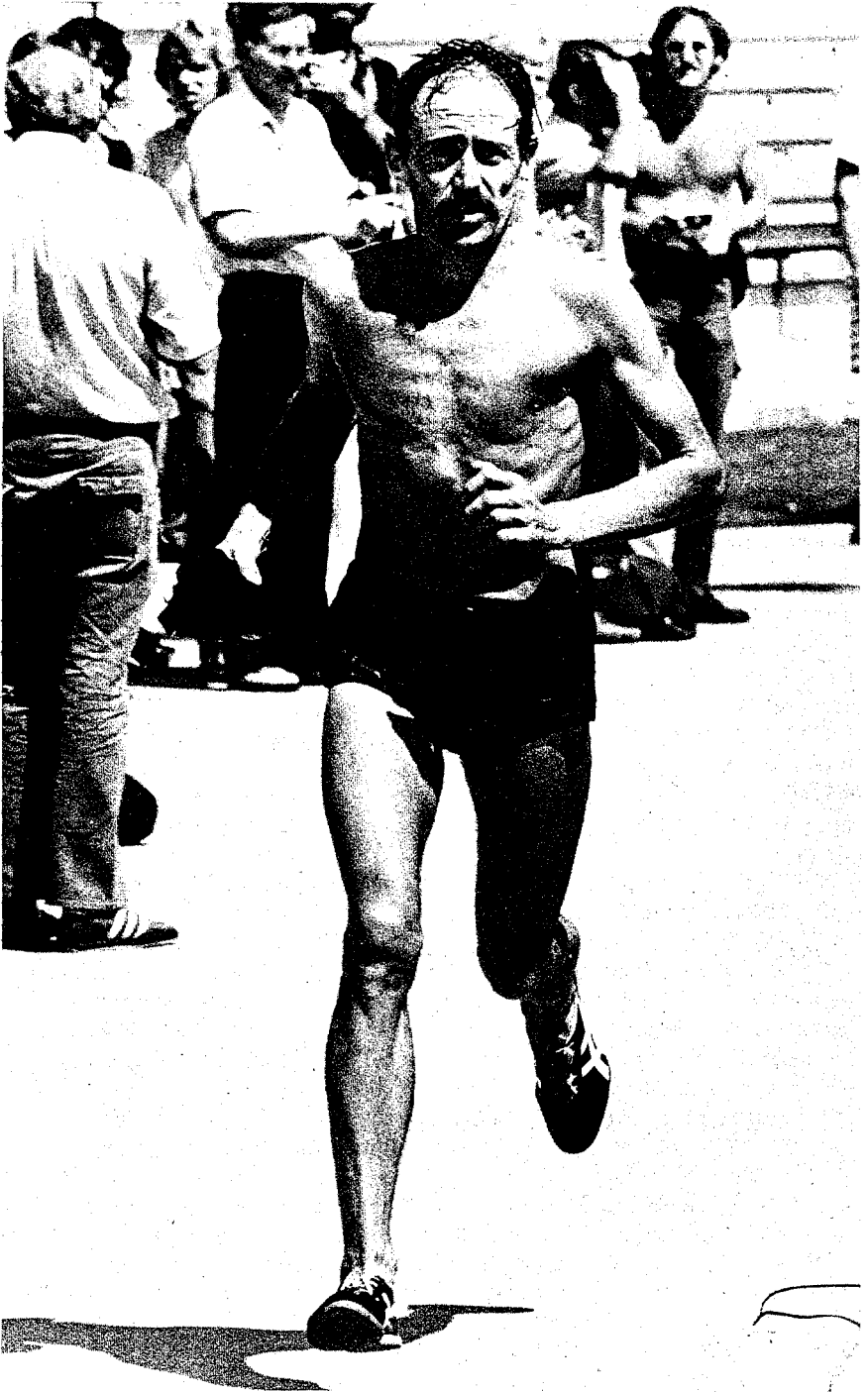
I went to work at age 14 in a local factory, a dreary existence which I put up with for 10 years. I detested the boring work, but I was ignorant of further study and not adventurous enough to try anything else.

What made life more bearable was the bike. On weekends and holidays the year-round, I "escaped" into Wales and the Lake District, Yorkshire Dales and even had odd ventures into France and Italy. We used to scorn the few people we saw in cars as being "softies," afraid of the wet or cold and work which was involved in our hard riding. We thought we were "hard men."

Those were the halcyon days of 1948-54. Little or no traffic frequented the then wilds of Wales or Westmoreland. People we met there were likely to be similar to ourselves, fed up with city and factory, and having an urge to get out to the hills and moorland. Many were hard-riding cyclists, willing and able to ride 200-300 miles in a weekend, roughing it, sleeping in barns or under hedges and taking whatever the weather offered.

**"I began to enjoy the run itself instead of only in retrospect. I enjoyed meals and slept better than I'd done in years. I knew instinctively I was getting fitter than I'd ever been before. . ."**

**(Stan Pantovic photo)**



The more cycling we did, the fitter we became. And I guess it was a logical sequence that we drifted into racing. In those days, road racing on a bike was just about non-existent in Britain. The only form of competition was time-trialing over set distances of 10, 25, 30, 50 and 100 miles, and 12 and 24 hours.

This is the fairest method ever devised for finding out who is the best and fittest man over a given distance. There can be no slip-streaming or taking shelter behind another rider. It is the man who can ride X number of miles at the fastest speed. I trained hard (perhaps too hard) and conscientiously for perhaps eight years, and never rode above mediocre performance. Still, I thoroughly enjoyed the sport.

By the time I was 24, I'd had more than my share of factory work. I didn't want to end up like some of the men who had never been anywhere or done anything worthwhile. I emigrated to New Zealand and did a wide variety of work for the best part of three years. Then after three or four months in Australia, including a 2000-mile cycle tour from Sydney to Adelaide, I returned to Britain.

Britain hadn't changed a scrap. Working conditions were still poor by Aussie and New Zealand standards, and I found that though I loved everything else about Britain, I still couldn't stand those factory jobs.

I got married and we came to New Zealand and settled into the usual sort of life most married couples do. My cycling was limited to riding to work and back. I was getting a little thicker around the waist, a stone (14 pounds) overweight, and made the excuse that there was no "give" in the modern man-made fibers used in pants.

One day, I had the bright idea that I'd have a run for a while. After all, I'd had the odd game of soccer for 90 minutes, surely a half-hour run would be no trouble. It was summer time and the good weather inspired me. We were out for a picnic and a swim. I set off before lunch, thinking I'd have the run and then a swim. What I thought to be many miles later, I arrived back at the car.

"What's wrong, have you forgotten something?" my wife asked.

I didn't understand.

"You've been gone only seven minutes," she said.

Impossible. I was sure I'd run at least six or seven miles. I was soaked in perspiration and felt tired. I'd thought I wasn't in too bad shape physically. Not really overweight, though heavier than when I was riding the bike regularly. Now I was worried. If I was like this at 33, how would I be when I was 40, or worse still, 50?

So I began running, only jogging I realize now. It was only every second day then, too, and I was working to maintain that 20-minute jog even on alternate days.

I almost ended my running before I'd really started it. Even in those early days, I seldom ran on roads, and one wet day was about to jump a low fence when I slipped and crashed crotch first onto the top rail. I slid off onto the wet grass like jelly sliding off a plate, feeling as though I'd been through a wringing machine. What felt like hours later, I hobbled off home and didn't or couldn't run for about 10 days. I still treat fences with a healthy respect.

It was inevitable, I suppose, that I should meet a harrier somewhere,

sometime, as I was out running several times a week. Running was still work, but I was fitter than I thought and had no trouble keeping up to the lads, provided the runs were reasonably short. I wasn't interested in long runs, and preferred the mad gallops over the hills which cross-country provided.

I kept at it. I liked the feeling after the run—going home in the car and feeling the glow which comes after exercise. Sometimes the glow was a whole fire. In fact, a real burnt-out feeling! But I persisted and runs became a daily ritual. A way of life, in fact.

I began to enjoy the run itself instead of only in retrospect. I enjoyed meals and slept better than I'd done in years. I knew instinctively I was getting fitter than I'd ever been before, even when I was so-called "racing fit" on the the bike.

It was this which gave me the motivation to keep running, not any successes I was having at racing. These were too few and far between to keep a man running every day, wet or fine, hot or cold.

In any case, I raced only spasmodically, but had noticed I was still very competitive. A hangover from my cycling days perhaps, maybe my nature? My competitiveness might better be described as a desire to excel, for I have no "killer instinct" at all, no real will to "win at all costs."

Getting my times down was the added motivation to do more and more running. Seeking improvements, I found I was goaded into greater efforts and ran faster in races than when I just timed myself, so I began racing in earnest.

# FOSTER'S PHILOSOPHY

We are all born with certain talents. Mine happens to be running. I'm not gifted with speed like, say, Valeriy Borzov or Tommie Smith, but running is easy for me. But the talent has to be developed, of course. The standards in running these days are such that natural ability alone will not get you anywhere. I was lucky and hit on a formula of daily running—mixing speed, hills and distance—which is just right for me.

A reporter once asked me about the training I did. I told him I didn't "train" but just went for a run each day. He was a bit baffled at that. The word "training" conjures up in my mind sessions in a gymnasium, doing endless pressups, or out on a track, grinding out 200- and 400-meter intervals, or other such repetitive hard work. I refuse to do this. I believe it is possible to achieve results in a less soul-destroying way.

I suppose it is a state of mind, though, because I've met lads who thrive on the intervals and gym stuff, and would be appalled at galloping over the rough hill trails of the sheep farmlands around home.

Almost all my running is done over very hilly country. The grass is very short, but it is quite difficult running, real work. The legs ache, lungs burn and the heart pounds mightily. One doesn't need to run very fast on this terrain. The very nature of the country works you over quite adequately.

Most people I've taken out haven't enjoyed it too much. Half- to three-quarters of an hour has been about all they could manage unless we went so slow that it was of no benefit. I've lasted 3½ hours at most, having been lost on a couple of occasions.

This kind of running has left me without running companions most of the time. But I think it is necessary to train alone as it is the long, lonely running which helps develop the persistence and self-reliance peculiar to marathon runners. The self-confidence, almost selfishness, so prevalent in individual sportsmen is lacking in the makeup of team-trained people who seem to need the support and reassurance of teammates. I can no more understand the person who needs the company of others for fulfillment in sport than the gregarious person can hope to understand me.

In my case, I do not do the 150 miles a week that some of the top men are doing. I rarely do more than half of that. And I don't train with the same dedication as I did when I began bike racing...

Early in January each year, the dedicated ones in the cycling club embarked on what was known as the "hard rides." We started with a ride of, say, 80-90 miles the first Sunday in January, gradually increasing on subsequent Sundays until the final ride of about 160 miles. At that time of the year in



Britain, it is still dark at 8 a.m. and again by 4:30 p.m. The temperature never gets much above freezing, and added to all this happiness it often snows and the wind makes you feel like you have nothing on. On the rides, the cold got you down more than anything. But there was no quarter given or asked. You either kept up or dropped off.

It was a miserable feeling to have the air go out of a tire and feel the rim bumping along the road, and seeing one's erstwhile companions disappear into the gloom up some remote Welsh mountain pass, 60-odd miles from home. Numbed, frozen fingers fumbled with tire levers and patches in the half-dark. Light snow was falling. Cursing and fumbling, you'd get the job done and bike back on the road, and set off into the mist and silence—the incredible silence which snow makes. Every four or five miles, you'd have to get off and poke out the snow which was jamming between the wheel and mudguards. The road climbed higher and higher, almost to 2000 feet.

Pitch darkness would come, and the struggle with the elements and one's fatigue and the cold went on. After a couple of hours, the lights of town would come into sight. Then the warmth and relative comfort of the transport cafe, the noise and the pints of tea. If you hadn't been too slow, maybe the boys from the club would still be there. There'd be company and another four or five lamps instead of just one's own feeble glimmer for the last 20 miles...

That sort of dedication is long gone. Most of my running now is pleasure running and the success I've had from it has been almost accidental, not planned.

Once I began running races, I set my own standards. I didn't much care what anyone else had done. Times meant more to me than wins. They still do. I prefer to run a personal best time and be third or fourth than to win in a mediocre time. This attitude guaranteed some early successes against lads who merely wanted to win. To win against me, they had to be prepared to run their tripe out, because I was going to run mine out. Anything other than full-out effort during a race is to me negative running. I always race full-out, from local club events up.

I feel that I must try to excel when racing, so I run hard, bloody hard. And anyone who gets there ahead of me has had to run a lot harder. It is as simple as that. Winning races is not all-important to me. The races themselves are, as they provide the stimulus which is necessary for putting in that extra effort to help me excel, and achieve the standards I've set.

I am one who believes it is the mind which needs working on most. Eliminating the little thoughts which detract from one's concentration. The belief and/or confidence in oneself. The search for new ideas and methods which gain a little extra for races.

I think the runner should base his success on attaining his own standards, not merely winning races. If he has a certain talent and wins easily early in his career, not caring too much about times, I doubt if his full potential will ever be realized. Young runners particularly seem to think winning is the be-all and end-all of running. I consider the improvement of times to be what it is all about.

Every generation adds a little to the last. Shrub through Nurmi, Zato-

pek, Bannister, Landy, Kuts, Peters, Clarke and now Hill, Viren, Puttemans, etc. Slowly, the standards go up and are made more and more difficult for each generation of runners refuses to accept the previous standards as being the ultimate.

People tend to think success in some field or other changes a person. In some cases, this is true, but more often it is the other person's attitude towards the successful one which changes. Before success, no one knows him. After success, everyone wants to. Why should this be the case with running? After all, it is only just that—running. It is unimportant, really. Our sense of values is quite lopsided. Music stars, film stars and to a lesser degree sports stars all get media coverage, public acclaim and, for professionals, remuneration out of proportion to what they contribute to society.

I have never run for any "acclaim" that might come to me. And as for "remuneration," no one in his right mind would run for an hour or more every day in order to win a \$20 trophy. There has to be more to running than that. The gains, the benefits, the answers to the "why do you do it" are the intangibles of running. Who can explain it? Why do we need an explanation, anyway?

No one asks a golfer or tennis player why they play, yet a runner gets as much kick from his daily run as do these golfers and tennis players from their games, though people can't seem to understand this so easily. Running is fundamental, the basis of most active sports and games. When a man can run fast for an hour or two, it gives a great feeling—a feeling not readily given up once you've experienced it.

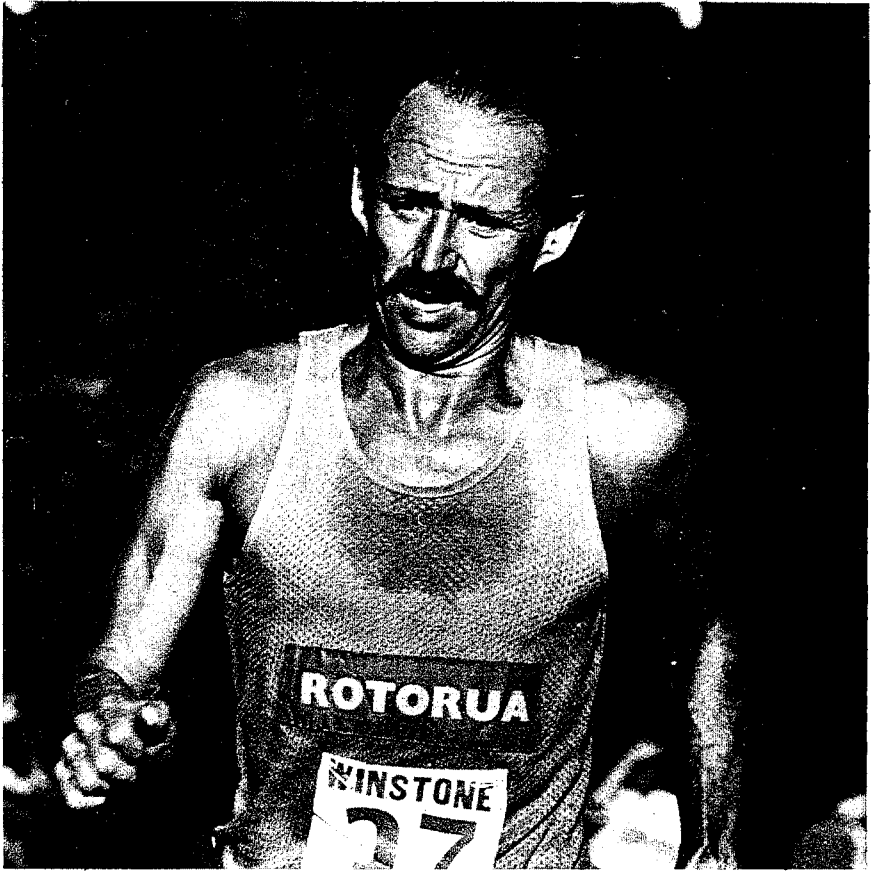
Racing is another matter. Why and how I race marathons takes some explaining, and I'm not completely sure myself of the answers. I persist at racing marathons, but have never really liked them. I enjoy the challenge they present, but hate those final miles and the after-effects which leave me washed-out for days and even weeks.

I wouldn't be honest if I didn't say that the successes I've had have been a reason for continuing. And maybe I run them for the international trips I wouldn't take otherwise. But neither of these factors was present at first.

The marathon is only one of many races. There are shorter cross-country and road races, which I much prefer. And there are longer ones such as the 54-mile "Comrades" in South Africa and the 52-mile London-to-Brighton, which I'll probably never attempt. But there is a special, almost magical, appeal about the marathon. Most runners, sprinters apart, harbor the desire to run one. When I began, the marathon had this appeal for me, and to some extent it still does.

Anyone can be a marathon runner. They come in all shapes and sizes, ages and sexes. But not everyone can run a *fast* marathon, just as not everyone can become a racing motorist or bull fighter. These things require certain talents which are intrinsic as individuals. Those talents have to be developed, but if they are there they insist on being developed. People say they could have succeeded at this and that, "if I only..." I say this is rubbish. One of the "talents" for succeeding is the urge to keep at it, getting out every day and do the work which is necessary for success.

The work has to be varied and made interesting, and only the individual



**“I persist at racing marathons, but have never really liked them. I enjoy the challenge they present, but hate those final miles and the after-effects. . .” (Mark Shearman photo)**

can say what this has to be. Obviously, what suits one won't suit all. There is, too, an optimum amount for each individual. It is no use, saying if X number of miles per week, for three months, allows one to produce a 2:10 marathon, then X + 20 miles will automatically produce a 2:05 marathon. I'm happy it isn't so simple. Otherwise, there would be more 2:05 marathon men about than I'd care for.

It is only by trial and error over a number of years that one finds a program of daily running which brings best results for one's efforts. I try to get away with seeing how little I can get by on and still improve. But it takes time to find out what level this is, and more time to adapt to it. There are and have been no "instant" fast marathoners. Only regular daily running over a fairly long period will give the body resistance to the inevitable fatigue of a long race.

Emil Zatopek once said, if you want a race, run 100 meters. If you want an experience, run a marathon. The experience he spoke of is with the inner man as much as with the other competitors.

The early miles can be reasonable enough. If steady and well within ones capabilities, they will not be too much of an "experience." But so often in big events, and in my case of always chasing good performances, the early miles are fast and furious, and this early pace has the greatest effect on how one feels toward the end.

Fast early racing in a marathon uses up oxygen at a very high rate. The by-products from this burning up of oxygen cannot be disposed of by the body quickly enough, and so the wastes build up in the system, causing stiffness in muscles and joints, and general fatigue and tiredness.

Toward the end of a race, little things which you normally wouldn't notice seem magnified out of proportion. There comes a time, usually during the last 6-8 miles, when you are alone. You can be in front or back in the field. It makes no difference if you're Olympic champion Frank Shorter or Bill Bloggs. You are alone.

The feet and joints get sore and muscles stiffen up, no matter how much training you have done. The desire to run has gone, and all you want to do is stop. But you press on, not really knowing why. You try and concentrate on keeping the pace going, but there are so many distractions: the aches and pains, well-meaning supporters who call out, traffic, etc.

The chest starts to feel restricted, as the muscles which help you breathe tire. Any increase in pace or rise in the road hurts. A drink brings on "stitch" and a desire to keep drinking. A cold sponge gives only temporary relief. In less than half a mile, the discomforts are all back, if in fact they ever went.

You think less and less of the race and result and more about just finishing. You think of the relief at stopping. This is another distraction. On and on, not much farther, but every few hundred yards feels like a mile.

The worst place, for me at least, is around 22-24 miles. Usually I'm starting to feel stiff and energy is sadly lacking. I run on instinct and will. The daily hours of running now tell, and it becomes almost automatic. It feels as though I've slowed drastically, yet times have shown the miling rate over the last six miles slips only from around five minutes a mile to 5:10-5:15. It is the fatigue which makes a 5:15 mile feel like a 4:50.

And then the finish. It is lovely to stop doing something you have spent hours practicing to do well. You swear it will be the last time, though you know it won't. Perhaps there is some truth in the saying that you don't have to be mad to be a marathon runner... but it sure helps.

The after-effects vary, with me anyway. Sometimes I feel fully recovered in two or three days. Other times, I have a drained feeling for as long as three weeks. My method is roughly to have a day off racing for every mile I've raced. If I've run a hard 26-mile road race then I don't like to race hard again for at least 26 days. I'll go for daily runs, okay, but no really hard effort. It is all a matter of trial and error, seeing what suits one best.

All this suffering. Why run marathons when there are other races? Why be a runner at all? There are no specific answers. There is no conclusive medi-

cal evidence to prove people who run or otherwise exercise themselves live any longer than those who don't. However, I think the really fit person does have a higher *quality* life. He lives a fuller life and gets more for his time here than the unfit, half-alive person. So maybe that is a reason for having a run and race. Who knows?

# INSIDE MARATHONING

Marathon runners don't usually have a lot to say for themselves. They are a pretty quiet bunch, or so they might appear. I have come to know many of them during the past five or six years. Some impressions of a few:

To my mind, the man with the best record is Ron Hill, the English runner. The redoubtable Dr. Hill (he owns a Ph.D. in chemistry) is how I refer to him, though Ron is just Ron to most of the lads. Among many other achievements, he won the European Championships marathon in 1969, Boston and the Commonwealth Games in 1970, and once held the 15-mile and 25-kilometer world records.

Over the years—and there are a considerable number now—that he has been on top, Ron has had his failures. And he has been subject to more pressure from the media than any amateur should have to put up with. He really likes to be just Ron Hill, in the pub, having a pint and telling a few yarns with the lads. Quite small and lightly built, he epitomizes to me the typical mara-runner.

Yet the man with the current world record is over six feet tall and quite heavily built. Derek Clayton is a colossus and his time, 2:08:33 set in 1969, is also colossal. Clayton, now retired, trained faster and farther than was thought reasonable, produced the goods, but paid rather dearly. His injuries resulted in surgical treatment, and he was never "right" for the Olympics or Commonwealth Games.

However, this didn't dampen Derek's zest for living. An Aussie, everything was a laugh for him. When paired with someone like New Zealand marathoner Terry Manners, trouble was on the way. Their "performances" after several marathons should have earned them an Oscar or five years in jail.

Manners must surely be the clown prince of marathoning. We are the best of friends and visit each other frequently. I don't think we ever say a serious word. Like Clayton, he is a big fellow, and is the only top marathon runner I know who works manually for a living. Not so fast as many other runners in the short races, Terry looks as if he could run all day. His training is similar to Clayton's—a lot of it, and all fast. Perhaps it is because he is big that he needs this volume of training. Or maybe it is the other way around. The fact that he churns out upwards of 160 hard, fast miles a week has ensured consistent top-flight performance.

Among Terry's better "performances" was a tap dance on the table of one of London's posh hotels. The table, disintegrating under Terry's 160 pounds, disappeared into bins, rubbish baskets and the larger portions out of the window.



**“He really likes to be just Ron Hill, in the pub, having a pint and telling a few yarns with the lads. . .” (Mark Shearman photo)**

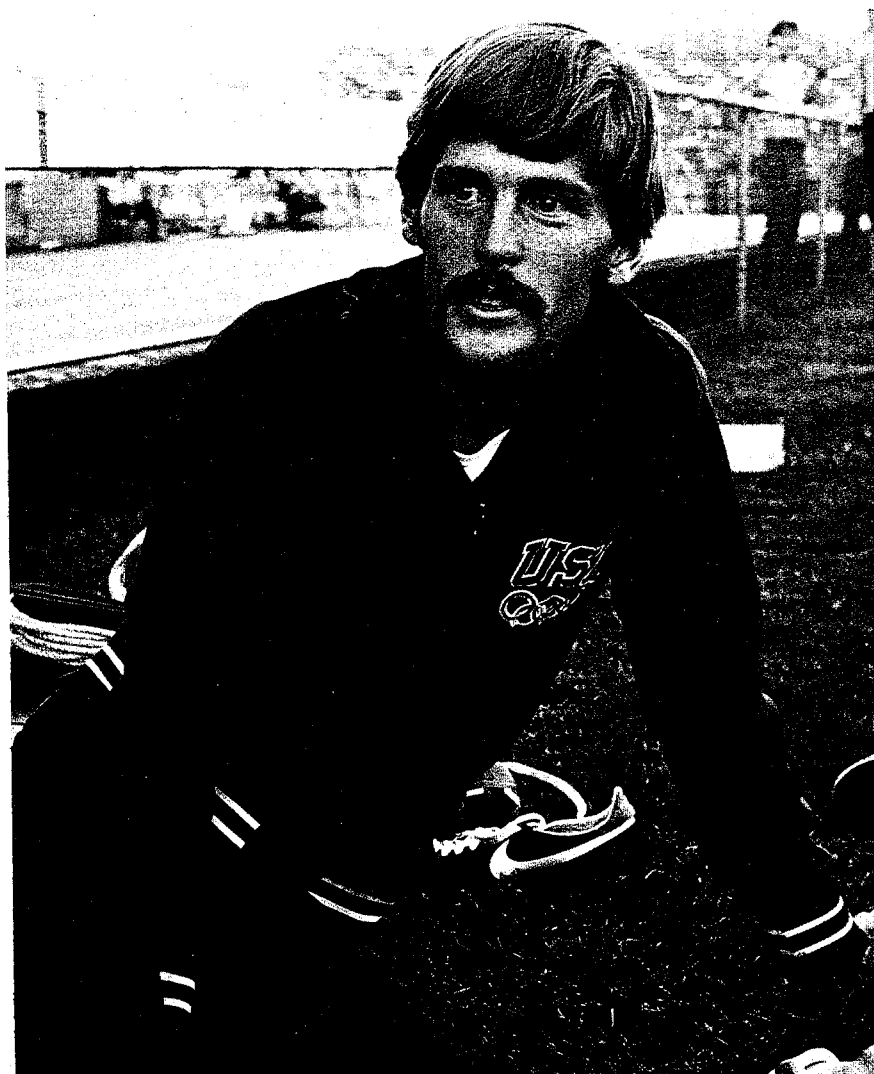
The “baptism” of certain unpopular officials was largely due to Terry and Derek pouring alcoholic beverages on them from a great height. Our clown prince turns on when the tension of competition is over.

Just about the opposite of Manners and Clayton is Ken Moore, the American who was fourth in the Munich Games. In contrast to their informality and rough humor, Kenny is precise and punctilious—a serious-minded man indeed, though not without a wry humor.

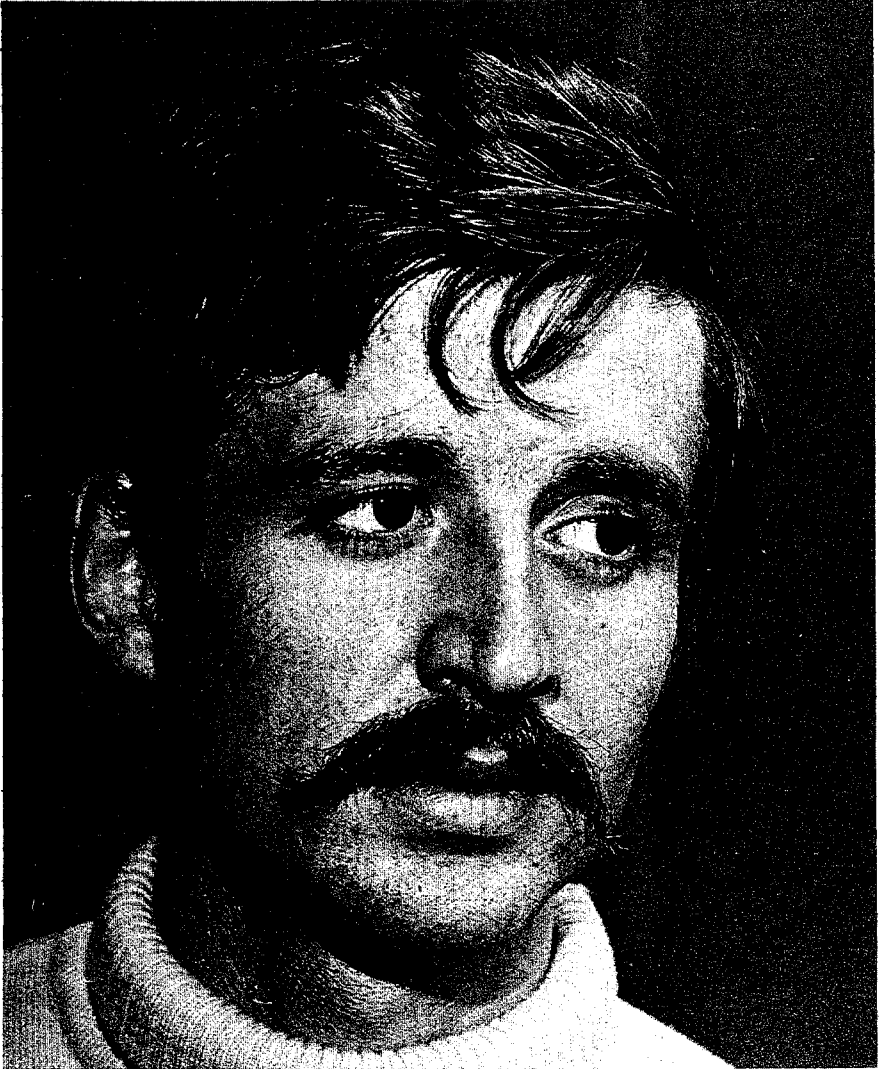
I don't know Olympic champion Frank Shorter as well as I know some of the others. He paid me a visit when he was in New Zealand in 1973, and we ran together. He seemed friendly and relaxed, though he was tired from constant traveling and racing in the six months following the Games. I remember that he had trouble with his feet, and had to bind them with tapes before each run.

New Zealanders Dave McKenzie and Jeff Julian have accompanied me on a number of trips overseas. Dave looks like perpetual motion when running.

**Kenny Moore “is precise and punctilious—a serious-minded man indeed, though not without a wry humor.” (Jeff Johnson photo)**







**“I remember that he (Frank Shorter) had trouble with his feet, and had to bind them with tapes before each run.” (Rick Levy)**

Some runners seem to flow along, but he works all the way down. His head rolls, his arms pump vigorously, he seems to thrash his way along. But he has run 2:12.

McKenzie fits the stereotype of a marathoner both in size (he’s about 5’3”) and personality. He doesn’t have much to say, but when he does it comes out pungently, with a string of profanities and seldom with humor. He is what is known in New Zealand as a “West Coaster,” from a remote and



rugged part of the South Island notorious for its inclement climate and people like Dave.

Another of New Zealand's greats is Jeff Julian. Very quiet, cool and consistent, he has qualities of durability. Jeff has been the world 30-mile record holder and New Zealand champion on many occasions. His best efforts in the ultra-distances may yet be seen. He will be 40 years-old in 1975.

Undoubtedly, one of my favorite characters is John Farrington of Australia. We first met in Hong Kong in 1969, where we booked in a crummy doss-house of a hotel with sullen waiters who were none too clean and didn't care whether they served us or not. Since then, John and I have raced together many times (our personal score is 3-2, in my favor, with the best times only 10 seconds apart, John's at 2:11:08 and mine 2:11:18).

John takes his running rather more seriously than do most others I've met. He trains very fast, though not over very long distances. His concern with times and "splits," even when training, is a bit disconcerting to someone as casual as I, and I prefer not to train with him though he's excellent company otherwise.

Farrington's advice and encouragement helped me beat him when I was a beginner. He was the first to make me realize, "I can do it." He convinced me I was as good as the rest, and his reassurances dispelled any doubts I had about my ability to run fast all the way.

**John Farrington "takes his running rather more seriously than do most others I've met. . . I prefer not to train with him, though he's excellent company otherwise." (John Marconi)**

# TOURING THE WORLD

Perhaps after some successes and a certain standard have been achieved in competition, my motivation to keep at it came from possible overseas trips. I have been on many and they have been great, though they have put me to considerable strain, physically and financially. You are under three obligations—to the sponsors of such trips to give your best performance and so justify the expense of your trip; to your own country, and, to ensure future trips, to yourself.

Sometimes the trips are hectic, most times very uneventful. Still, they are memorable in lots of pleasant ways.

I remember my first trip, to Canada in 1969 for the Canadian National Exhibition marathon. Jeff Julian and I had a manager, but sometimes I wondered who managed whom? Jeff had been around and knew the drill. We were delayed in Hawaii, and it was Jeff who insisted on a room at a hotel for the day. Naturally, we went for a long run, and it was very hot, too. Back at the hotel, we went straight into the sea at the hotel's private beach.

Then we took full advantage of the smorgasbord luncheon. Two of the skinniest looking guys imaginable, we put away three or four of the largest platefuls of food you'd see. The other diners looked at us in wonder and must have thought we were some sort of half-starved refugees being given asylum in Hawaii. It was a memorable meal, indeed a memorable trip.

To be invited to run in Canada is to encounter the whole ballyhoo of America: the super hotels, sightseeing, noise, all-night TV, motorcycle police, flag-waving crowds, the whole bit in the Hollywood tradition.

We trained twice a day in the gardens along the shores of Lake Ontario. The weather was hot, over 80 degrees. I'd never run a "hot" race before, and was a bit apprehensive. Still, it was to be run at night, an 8 p.m. start, so it should be a little cooler. The late start was something else which was different. Quite novel, in fact, and something which I've been keen on since.

We got away with a roar from the 20 or so motorcycle cops who were to accompany us. Each runner was allocated a cop, or perhaps it was the other way around. He stayed alongside for the full race, controlling traffic and pedestrians. The police had a pool on us, too. Each cop had put a dollar and hoped his "boy" won.

The race was a steady affair, Jeff Julian doing most of the leading and especially where it counted, at the finish. I was pipped for third by Bob Moore, a wiry little Canadian with a broad Yorkshire accent. Bob is the most talkative person I've met. But unlike a lot of talkative people, he's interesting. We yarned away for hours at the post-race gathering.

New Zealanders and Australians are reputedly big beer drinkers. But the Canadians want some beating. The race organizers had laid on a bath full of bottles of beer for the party. We were not allowed to leave until it was all gone or it was the next morning, whichever happened first. Need I say we were a sorry looking lot that went to the airport the next day?

The monster of a team trophy which we'd won turned heads at every airport and occupied its own seat on the aircraft, complete with safety belt and air hostess attention.

### COMMONWEALTH GAMES, 1970

It had been a great two weeks in Edinburgh. My parents had traveled from Liverpool and we'd toured the scenic "border" country south of the Scottish city. The area has many and long associations with the past and history is everywhere. You could almost feel the presence of colorful bearded highlanders in the heather, with plaid and claymore awaiting the redcoats.

I'd trained on Arthur's Peak, just outside the city in Holyrood Park. It was an ideal setup. Soft moorland grass or hard bitumen road, you could take your pick. I chose the moorland. It was like home.

The weather had not been the best. We'd had our share of rain, and a strong wind had blown the whole time we'd been there. One day, we'd taken a team car out to the turn on the marathon course and had run the return half. Into the teeth of the wind, it had been tough work. We were quite apprehensive of the race after that.

Race day was a poor one for spectators—drizzling rain. But they were out there, lining the road, several deep in most places. And, miraculously, the wind had dropped for the first time in 10 days.

The start was the fastest of any marathon I've been in. Hamek Singh of India shot out of the stadium as though his top-knot was on fire. (A Sikh, his hair was tied in a rag on top of his head.) A mile up the road, though, he was shot out the back door. The leaders—Ron Hill, Jerome Drayton of Canada, Derek Clayton, etc.—went through five miles in 23:42. I ran 24:25. At that stage, Hill was like an express train. No one could stop him or go with him. He went through 10 miles in 47:31, turned for home in 1:02:48 and went on to win by over three minutes.

I turned in 1:05 and felt okay at the turn. I was eighth and ahead were some of the biggest guns in world marathoning: Clayton, world's fastest with 2:08; Bill Adcocks, with a string of runs between 2:10 and 2:16; Drayton, 2:11. Drayton was first to come back. I caught him at about 15 miles. He'd stopped. Clayton also stopped. He reputedly had bronchitis. At around 21 miles, I could see I'd get Adcocks, too. At the stadium gates, I caught the frail-looking John Stephen of Tanzania, who'd been last at the Mexico City Olympics. Two years had made a great deal of difference in his running, and in mine.

### CANADA, 1970

A month later, Jeff Julian and I were back in Canada for the Canadian National Exhibition. I wasn't sure if I was ready for another marathon so soon.

It was very hot again. I was running in High Park and remember even the usually quick squirrels seemed to be lethargic. I was sweating profusely at the least effort, and the skin on my feet were soft and developed little blisters easily.

The field was quite good. Pablo Garrido, the Mexican film actor, was there. He had run 2:12, which was over two minutes faster than I had gone. With him was Alfredo Penalzoa, who'd done 2:13. Alastair Wood of Scotland, another 2:13 man; Fergus Murray, another Scot; Bill Clark and Herb Lorenz of the USA; Bob Moore, the tough little Canadian who had pipped me for third the previous year—all were there ready to go.

When Garrido went mad after about six miles, I went madly after him. However, at 17 miles, with Alastair Wood and I now moving away, Penalzoa, the other Mexican, went past on the cycle of his speed cop. The cop said afterwards that when they got to 20 miles, Alfredo wanted to run again!

Between 17 and 20 miles, the road had short, sharp little ups and downs just like on my paddocks at home. I pulled away from Alastair. Entering the stadium, I was picked out by a spotlight to run the last lap. I was given a bunch of flowers, kissed soundly by two very gorgeous girls (a pity I was so tired and bleary-eyed) and pushed onto a stage in front of 10,000 people to receive the cup.

Again, the party went on all night but I never found those two girls. Even one would have been okay.

## FUKUOKA, 1970

Off again, this time to fabled Fukuoka in Japan—the Mecca of Marathon Runners. It was here that Dave McKenzie had run his New Zealand record of 2:12:25 and Mike Ryan his 2:14. Two-fourteen did not interest me any more. I was looking at Dave's record. This would be my chance of breaking it.

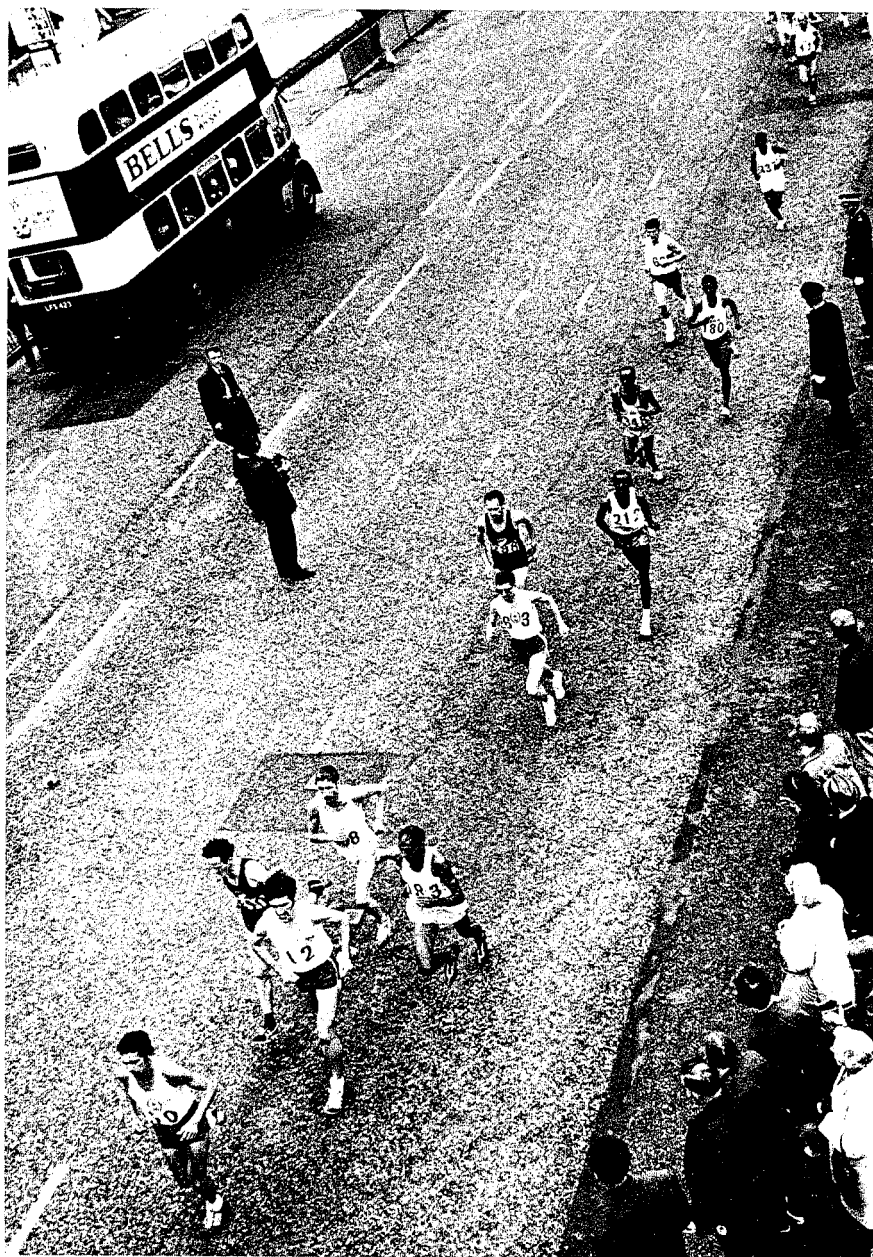
It is a long flight from Sydney to Tokyo, and I got hungry. Normally, I eat very little on airlines as the food is usually unappealing. However, I ate a steak heavily garnished. About an hour later, I was nauseous and sweating. The trip was three weeks long, or so it seemed. After an hour in a Tokyo airport toilet, I started feeling almost normal again.

On the drive from the airport into the city, I was appalled at the yellow atmosphere. Fumes seemed to permeate the taxi, clothes, even into the suitcase. I was glad to get into the hotel and air conditioning.

Later, over a cup of tea, I met Ron Hill and Bill Adcocks, two legendary figures in the marathon world. Both had run times of 2:10 or better. Well-wrapped in sweat suits against the cold, we went for an easy jog around the old Emperor's Palace and the site of the 1964 Olympics.

We flew down to Fukuoka, some 600 miles south and I faced my first "press conference." They take their marathons very seriously in Japan.

John Farrington, my companion of a couple of previous trips, arrived a day or two later. Ken Moore completed the group of English-speaking foreigners. Ken kept a little apart from the rest of us. Our rough language and bawdy humor didn't appeal to him. I can understand how he must have felt. Very reserved and quiet, he must have thought us to be a right rough lot.



The 1970 Commonwealth Games field (from the front): Drayton of Canada, Clayton of Australia, Julian of New Zealand, Jagbir of India, Hill of England, Moore of Canada, Foster of New Zealand. Jack finished fourth. (Mark Shearman photo)

The race was like no other I've been in. Fukuoka on race day devotes itself almost entirely to the race. About half of the million or so inhabitants of the city line the road, forming dense crowds in early miles and thinning out toward the turn. The course is in the shape of a horseshoe around a bay, dead flat with no shelter if there is a wind. The weather was good this time. Little or no wind, mild and sunny. TV cameras were everywhere. The full race was to be shown live on TV and a replay later in the evening. Truly, the Japanese take their marathons seriously.

What a fast and furious race it was, more like a 10-mile than a marathon. Akio Usami, a little powerhouse of a runner, set it up and took us all apart, running 2:10:36 to win by a minute from Ken Moore. A further minute back were Yoshiaki Unetani and I, "sprinting" for third place. I use the word sprinting very loosely. My legs felt like chewed string as I battled down the straight.

During the race, I was amazed at the thousands and thousands who lined the road, cheering politely and waving little "rising sun" flags. It was disconcerting to me after the abuse and even the odd bottle being flung at me on New Zealand roads.

I remember after some 10 frantic miles in about 50 minutes, I looked around and saw what looked like a solid sea of runners' faces. I thought, "Christ, better try and break them up. I hate sprint finishes." And yet that's what it came down to. I lost the "sprint" to Unetani by five seconds, but broke the New Zealand record by eight with 2:12:17.

The after-race function was semi-formal. We were waited on by lovely hostesses, some dressed in traditional kimono style and others in Western. A play was put on on a small stage with the actors miming the antics of birds and other animals. The crown princess was introduced to us, and the evening went off in decorous solemnity. That is, until the press boys took us to their favorite pub and we all began the unwind. Without the princess, of course.

## ATHENS, 1971

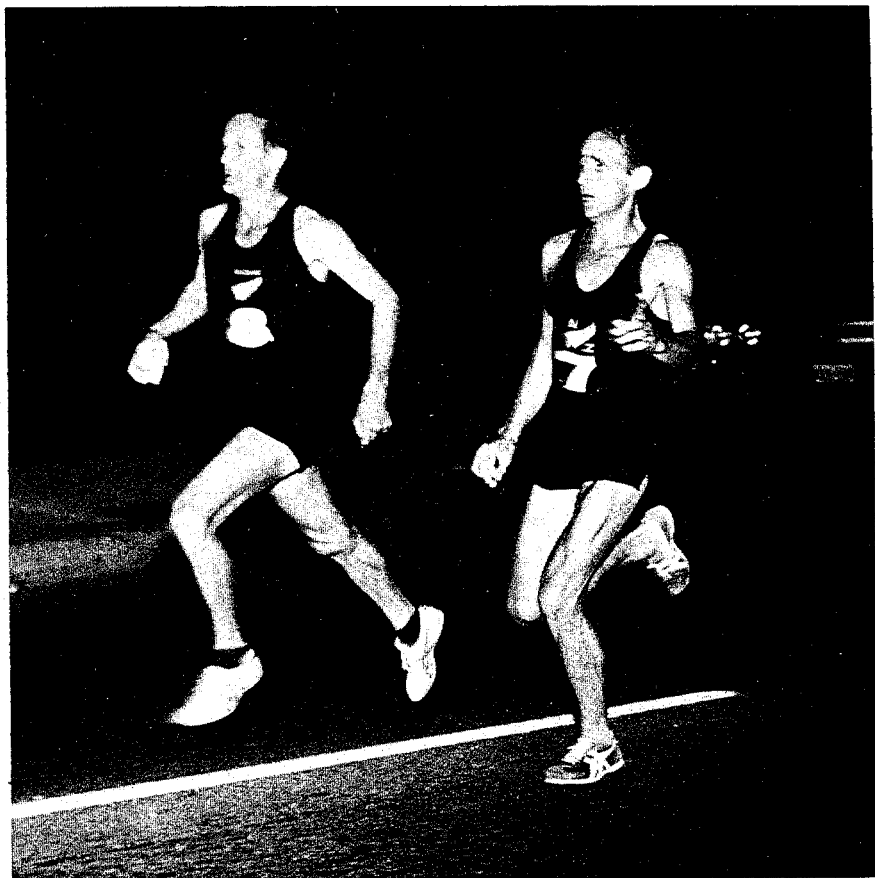
It all began in Greece, this marathon running, with the battle of marathon in 486 B.C. The Greeks and their eternal enemies, the Persians, were at it again. At the end of the battle, a runner reputedly named Pheidippides was sent off to Athens to tell the good news. The Greeks had won again. The runner died on making the announcement. Now here we were in Athens getting ready to do the selfsame run over the classic course from Marathon to Athens. But we weren't likely to drop dead at the finish. For one thing, we weren't fighting the Persians beforehand.

Once again, I was with John Farrington of Australia. We were welcomed at Athens airport by Stylianos Kyriakides, who'd won the Boston marathon in 1946 and had won himself fame and fortune in Greece ever after in the way of two homes and a car. Such is amateurism. But more on that later.

Greece in April is beautiful—clear skies, balmy days, perfect—except for marathons. Ron Hill had run 2:10 at Boston in 40-degree weather and pouring rain. Yet he'd taken 2:16-odd in Athens for his 1969 European Championship on a hot day. It looked as though it would be warm now.

We went out to the village of Marathon by bus on a sightseeing trip. It





**1970 in Canada: Foster runs alongside teammate Jeff Julian (left) before pulling ahead to win.**

was springtime and everywhere was fresh green. The road wound uphill through suburbs for about 6-7 miles over what would be the final seven miles of the race. I thought, "No wonder the course record is 2:11." But I was way ahead of myself. We were on a high ridge and the road began to descend. Down and down we went through the olive groves, down for miles. A slight rise here and there, then down, down again and I kept thinking, "We have to come up all this." Then for 4-5 miles it was a switchback and the last six was dead flat. My respect for Bill Adcocks' 2:11 had grown.

Like most originals, the original course is great. It should be the only place where a world record or best time can be established and recognized. Most of the marathon runners who are capable of setting a record or world best get the opportunity to run there at some time. It is a true test of a real road man.



We visited the burial mound of the warriors who fell in the battle so many years ago. The valley is a peaceful, lovely place now, quiet and orderly. During the race, we were to pass here again and cast a sprig of olive branch, carried from the start, onto the mound in a gesture of respect and remembrance.

Akio Usami started the race like a 1500-meter runner. No one even tried to stay with him. A tribute to his courage, he stuck it out and no one saw him until it was too late and all over. It was a classic way to win a classic race. Simple, from the front all the way, with the rest floundering in his wake.

John Farrington got away from me in the early miles. By the time we got over the long uphill section, I caught him. However, the effort of chasing told and John crept away to a 20-odd second advantage by the end.

I am convinced that Bill Adcocks' 2:11 on that course is the best marathon ever run.

### KYOTO, 1973

How any good came of this trip, I'll never know. I was off to Japan once more, this time to Kyoto and its annual marathon.

On the way to Japan, I passed a pleasant few hours with John Farrington in Sydney, going for a run and a swim. Then on arrival at Sydney airport, I saw the Japan Airlines flight roaring up the runway an hour before time. There was a tanker driver strike in Sydney and flights were going early to refuel in Brisbane. I arrived in Japan a day late.

In Kyoto, I found the travel agent in my New Zealand bank had given me travelers' checks redeemable only in Australia! A loan was arranged through the Japanese Athletic Association and Kyoto Shimbun newspaper, which I would repay as soon as I arrived home with my dud checks. I was saved, but again like the airline mess it cost me a bit of sweat and adrenalin.

I went off to the local track to do a couple of mile reps as is my usual routine. The track was cinders but covered by straw matting for the winter. It was like running on soft sponge, and I wallowed around the miles in about 4:50 but at 4:20 effort.

Sunny, mild, no wind. Conditions might have been "ordered" for the marathon. The big field got cracking right away. I knew there were two Japanese who'd done quicker times than I had. Unetani, at 2:12:12, had beaten me by five seconds at Fukuoka, but Ueoki had run 2:11-odd. I didn't know him, and when someone sprinted away I chased him wondering if it was Ueoki. A mile or two up the road, this guy all but collapsed. And I was alone 300 meters out in front.

I was committed. Ease up and be caught and lose face. Bash on and have a go—run out of steam, lose face again. The hell with it, I kept going. Five kilometers in 14:52. It was fast all right. The other runners were a minute back already, and looked like they were working at least as hard as I was. I felt okay and firmly decided to bash on. It was one of the least eventful

**Akio Usami (left), Foster and John Farrington, in Greece to retrace the original marathon route from Marathon to Athens.**

marathons I have ever run. But at least I finished over four minutes ahead of Unetani—retribution for those five seconds at Fukuoka.

Coming home, I stopped off in Hong Kong to do some shopping, but had picked a public holiday. Hardly any shops were open. I was to connect with a flight to Sydney but it was two hours late, making me miss my connecting Sydney-Auckland flight. I was also told I could not get back to New Zealand before Friday, and it was only Tuesday. I kicked up a fuss and was on a plane for home within the hour.

### LOS ANGELES, 1974

One cold, wet winter day, the phone rang and a man said, “Hi Jack, I’m Max, Sue’s coach. How’d you like a week in sunny California?” I took a moment or two to digest this. I knew about Max Golder, coach to New Zealand golden girl half-miler Sue Haden, but had never met him. Here he was offering me a week in the sun.

Foster and 1974 Boston marathon champion Neil Cusack take a soaking at Los Angeles, a race Jack won. (Alan Haas photo)



Whatever the "catch" was, I said, "Sure, when do we leave?" At my age, there can't be many more offers like that. All I had to do he said was run a marathon. The field would be moderate, no guns. Just a run. Sounded too good to be true. Anyone sponsoring a marathon and willing to pay my fare halfway around the world must surely want to see me race someone.

The "moderate" field which lined up with me at Los Angeles on a mild Saturday at 8 a.m. included Neil Cusack, the Boston winner at 2:13, and Tom Fleming, twice second at Boston. I was agreeably surprised at this as it gave me a chance to race guys I'd not get a chance to race normally.

I led off at a good pace, but soon Tom was pounding away out front making me work like hell to stay with him. He reminded me of Derek Clayton in his manner, his style of running, even in build. Neil just padded along on our shoulders, waiting. By halfway, I was feeling the heat badly, taking every sponge possible and wondering how the hell I was going to last. But I didn't seem to get much worse. Tom drifted off at about halfway, but Neil stayed right there to about 25 miles, then collapsed suddenly from around 5:15 miling to 6:15s.

A well-meaning fan made me run one more lap at the finish than was necessary. I'd made certain at the beginning that it was *one* lap at the end. I thought officials had changed their minds. I could have done without that extra 400 meters.

I have no impression of one race as being my best or greatest achievement. Each one has some aspect either more or less satisfying, more or less pleasant than others. I like to think of all the races I've run as being just incidents in a very happy period of my life—a period which I hope will last a little longer yet.

# THE BEST ONE AT HOME

The Commonwealth Games in New Zealand began for me during the summer of 1972-73, directly after Munich. At least prepare for it, I reasoned. After a good run in Japan, at least I had a qualifying time within the Games year, February 1973-February 1974. Two months later in New Zealand, I romped to another qualifying time of 2:18. All I needed was to run a good one on the trials in Christchurch in December.

I had my best cross-country season, winning everything in sight locally. And I set a new standard for the 15-kilometer road race, doing 43:58. At the time, no one had broken 45 minutes in New Zealand. So I knew I was "on." But this must have been too much for my old legs. I'd not had a serious injury in eight years of running. Now here I was, four months before the Games, with tendinitis. Naturally, I tried all the known "cures," but knew instinctively that only time and an easing up of running would fix it.

Five weeks after the injury, I went to Hamilton to watch a marathon and saw Terry Manners go down fighting to an on-form John "Robbie" Robinson and Brian Rose. Things did not look too bright for Christchurch, as I was still running like a flat-footed novice.

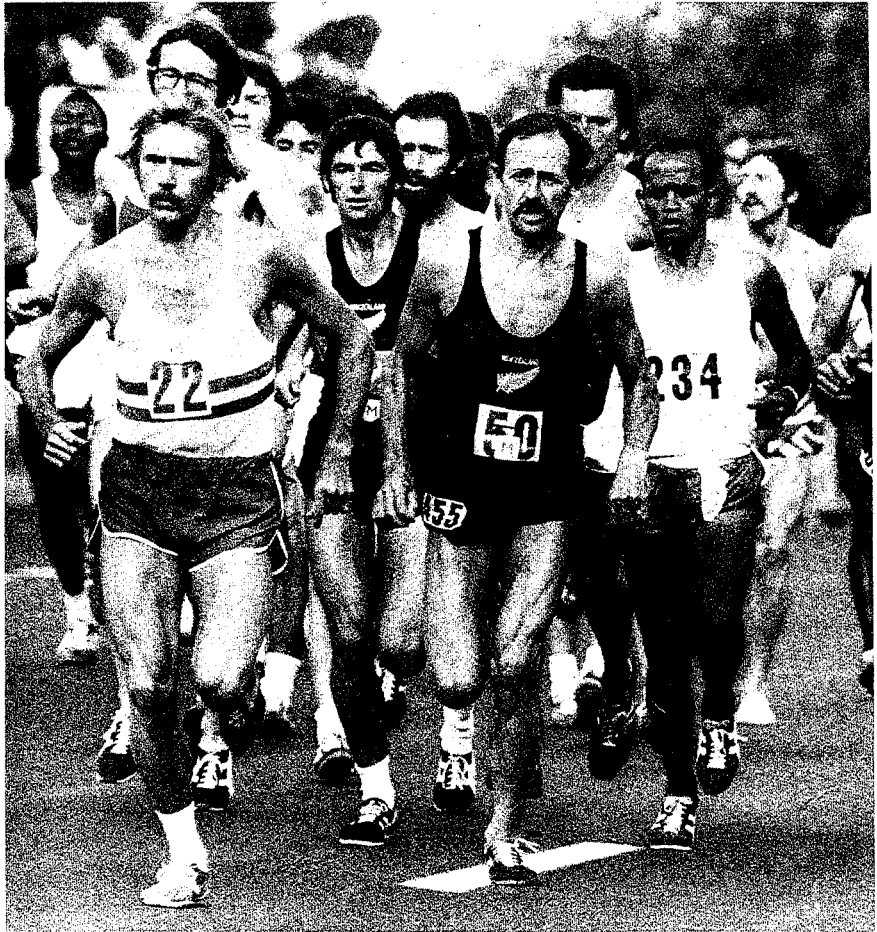
It was a dull, still day when we started in Queen Elizabeth II Park, future site of the Commonwealth Games and now the scene of the marathon trial. The pace was ridiculously slow, with no one game to lead. I took the initiative and still no one followed. I had almost a minute lead at five miles. Lack of any consistent training over the last three months showed up my lack of stamina and I dropped behind Robbie during the last three miles. But I knew I could still run at 2:12 pace. A few more weeks and I would be right.

Three weeks later, I beat Robbie by over a minute in a five-mile road race. Then I ran a 10-miler with Terry Manners, the third Commonwealth Games team member, in 49:25. We ran very easily, chatting most of the way around. All I had to do was hold my form for a month and not get injured.

The Christchurch Games were dubbed as the friendly games, and rightly so. It was recorded that the sales from the contraceptive vending machines were only exceeded by what was stolen from them.

Runners, opponents, trained together, ate together. One day, six of the marathoners ran an 18-miler on the latter part of the course. The pace was brisk in the middle stages, so we left it to John Farrington and Derek Clayton to sort out. They ran the distance in 1:33. I took over 1:40.

The day before the marathon was a scorcher. But by some miracle, race day dawned dull and cold, no wind, threatening rain which never came.



**Foster stalks Ian Thompson (number 22) early in the 1974 Commonwealth Games marathon. Thompson ran the second fastest time in history. Foster finished second. (Mark Shearman photo)**

We drove to the track with Arthur Lydiard. He made us feel 10 feet tall. I think this is his true value as a coach. There was no one in that race as good as us, or so he made it seem. As it turned out, there were quite a few!

While we changed and prepared for the race, we heard a roar outside. It was Robin Tait, who had won the discus. No one really took him seriously. He'd had so many tries, so many failures. But out there on his hometown field, he'd put it all where it belonged, 200-odd feet away.

Just before we were due to go to the start of the track, we were assembled in a tiny room and told we must stay there. Runners being relatively normal people, we were quite excited at this stage of the proceedings. It is

still a wonder to me now that this bumptious little official wasn't urinated upon. We were not even allowed to go for a nervous one. Such was security.

It was a sedate start. Not like the Edinburgh Games in 1970 at all. We cruised along nicely for 5000 in 15:15 and 10,000 in 30:30—very steady running. Then something happened in Hagley Park, for we came out of there like madmen. The miling rate dropped from a reasonable five minutes to something in the order of 4:45s.

A group detached itself from the main field: Ian Thompson, Richard Mabusa, Jerome Drayton, John Farrington, Terry Manners, Bernie Plain and myself. Soon it was just Thompson and me, then just Thompson. I went flat-out from 8-12 miles, and knew I could not keep it going. I let Thompson go, knowing it was only his second marathon and my only hope lay in that he might blow up. We now know he didn't.

Coming back from the turn down Memorial Avenue, a three-mile stretch of road as straight as a gun barrel, was an emotional and almost frightening experience. People must have been eight or 10 deep on each side of the road, and they closed in as I ran past, leaving me about a yard or so to go through. As they cheered wildly, it was difficult not to be carried away and start sprinting. Never has a crowd done so much for my performance. Nothing I experience will ever be quite the same again.

I looked at the clock as soon as I got into the stadium. 2:09:35. I had a minute and a half to realize my marathon aspiration of breaking 2:11—or five-minute miling. But I was shattered. My lap and 100 meters to do took 1:43. Still, I was happy. A silver medal. A new personal best time. Beaten by a better man. A silver medal on my mother's birthday and her silver wedding, too. (Twenty-five years married and I was almost 42 years old. You can work that out for yourself.)

My medal was presented by the Queen on Saturday, a Saturday I'll never forget. The medal presentation, that choking moment which lasts forever up on the dias. Filbert Bayi's incredible world record 1500 meters. The mad but also sad closing ceremony. I remember standing there on my own yet amongst all those people and thinking, "This will probably be my last. Enjoy it." But I already had.



## CONTINUING

*After 25 years with some form of competition most weekends and exercise most days on the bike or running, I must admit to having lost some of the desire to compete. I'm not as intense as I used to be.*

*Looking at the careers of other distance runners, they seldom seem to go for more than about seven years at top level. Injuries and loss of motivation or incentive take their toll. Perhaps the bodies just wear out. Ken Moore once spoke of a "well of adaptive energy." Maybe it is this which dries up. Who knows?*

*I still run most days and will continue to do so while I can for many years yet, I hope, though probably at ever decreasing speeds.*

*Perhaps what I've achieved as a runner may have inspired other 35-year-plus men to get up and have a go. I'd like to think so.*

# FACTS ABOUT FOSTER

**John Charles (Jack) Foster:** Rotorua, New Zealand (Rotorua Harrier Club). 5'8", 140 pounds. Born May 23, 1932, at Liverpool, England. Married, four children. Occupation: clerk. Began running in 1965 at age 32. Self-coached.

**Best Times:** 880y—2:01.2 (1972); mile—4:19.8 (68); 3000m—8:33 (73); 5000m—13:56 (73); 10,000m—28:46 (72); 15,000m—43:58 (73); 10 miles—48:22 (71); 15 miles—1:13:47 (71); 25,000m—1:16:29 (71); 30,000m—1:32:48 (71); 20 miles—1:39:14 (71); marathon—2:11:18 (74). 20-mile time is a world track best.

**Marathon Marks by Age:** 33—2:27:50; 34—2:28:41; 35—none; 36—2:23:11; 37—2:19:02; 38—2:12:17; 39—2:13:42; 40—2:14:53; 41—2:11:18; 42—2:18:24. Times at 38 to 42 are world age-group records.

**Daily Running** ("I still don't like the word 'training!'"): Four weeks prior to the 20-mile world record in August 1971—

July 18—AM, 40-minute jog in track suit (cold); PM, 1¾ hours, country (hard at it).

July 19—25-minute jog in track suit.

July 20—one hour, country, very hilly (brisk pace, felt good).

July 21—horse track, seven miles including miles of 4:41, 4:37, 4:40, six-minute jogs between (cold night).

July 22—80 minutes, country (worked hard, not fast but bloody hilly; cold night again).

July 23—easy jog, 30 minutes (felt poor).

July 24—jog 15 minutes, two-mile time trial, easy 9:30, jog.

*Week's Total: about 75 miles.*

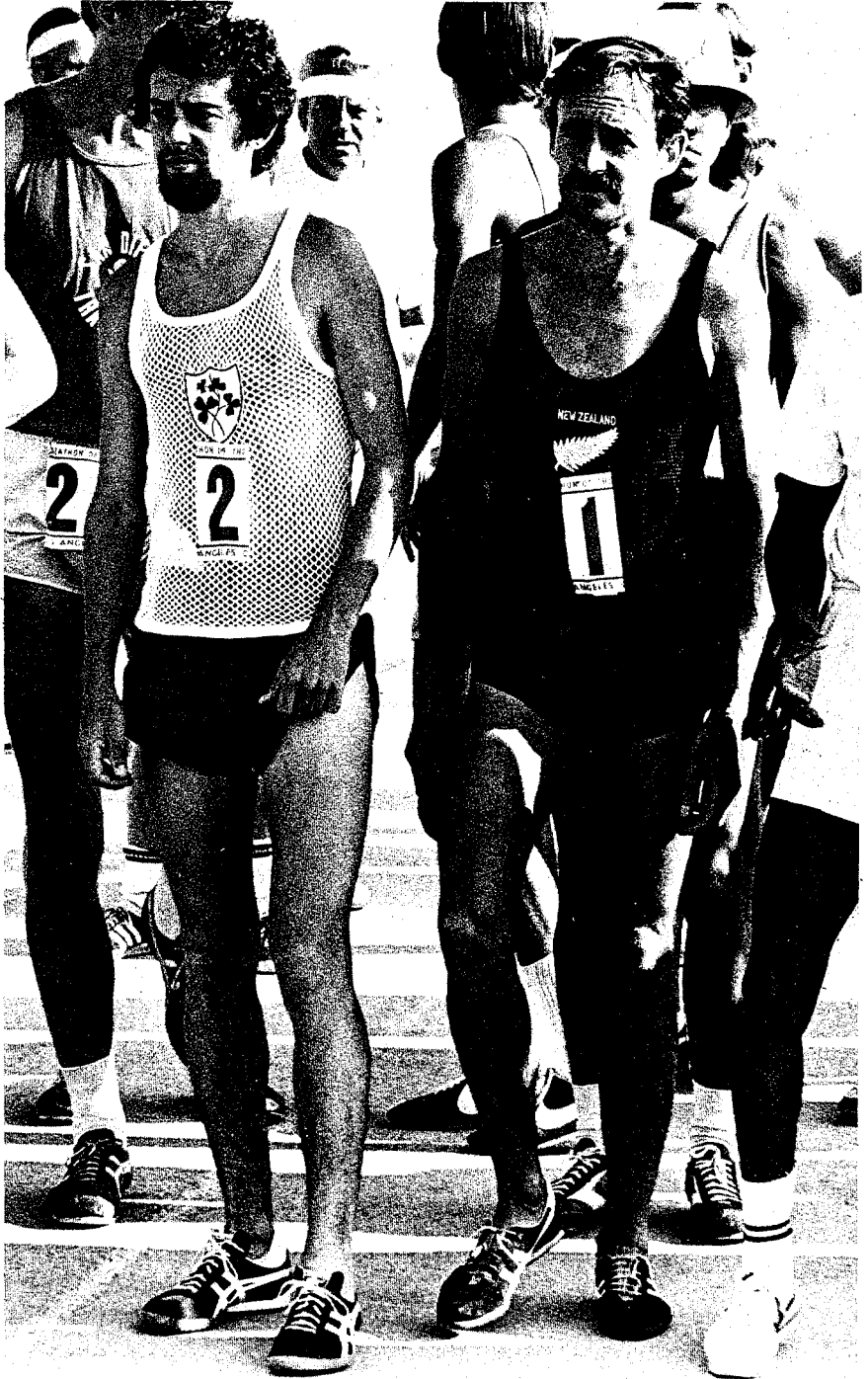
July 25—2½ hours, mostly cross-country and bush tracks (felt poor, no "sting," but nice running).

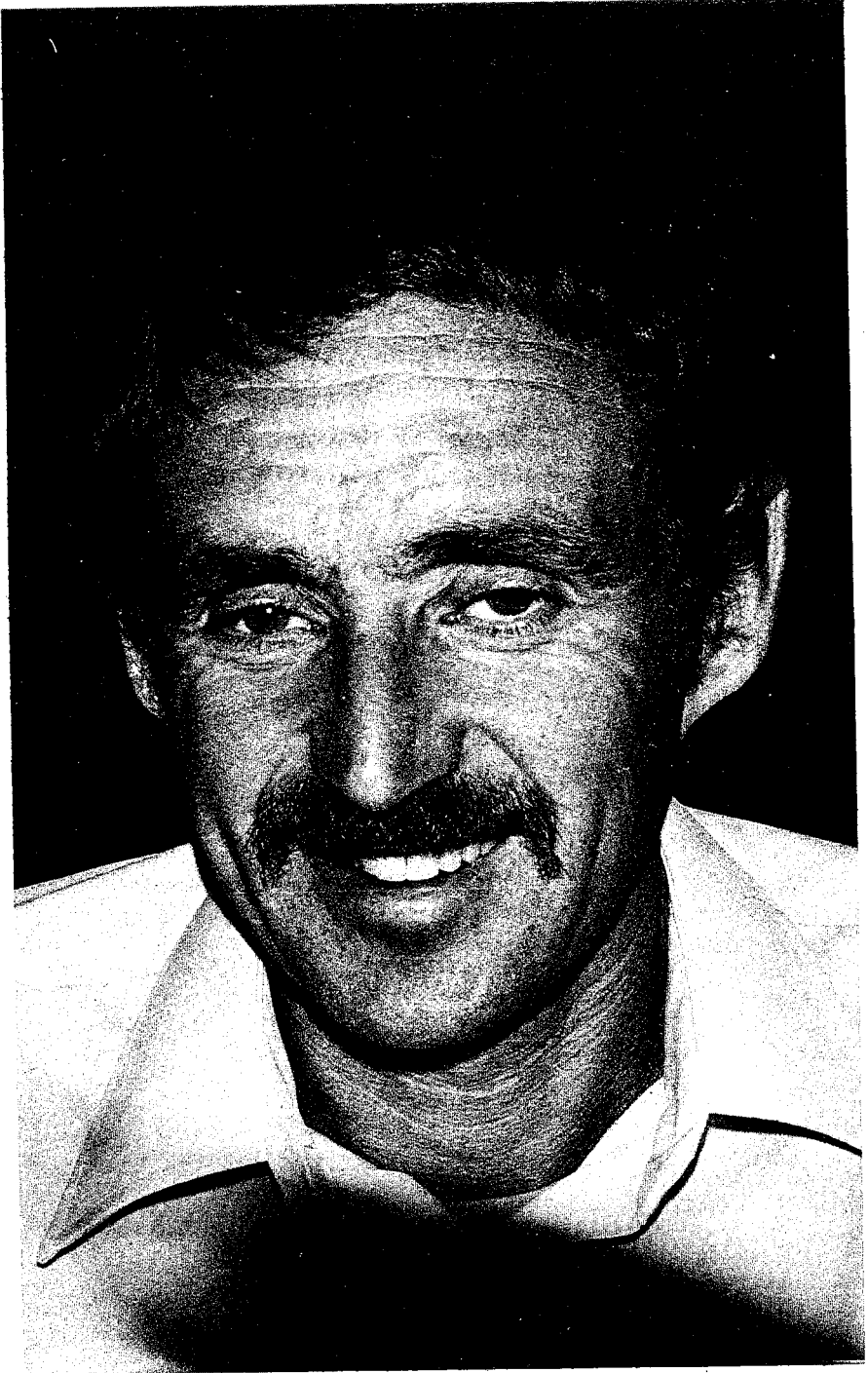
July 26—no run, too tired (or lazy).

July 27—one hour, country, hilly (ran hard).

July 28—horse track, six miles including 4:40, 4:39, 4:39, jog six minutes between (working).

The "moderate" field for the 1974 Los Angeles Times marathon included Boston winner Neil Cusack (left), and Foster looks appropriately concerned. (M. Julius Baum photo)





July 29—one-hour country (ran easy, didn't try).

July 30—three-mile easy jog.

July 31—Provincial cross-country championships; ran hard, from the front all the way; hilly course, soft going, cool, no wind.

*Week's Total: about 65 miles.*

Aug. 1—20 miles on road, 2:03 (blisters slowed me, nice day).

Aug. 2—no run (car broke down, worked late on it).

Aug. 3—80 minutes in forest and hills (worked hard at it, really going up steep bits).

Aug. 4—horse track, seven miles including three at 4:51, jogging others (freezing rain and strong wind).

Aug. 5—16-plus miles on road, 1:30 (dead in both senses of word, cold showers).

Aug. 6—three-mile easy jog.

Aug. 7—AM, five-mile jog; PM, 10 miles on horse track, four fast (no time), four slow, two jog.

*Week's Total: about 75 miles.*

Aug. 8—Bush Road, 2:10 (one really big hill, finished tired, cool and showery).

Aug. 9—three-mile jog (felt lousy, tummy upset).

Aug. 10—no run (only to and from toilet).

Aug. 11—horse track, seven miles including 4:41, 4:41, 4:56 (knackered!).

Aug. 12—1:15, country (legs felt heavy, fed up!).

Aug. 13—nine miles, road, 51 minutes (steady run).

Aug. 14—three-mile jog (felt okay tonight).

Aug. 15—20 miles, Hamilton Stadium (80 bloody laps, must be stupid! three New Zealand records, 15 miles, 25 kilometers, 30 kilometers; world best 20; not bad for an old bugger).

*Total: 80 miles (eight days).*

This is written verbatim from my diary, and it would be very typical of most weeks of running. Eight weeks prior to Munich (1972 Olympics), I had four weeks averaging 85 miles similar to the above, and four weeks over 100 miles, running two and sometimes three times per day in the Village. There was little else to do. It didn't make much difference to me. I ran a poor one there.

(Continued on page 46)

**LEFT:** This photo of Foster was taken by the man who finished one place behind him in the Olympic marathon, Jack Bachelier.

**PAGE 44:** Reviewing the course at the 1970 Fukuoka marathon are (standing, l-r) Bill Adcocks, John Farrington, Akio Usami, (sitting) two Soviet runners, Kenny Moore, Foster and Ron Hill.



# Foster's Marathons, 1966-1974

No.	Date	Site	Race	Time	Place	Winner
1.	4/23/66	Rotorua, N.Z.	Rotorua Marathon	2:27:50	2nd	Robinson (NZ) 2:25:40
2.	3/12/67	Auckland, N.Z.	N.Z. Championship	2:34:51	9th	McKenzie (NZ) 2:22:08
3.	4/23/67	Rotorua, N.Z.	Rotorua Marathon	2:28:41	6th	McKendrick (NZ) 2:25:05
4.	11/11/68	Auckland, N.Z.	Road Relay	2:49:00	1st	—
5.	4/23/69	Rotorua, N.Z.	Rotorua Marathon	2:23:11	2nd	Alison (NZ) 2:20:—
6.	8/22/69	Toronto, Canada	C.N.E. Marathon	2:19:02	3rd	Julian (NZ) 2:15:45
7.	12/14/69	Hong Kong	Hong Kong Marathon	2:29:45	5th	Kim (Korea) 2:21:42
8.	1/26/70	Hamilton, N.Z.	Provincial Champ.	2:22:51	1st	—
9.	3/9/70	Napier, N.Z.	N.Z. Championship	2:27:19	2nd	Julian (NZ) 2:24:40
10.	4/18/70	Rotorua, N.Z.	Rotorua Marathon	2:22:21	1st	—
11.	7/26/70	Edinburgh, Scotland	Commonwealth Games	2:14:44	4th	Hill (Eng) 2:09:28
12.	8/26/70	Toronto, Canada	C.N.E. Marathon	2:16:23	1st	—
13.	12/6/70	Fukuoka, Japan	Fukuoka Marathon	2:12:17	4th	Usami (Japan) 2:10:36
14.	4/6/71	Athens, Greece	Marathon-Athens	2:21:20	3rd	Usami (Japan) 2:19:45
15.	12/5/71	Fukuoka, Japan	Fukuoka Marathon	2:13:42	3rd	Shorter (US) 2:12:50
16.	4/22/72	Rotorua, N.Z.	Rotorua Marathon	2:17:51	1st	—
17.	9/10/72	Munich, W. Ger.	Olympic Games	2:16:51	8th	Shorter (US) 2:12:19
18.	2/4/73	Kyoto, Japan	Kyoto Marathon	2:14:53	1st	—
19.	4/28/73	Rotorua, N.Z.	Rotorua Marathon	2:18:09	1st	—
20.	12/4/73	Christchurch, N.Z.	N.Z. Championship	2:16:00	2nd	Robinson (NZ) 2:15:05
21.	1/31/74	Christchurch, N.Z.	Commonwealth Games	2:11:7	2nd	Thompson (Eng) 2:09:12
22.	6/22/74	Los Angeles, Calif.	Times Marathon	2:18:24	1st	—



In the “Golden Age” of New Zealand running, the early 1960s, one of the greats was Bill Baillie (left). He’s still active.

Until I went to the Games Village in Christchurch in January 1974 (before the personal best marathon of 2:11:18), my daily running was still much the same as I’ve listed for 1971—perhaps in the order of 85 per week. I now quote two weeks before the Commonwealth Games race, weeks totalling 111 and 82 miles.

Jan. 20—AM, 1:25 in park (brisk pace); PM, three-mile easy jog.

Jan. 21—AM, usual five-mile shuffle, pre-breakfast (awful); PM, Masters’ meeting, 10,000 meters, won in 29:36 (track sandy and cut up, ran a lane out; hot!).

Jan. 22—AM, five-mile jog; midday, 7½ miles with John Farrington (brisk!); PM, five miles (ditto!).

Jan. 23—AM, five-mile jog (legs stiff); PM, 65 minutes up in Port Hills, easy pace (with Terry Manners).

Jan. 24—AM, five-mile jog; PM, Port Hills again, one hour-plus (felt good).

Jan. 25—AM, five-mile jog; PM, 17 miles on the marathon course, good pace (two miles in 9:20, then eased it; felt very good).

Jan. 26—AM, five-mile jog; midday, five miles (brisk pace, hot); PM, five miles steady.



Jan. 27—AM, five-mile jog; midday, 1600 meters in 4:23; PM, seven miles easy (with Ron Hill).

Jan. 28—AM, five-mile jog (felt poor, legs stiff again).

Jan. 29—AM, five-mile jog; PM, four-mile jog (felt very good).

Jan. 30—AM, two-mile jog; PM, three-mile jog (felt very good, it's easy!).

Jan. 31—Race; felt good all the way, no bad patches; cool, very light breeze.

Maybe there is a moral here—"train" two or three times a day for best results. I don't know, but I do know I don't have this kind of time to spare.

**Articles by and about Foster:**

"Meet Jack Foster," *Runner's World*, Sept. 70, p. 27.

"Marathoner at 'Mecca'," *Runner's World*, March 71, p. 33.

"The New Zealand Scene," *Varied World of Cross-Country*, Booklet No. 2, Aug. 71, p. 34.

"RW Interview: Jack Foster," *Runner's World*, Jan. 72, pp. 8-10.

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## **Tale of the Ancient Marathoner**

Jack Foster has lived out the dream of every aging athlete. At 32, the New Zealander started running. Like most 32-year-olds, he had an expanding waistline and goals no bigger than reducing it.

He writes, "One day, I had the bright idea that I'd have a run for awhile. After all, I'd had the odd game of soccer for 90 minutes, surely a half-hour run would be no trouble. What I thought to be many miles later, I arrived back.

"What's wrong, have you forgotten something?" my wife asked.

I didn't understand.

"You've only been gone seven minutes," she said.

"Impossible. I was sure it was at least six or seven miles. I was soaked in perspiration and felt tired. I'd thought I wasn't in too bad shape physically. Now I was worried. If I was like this now, how would I be when I was 40?"

At 40, Foster was an Olympic marathoner and a world record holder at 20 miles. At 41, he ran 2:11 for the marathon—a time not a dozen men have ever bettered.

A delightfully low-key individual, Foster tells in *Tale of the Ancient Marathoner* how he improved so much, so late, mixing accounts of his own career with advice for runners of every age.