

My Quest for Titanium

By Steve Walters (written 6/13/11)

One might ask, “What is a Marathon Maniac?” This question means a lot of different things to a lot of different people. To the running community in general (especially here in the Pacific Northwest) it’s understood that it’s someone who runs a lot of marathons. In case you don’t know, the Marathon Maniacs is a group (mostly online via their web site and social networking sites) that is passionate about running marathons. To most of the members running a marathon is a monthly (or weekly) event. While to most people running a marathon is a once-in-a-lifetime event to the Maniacs it’s an opportunity to show that the human body is capable of much more than most people (runners included) think.

In June 2005, I ran my first marathon and in the months leading up to this big event, I fell in love with distance running. The 20 mile training runs were my favorite workout of the week. I had yet to run my first marathon before I had signed up for my second. Yes I know that is crazy. Just 9 days after my first I ran my second. And just four weeks after that I ran my first ultra (a 50k). That is when I was given the nickname “Marathon Freak”.



It wasn’t until the following year (July 2006) that I took notice of the runners in the yellow Marathon Maniacs singlets. I quickly went online and checked the club out. I wanted in! I realized that after my second marathon (more than a year earlier) I had qualified. I started the process of joining the club and was given Maniac #338 on August 3, 2006. That would prove to be the date that started a passion for running marathons and ultras that would continue to this day!



One thing you should know about the Marathon Maniacs is that they have 9 different levels. Each level is given a name (this name is some kind of metal). In addition to being given a name, each level has a number of stars. Most Maniacs join on the lowest level (Bronze, one star). And from there the goal of some Maniacs is to get to the next level. Each level has a criteria to achieve. For example, the Bronze level is running 2 marathons in 16 days or 3 marathons in 90 days. This is how most people qualify for the Maniacs. The highest level is Titanium or 10 stars (while there are nine levels the highest level has ten stars, this is because the founders of the club couldn’t come up with a tenth level) this is achieved in one of three ways. You can run 52 marathons in 365 days, run a marathon in 30 different states in 365 days, or run a marathon in 20 different countries in 365 days. For the record ultras do count as a marathon.

In 2008, I set out to achieve the seven star level (also known as Palladium). I did this by running 13 marathons/ultras in 12 weekends. I really enjoyed the chance to push my body and run every weekend. I made a ton of friends along the way and look back at that as a great experience. But seven stars would not be enough!

Every year I run an event that allows me to push my body to its limits. While for most running a marathon is quite enough (even to most Maniacs 26.2 miles is as far as they will run) for me I always like to see how far I can go. So I found Pacific Rim One Day Run to be a perfect chance to push myself. In this event, runners go round a one mile loop as many times as they can in 24 hours. While most drop out after a 50k or 50 miles, there are a few crazies that go the full 24 hours. In 2008, I ran 107 miles in that 24 hours and in 2010 I ran 103 miles. This year I set my goals on running 110 miles!

As I started training for this event in November 2010, I knew I had to run 20 or 30 miles almost every weekend to get my body ready. So I asked myself, "If I'm going to run 20-30 miles, I might as well get credit for it!" That is when I decided to try to find races to run instead of just doing a training run.

The great thing about living in the northwest is that this is where the Maniacs began in May 2003. That means there are a lot of Maniacs in Oregon and Washington. So to satisfy all these Maniacs there are a lot of races in the Northwest! Most of the races are small (200 or less) and most people don't even know they exist. Which is one reason the Marathon Maniacs' web site is so useful, they have a race calendar that has pretty much all the marathons and ultras from all over the country.



Late last summer some Maniacs decide to create a "Quadzilla" (four marathons in four days) over Thanksgiving weekend. The Seattle Marathon is always run on the Sunday after Thanksgiving, so three other Maniacs decided to host races on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. I figured this was a great way to train for my 24 hour race. So in November 2010, about 26 runners completed the first Seattle Quadzilla. I found that I was not sore after each race and my times got faster each day. On the following Monday I felt great and even ran with my local running group. I knew I was in good shape.

As I entered into the new year, I decided that I was going to run as many marathons or ultras as I could find. Every weekend there was something available. Most of them in the Seattle area, and for me, living in Portland, this meant I was going to drive to Seattle on a regular basis. Being a single guy, meant I didn't have the commitments that most have to a family.

In January, I realized that if I kept up my pace, I would get 8 stars (Platinum) in no time flat. To get 8 stars you basically need to run 28 marathons in 183 days (or 26 weeks) or run 45 marathons in 365 days (or one year). I did the math and realized that I was going to get there in April by running 28 marathons in 26 weeks (September to April). So of course as my 24 hour race approached I was looking beyond that and keep this crazy streak of running 5-8 marathons per month going. And if I got to 8 stars in April why not get to 10 stars by running 52 in one year?!

On March 19-20, I did my 24 hour race and run 110 miles and raised about \$2900 for autism research in the process. The following weekend I went to Seattle and ran a marathon and a 50k in order to reach my Maniac goals.

On April 3, I ran the Yakima Skyline Rim 50k (hardest race ever) and upon completing that race, I got my eighth star by completing 28 marathons/ultras in 26 weeks (and that 110 mile run only counted as one race). That would still not be enough!

I planned to go back to August 2010 and run 52 marathons/ultras by this August. But in going through the race calendar with a fine tooth comb, I realized I could get there sooner! By adding a handful of races I realized that if I went back to June 2010 I could get to 52 by June of this year. Game on!

In May I completed 10 marathons/ultras including running a marathon and a 50k in the same day. This would push me into position to get my 52 races in by June 11. Giving me 52 marathons in 50 weeks (or 351 days).

On June 11, I ran and completed the Lake Youngs Ultra (28.8 mile race in Renton, Washington). This gave me 10 stars and boosted me to the Titanium level of the Marathon Maniacs! I had a cake for the runners to enjoy and together my Maniacs friends and I enjoyed the achievement. Of the 4000+ Maniacs only 75 Maniacs have achieved the top level!



A few interesting facts about my 52 marathons:

- Of the 52 races, 20 were ultras and 32 were marathons
- The longest run was 110 miles and the shortest, of course, being 26.2 miles
- The average distance per race was 30.55 miles
- In the first 26 weeks I ran 15 races, in the last 24 weeks I ran 37 races
- All 52 races were in Oregon (15 races) and Washington (37 races)
- I ran 1,588.55 miles in the 52 races and drove 12,167.90 miles going to and from the 52 races
- The total cost was \$3,472.69 (\$66.78 per race)
- Of that \$66.78 per race, \$40.56 was the registration fee and \$21.23 was the gas money
- I spent 25 nights in my car and only 6 nights in motel/hotel room
- It cost me \$2.19 per mile in the 52 races
- I received 29 finishers medals in the 52 races
- I ran 9 doubles (2 in 2 days), 2 triples (3 in 3 days) and 1 quadzilla (4 in 4 days)
- Favorite race: Seattle Marathon, least favorite: Easter Marathon
- Hardest race: Yakima Skyline Rim 50k, easiest race: Mother's Day Marathon
- Fastest road marathon: 3:21:08 (Portland), slowest road marathon: 4:20:11 (Mother's Day)
- Fastest 50k: 4:14:35 (West Seattle FA), slowest 50k: 8:45:50 (Yakima Skyline)
- In addition to running 52 marathons/ultras I also ran 11 half marathons and 7 shorter than a half marathon
- I helped raise \$6,400 for Operation Jack (a charity to help those with autism)

Some highlights:

August 7-8, I ran a marathon in Bothell, Washington (First Call Summer Marathon) and drove 7 hours south to Bend, Oregon for another marathon the next day (Haulin Aspen Trail Marathon).

September 5, helped Sam Felsenfeld raise money for his charity Operation Jack (raising money for autism research) by hosting a 7 hour race in Tigard, Oregon. Finished second place with 42.75 miles.

October 10, ran the Portland Marathon on 10/10/10 and it poured down rain the entire time. I managed to run a time of 3:21:08.

October 23-24, ran the Columbia River Power Marathon in Umatilla, Oregon then drove back to Portland and ran the Run Like Hell Half Marathon with my sister the next day.

October 30, ran a 50 mile PR at Autumn Leaves at Champoeg State Park in Oregon with a time of 7:41:06.

November 25-28, ran the first ever Seattle Quadzilla by running 4 marathons in 4 days. Was joined by 25 other runners in doing the same thing. The first day was running on packed snow, and each of the 4 runs was better than the last.

November 28, ran my 100th marathon/ultra at the Seattle Marathon (my favorite marathon). It was also the final day of the Quadzilla and I ran a personal course record of 3:23:26.

December 26, organized another event to benefit Operation Jack by hosting a 6 hour run. It poured down rain and was windy. Ran a marathon then volunteered the rest of the time.

December 31-January 2, Ran the Winter Triple by running 3 marathons in 3 days in the Seattle/Bellingham area. Organized the final race, temperatures were between 23-32 degrees during the three days.



January 8, ran the Bridle Trails 50k in Kirkland, Washington which started at 3pm. Only the first 10 miles had daylight the rest was in the dark on trails in the mud!



February 13, ran the Cupid's Marathon in Rochester, Washington. Only 22 runners ran the race and I was the fastest winning with a time of 3:36:47.

February 19-21, ran the Hagg Lake 50k on Saturday then the Hagg Lake 25k on Sunday then drove to Bothell, Washington for the First Call President's Day Marathon on Monday.

March 12, ran the Gorge Waterfalls 50k in the Columbia River Gorge in Oregon. Ran by and behind 10 different waterfalls. The 50k had 8,200 feet of climb and a total of about 16,400 feet of elevation change.

March 19-20, ran a PR of 110 miles at the Pacific Rim One Day Run in Longview, Washington. Raised about \$2,900 for Operation Jack through per mile donations.

March 26-27, ran a double in Seattle/Redmond, Washington just a week after my 24 hour race. Ran slow, but managed to finish the second race faster than the first.

April 2-3, ran the Yakima River Canyon Marathon on Saturday in Yakima, Washington. Ran the Yakima Skyline Rim 50k the next day. The Skyline 50k had 9,000 feet of climbing and a about 18,000 feet of elevation change. It had four climbs of 2,000 feet over 2 miles each. I finished with a PW of 8:45:50 and received my 8th Maniac star.

April 16-17, ran the Lumberjack 50 miler on Saturday in Port Gamble, Washington. The course had tons of mud including a mud pit that was knee high. On Sunday I ran the Easter Marathon in Elma, Washington on very tired legs.

May 7, ran the Mother's Day Marathon in Elma, Washington. Ran the first half with my sister in 2:23, then ran the second half by myself in 1:57.

May 21, ran the First Call Spring Marathon in Bothell, Washington in 3:52:26 then drove 40 minutes to Redmond, Washington and ran the last 6 hours of the Redmond Watershed 12 hour race to get a 50k in. This gave me a marathon and a 50k in the same day!

May 28-30, ran the Ridgeline Ramble Trail Marathon in Eugene, Oregon on Saturday then ran the Forest Park 50k in Portland, Oregon on Sunday and the Issaquah Spring Marathon on Monday in Issaquah, Washington.

June 11, ran the Lake Youngs Ultra (28.8 miles) in Renton, Washington. This gave me 52 marathons/ultras in 351 days (50 weeks). I earned my 10th Maniac star!

Common Questions:

How do you recover so quickly?

My body has been trained to handle running a lot with little rest.

Don't you ever get injured?

No, maybe I'm lucky, but I have never had a major injury.

How can you afford it?

It only cost me \$3,472.69 to run all 52 races. Some people spend a lot more than that on their hobbies. My hobby is running marathons. I found a lot of small cheap (or free) races. Some people don't like these types of races, but I figure 26.2 miles is 26.2 miles with or without the fan fare.

