

2012 Across The Years 72 Hour Race Report
by Joe Fejes



For the past couple of years I have immersed myself in running ultra events, mainly in the Southeast. In 2011 I completed 21 races of marathon distance or greater, including but not limited to the following events:

Rank (%)	Place	Time	Date	State	Ultra Event
71.67 %	14	23:18:29	Nov 5, 2011	AL	Pinhoti 100M
	3	66.67	Oct 26, 2011	TN	Laz' Backyard Ultra 18HRS
66.53 %	50	5:45:29	Oct 1, 2011	TN	Rock/Creek StumpJump 50K 50KM
	2	132.24	Sep 24, 2011	NC	Hinson Lake 24HRS
74.79 %	22	32:24:03	Sep 9, 2011	MN	Superior Sawtooth 100M
78.02 %	9	7:48:55	Aug 13, 2011	SC	Laurel Valley 35M
	2	47.2	Aug 7, 2011	GA	Hot to Trot 8HRS
86.04 %	3	4:11:50	Jul 16, 2011	SC	Landsford Canal 50KM
	1	52.03	Jun 25, 2011	GA	Darkside 8 Hour 8HRS
75.35 %	23	3:42:41	Jun 19, 2011	TN	Chattanooga Mountains Stage Race 20M
75.74 %	15	3:01:38	Jun 18, 2011	TN	Chattanooga Mountains Stage Race 22M
77.63 %	16	2:26:21	Jun 17, 2011	TN	Chattanooga Mountains Stage Race 18M
85.49 %	13	5:39:41	May 7, 2011	TN	Strolling Jim™ 40M
	4	73	Mar 12, 2011	AL	Delano Park 12HRS
89.30 %	4	3:27:58	Feb 26, 2011	GA	XTERRA Thrill in the Hills Trail 26M
88.41 %	4	4:30:06	Feb 19, 2011	AL	Black Warrior 50KM
70.77 %	29	5:15:06	Jan 22, 2011	AL	Mountain Mist 50KM
97.91 %	2	4:47:00	Jan 9, 2011	GA	Atlanta Fat Ass 50K 50KM

Although I can no longer break 3 hours in the marathon or run sub 18 in the 5k, I have been fairly competitive in my age group (46-50) in ultra events. That is, unless John Dove, Phil Canning, Tim Vinson, Dewayne Satterfield, Dink Taylor, Garth Peterson, Dave Carver, Randy Whorton, Sheridan Ames, Jack McDermott, (among others) showed up. All of these runners have superior leg speed.

Throughout the year I tried to make a list of my strengths and weaknesses as a runner:

Strengths:

- (1) Road running;
- (2) Flat courses;
- (3) Loop courses where navigation skills are not required;
- (4) Above average endurance. Generally the longer the race the better.

Weaknesses-

- (1) Atrocious navigational skills;
- (2) Suck at downhill trail running;
- (3) Super suck on technical rocky single track trail running;
- (4) Mountain climbs such as Laurel Valley or Superior Sawtooth;
- (5) Generally, the shorter the race, the worse I do.

I decided that I should focus on events that suited my strong points and avoid races where my weaknesses would be exposed.

With great interest I discovered the race known as the “timed event”. These are unique ultra races that typically occur for a period between 8-72 hours in duration on a flat fast surface consisting of a relatively short loop ranging from 400 meters to 1.5 miles.

To test out my hypothesis I decided to run several timed events in 2011:

- Two 8 hour events (Darkside & Hot to Trot),
- One 12 hour event (Delano) and
- Two 24 hour events (Hinson Lake & Black Mountain).

I found that my running style is well suited for these events primarily because it is *almost* impossible to get lost running around a one mile (or less) track and the running surface is flat.

I also confirmed that the longer the timed event, the better I did, comparatively speaking. I won the Black Mountain 24 hour with 116 miles on a hot, humid day on a 3 mile trail loop with a few small hills. At Hinson Lake I was able to do 132 miles on a hot humid day. Hinson Lake is a 1.5 mile trail loop with fewer hills than Black Mountain. At Hinson I lost by more than 30 miles to Mike Morton who ran almost 164 miles. Although I was somewhat embarrassed by getting trounced at Hinson Lake by Mike, I felt much better about myself when I learned that Mike's mileage nearly broke the American Record for a 24 hour event.

I felt even better when I later learned that Jonathan Savage had run the same distance (132 miles) as I had at Hinson in 2010, and that he had recently run 145 miles at the Northcoast 24 hour National Championship run in Cleveland, Ohio. Jonathan's second place finish at Northcoast was an automatic qualification for the US National 24 hour team.

Vikena (Kena) Yutz is a fellow GUTS runner and friend whose expertise is running timed events and who also competed at the Northcoast 24 hour and Hinson Lake. After we finished Hinson Lake, Kena pulled me aside and told me I should consider running Northcoast in the future as it was typically a faster course than Hinson Lake. Kena also told me I should consider running a multiday event such as the Across the Years 48 or 72 hour run as my endurance was a strong point (or maybe she was gently referring to my declining leg speed!).

On Kena's advice I decided to conduct a feasibility study on the Across the Years 72 hour race held in Glendale, Arizona from December 29 – January 1. Initially I would not consider running ATY because I understood that the event was run on a 500 meter track which seemed too short to keep my interest engaged. I soon discovered, though, that the event had been moved from Nardini Manor to Camelback Ranch which had a 1.05 mile scenic mostly flat loop around the training grounds for the Los Angeles Dodgers. My interest was now piqued.

After consulting with my super understanding wife Michelle and my 8-year-old princess daughter Alyssa, we decided that my birthday and Christmas present would be entry into Across the Years 72 hour race. The race is so named because the participants run from one year into the next—in this case, starting in 2011 and ending in 2012. My entrance into the race was a very difficult decision, knowing I would miss the New Year holiday with my family.

I signed up for the race and booked my airline ticket to Phoenix. No turning back now—I was committed. I was also excited that in addition to Kena, a couple other Georgia running friends--Willy “Natureboy” Syndram and Jameelah Abdul Ramin Mujaahid--were also running Across the Years.

Now all I had to do was formulate my goal and strategy for the race. I figured the best way was to analyze the ATY race data for the past six years. I added to my spreadsheet a “daily goal” column with distances that would allow me to break the course record of 323 miles set by the great Yiannis Kouros.

Below is my spreadsheet based on the historical splits of prior ATY races as well as my 100 mile and 24 hour Hinson Lake totals. Figures in yellow are the numbers I hoped to do at ATY.

	Kouros	Geesler	Fejes (me)	Biondic	Sichel	Mangan	Mangan
100 mile	15:21	16:35	17:15*	28:42	22:06	16:57	18:50
24 hour	149	134	132*	83	107	132	118
48 hour	257	217	X	160	197	210	188
72 hour	323	300	X	248	269	273	279
Day 1 mileage	149	134	131	83	107	132	118
Day 2 mileage	108	83	98	77	90	78	70
Day 3 mileage	66	83	95	88	72	63	91
Total	323	300	324	248	269	273	279
Break	Minutes						
Day 1	20	10	30	129	173	42	98
Day 2	61	192	100	213	136	276	363
Day 3	282	124	115	118	336	455	115
Total	363	326	245	460	645	773	576

*My results from Hinson Lake 24 hour.

Based on a comparison of my Hinson Lake performance with the prior ATY performances, I was confident that I should be able to achieve between 280 and 324 miles provided I ran a smart race.

The numbers show the obvious—the more time spent on the course, the greater mileage that could be achieved. Kouros and Geesler had rested considerably less than the other ATY winners. I thought I might be able to offset their superior leg speed if I simply took shorter or fewer breaks.

Trust me when I say I quickly learned that this particular plan was wishful thinking, if not just plain stupid.

STRATEGY CHANGE: I revised my daily goal for the first day from 131 miles to 140. After I signed up for the race, I learned there were at least two qualification slots still open for the six-member US 24 Hour national team. Serge Arbona, Phil McCarthy, and Jonathan Savage had qualified automatically with their performances at the Northcoast 24 hour race. Mike Morton surely qualifies based on his 164 miles at Hinson Lake. It appears that the next best performance for the open qualification was Harvey Lewis's 140 miles at Northcoast, which would be the current minimum mileage floor. As the qualification period runs through June 2012, it is likely that a higher mileage number (i.e. 150+) will be required to qualify for the team. There are many more talented runners (Jay Aldous, Michael Arnstein, Zach Gingerich, Michael Henze, Nick Coury, Dan Rose, et al) who are likely to exceed 150+ miles before the qualification period ends. Nevertheless, I decided to follow the sage advice of my ultrarunning idol William Keane who recently said, "***When you're going to the last waltz...Go Big and Make a Statement.***" I would try for 140+ miles on the first day. I also knew, however, that going "***Big***" the first day would almost certainly mean a slow and cruel death on Days 2 and 3.

Glendale Arizona-Camelback Ranch- December 29th --9 am

At the start of Across the Years, I was ready to run but nervous as hell. The ATY entry list read like a *Who's Who* for ultrarunning legends:

John Geesler (Former US record holder for 48-hour run),
Don Winkley (American Record Holder 6-day race),
"Frozen Ed" Furtaw (Author of *Tales from Out There/Barkley Marathons*),
Anna Piskorska (1st American & 10th overall at the 2010 World 24-hour championship with 133 miles).
Pam Reed (Badwater winner & USATF 24-hour track record holder),
Ed Ettinghausen, (Guinness Book of Records: Most marathons completed in a year 135)
Martina Hausmann (Age class world record holder for 1000 miles - 15 days)
Ray Krolewicz, (Former American record holder 48-hour run: 216 miles)
Don Lister (Completed 574 mile Blue Ridge Parkway in 17.5 days at age 67)
Vikena Yutz (2010 72-hour Across the Years winner)
George Biondic (2010 Across The Years winner)
Davy Crockett (2010 48-hour Across the Years winner)

Day 1 "Going Big"

I ran hard from the start. I wore my disposable ultra lightweight Nike Mayfly (engineered to last 100k) racing flats for the first 50 miles because I wanted every advantage to have a big day. I ran the first lap with Ray Krolewicz who asked me what my goal was. I told Ray 140+ and asked him what I needed to get there. He said that I really needed to be at 70 miles in 11 hours to have a realistic shot. This was a little faster than I had originally planned on. I remembered, though, that Rich Shick, another ultra idol of mine, had previously told me, "If Ray K. ever gives you advice on ultras, take it to the bank—it is good as gold." I therefore picked up my pace gradually with hopes of meeting or exceeding Ray's benchmark.

The temperature quickly climbed from the 40's to the 70's. It felt like a 100. I am not sure why but dry heat seems to affect me much worse than heat with humidity which I am accustomed to in Georgia. I had suffered severe dehydration a few months prior at Superior Sawtooth 100 miler in Minnesota under similar dry heat conditions.

Unfortunately, just like Superior Sawtooth, I started having stomach issues early on in the race as a result of the warm day and my fast pace. From 10 am until 6 pm I couldn't eat any food or gels or even drink the high caloric Ensure drinks I had brought. I could only drink water. I dry-heaved several times and worried that continuing to push the pace would lead to misery and, more importantly, low miles. I asked Perry Sebastien, who was Kena's crew chief and a good friend of mine to put my Pepto in the cooler, hoping that a couple shots would solve my stomach issue. It didn't. Perry was kind enough to pick up some Alka Seltzer which seemed to be more effective than the Pepto. I also sipped Coca Cola and ginger ale but still felt nauseated. I came through 11 hours with around 68 miles. Ray K. said the 68 miles should translate into approximately 134 miles for 24 hours. At the time I was discouraged that I would likely fall well short of my first day 140+ goal but tried to stay positive since I was still on pace to beat my 132 Hinson Lake mileage total.

As the temperature dropped and nightfall came, my stomach began to settle. I was now able to eat a little fruit and a bean quesadilla. I was also able to run at a reasonable pace consistently without any major issues. Both my breathing and legs felt good. I reached 100 miles in 17:12, a 3-minute PR from my Hinson Lake time. I finished the first 24 hours with 132.30 miles which was .04 of a mile further than my Hinson Lake PR.

Day 2 "Sink or Swim"

I decided to take an hour nap in hopes of rejuvenating my legs and body. Unfortunately, it didn't. Once again the heat felt intense on my body. I was now trying to walk/shuffle to get my miles. The miles were not adding up. I didn't even want to be outside. Bummed, I quickly scaled back my three-day goal to 250 miles. As the day dragged on, the dreaded DNF acronym started popping up in my head. Simply put, I felt like shit.

Then around 5 pm, as the sun began to set and the temperature cooled, I felt like a new man. My breathing improved and my legs felt great. I decided that I would attack the mileage in 7-10 mile increments hoping the miles would eventually add up. I ran the next seven miles strong but then felt sapped of energy. I asked Perry if I could take an hour nap. After some serious haggling Perry agreed to a half hour. Truthfully I was a little pissed because a half hour is NOT a power nap. I barely had lain down before Perry was waking me up and telling me to hit it. By now Tom Jackson and Davy Crockett were quickly and steadily closing the gap. I knew that they were running the 48 hour race but I was still trying to protect my big day-one lead.

I had several issues to contend with.

EATING: My stomach had settled enough on Day 2 to allow me to eat everything in sight. I scarfed down several pork burritos, bean and cheese quesadillas and three slices of spicy sausage-and-pepperoni pizza. Eating solid real meat felt fantastic, although I was now running like a choo choo train, farting nonstop for the remaining two days of the race. My food choices also caused some serious acid reflux. I didn't let my gastric discomfort interfere. I felt energetic. Relentless forward motion ensued.

NAPPING: I had bought a cheap sleeping bag at Walmart before the race. I didn't reserve a tent, so I just laid the sleeping bag on the grass outside Kena's tent. The sleeping bag felt nice and cozy during the day, but once the temperature cooled and the dew set in, it was a cold, wet hell. I eventually placed the sleeping bag on an extra cot, but soon found that the cot wasn't roomy enough. My legs were exhausted and would cramp unless I changed positions from time to time. Additionally, the cot being off the grass actually caused cold air to blast from underneath—almost like how a bridge ices before the highway. *What a cheap dumbass*, I thought to myself. *Why didn't I spend the \$75 to rent a damn tent?*

IPOD: Almost as important as the eating and sleeping, my iPods presented serious issues during the race. For some reason the shuffles would not charge, forcing me to rely on my two iPod Nanos. My primary Nano contained my favorite country or rock songs including Miranda Lambert, Eric Church, Jason Aldean, Nirvana, Reba, Tim McGraw, Cary Underwood, Kenny Chesney, etc. I also had acquired a backup Nano a few weeks ago from a dude on Craigslist for super-cheap, the low price due to the cracked screen and the broken on/off button. My newly purchased iPod came with over 700 songs, mainly hardcore gangsta rap or hip hop artists. I left the songs on, thinking that a change in my music genre might prove beneficial. Although I did enjoy the faster beat of the rap and hip hop music, I quickly grew tired of repetitive lyrics involving bitches, suckas and bad muthafuckas. As a result, most of the 72 hours involved listening to the same 70 country rock songs. This lack of variety alone greatly jeopardized my race.

Throughout the night on Day 2, I kept focusing on running 7 miles and then taking a 30-minute nap. Perry agreed with my strategy. Even if I didn't sleep, the rest cooled my body core and refreshed my legs. I felt like a frickin' wind-up doll with Perry doing the winding. At least I was now making progress on accumulating miles. My feet, however, were really sore and I knew I had at least a couple of nasty blisters. I stopped by the medical tent and removed off my toeless Hoka Bondi B's.

Holy Chipotle, my toes were mangled with blisters! I spent over an hour in the medical tent having my feet treated. My angelic caregivers removed two syringes of blood and fluid from my biggest blister. *Dammit*, I thought to myself, *I didn't plan on this hour of off-time!* After my blisters were drained and my feet taped up, however, I felt golden. I continued to run hard throughout the night. At the end of Day 2, I had racked up 208 miles. The bulk of my 76 miles on Day 2 had happened in the evening and nighttime hours, from 5 pm until 9 am. Clearly, from 9 am until 5pm, I had been useless.

Day 3 “Shifting Gears”

I was upbeat at the start of Day 3, knowing that I could get close to 290 miles if things went my way. Although short of my 300-mile goal, it would be a very good first outing at the 72-hour distance. I was comfortable with my strategy of running 7 miles nonstop and then taking a 30 minute break. Perry had even asked whether we were back on for the 300 miles.

When I resumed my running, I noticed I was being lapped by a young lady who was clicking off miles at a rapid rate. She had long legs, well defined quad and calf muscles, a slender frame and the absolute perfect running form. I learned her name was Anna Piskorska and that she was attempting to make the Women's 24 Hour US Team for a second time. At Across the Years she was shooting for 133+ miles in the 24 hour race. Anna previously had finished as the top

American in the 2010 World Championship with 133 miles. I tried on several occasions to run with her, but she was simply too fast. Every time she lapped me I would yell, "Go, Anna go!"

I also spent much of Day 3 running with Ed Ettinghausen who was in second place behind me in the 72 hour race. Ed is a super nice guy, always slapping hands with other runners and shouting encouragement. Ed is also a character. Literally. He dresses in his trademark court jester outfit and hat in all his ultra races including Badwater. Ed is a Guinness Book of World Record holder for having run the most marathons in a year with 135.

My race performance on Day 3 was very similar to Day 2. I was essentially worthless during the day and came alive at night. One interesting aspect of the multiday race was learning how to run again after taking a rest break. I found that I would literally moan and groan while trying to get my foot speed to a slow crawl for about 15 minutes before I could shift into a higher "shuffle gear." Then I would spend about 15 minutes in shuffle gear before I could shift into "running gear." It was almost like driving a car. I was, however, quite concerned that, at some point, transmission failure would occur.

Early in the evening, Perry mentioned that I still had a chance at 300 miles but it would hurt like hell. I told him that I was at peace with myself if I came up short. The heat of the last three days along with some rookie mistakes had made my 300-mile goal a bit too aggressive. I told Perry that I could live with 280 miles.

Just before daylight on Day 3, I was infused with adrenaline at knowing that I would hit 280 if I could get in a couple of decent hours of running. Keeping my revised goal of 280 firmly in mind, I clicked off 5 or 6 miles at an eight-to-ten-minute pace which brought me to 275 miles.

I ended up enjoying my final couple of hours walking with other runners until the leaderboard showed that golden 280 miles and my first-place finish.