

Pass It On®...

Going the Distance from the Farm to the Record Books.

Cliff Young showed up to the most grueling footrace in Australia — 875 kilometers — in overalls and gumboots. He went on to win in record time.

Even among ultramarathons — defined as any race longer than a standard 26.2-mile marathon — 875 kilometers (544 miles) is a long one, requiring training and stamina that seem almost beyond belief.

Back in 1983, the Westfield Sydney to Melbourne Ultramarathon, which began and ended unceremoniously in mall parking lots, had never been completed in less than seven days. But the world's most elite runners showed up to prove their mettle. They were surrounded by support crew, followed sophisticated nutrition and break schedules, and had years of training experience. Cliff Young showed up alone, wearing gumboots and overalls. He left his dentures at home because they rattled when he ran. When asked about his training regimen, he simply said he had grown up on a 2,000-acre ranch where he herded sheep on foot because they couldn't afford horses.

As the race began, the elite runners left Cliff in the dust. He strode along in his signature shuffle, arms dangling and gait efficient but not film-worthy. Many spectators must've thought Cliff was a promotion for the race who would soon drop out. But when other racers paused to get some sleep before the next grueling day, Cliff kept on, making up distance on the leaders. He reflected on herding sheep to new pastures, a task that took three straight days and nights, walking back and forth, prodding the sheep forward, steady progress to keep control of the herd. Cliff was at home with the solitude of running and the challenge to stay on task, to keep moving, even after days of simply putting one foot in front of the other. He kept himself sharp by imagining he was moving sheep ahead of a storm.

Cliff finished the race in five days, 11 hours, a full two days faster than the previous record. He was an instant celebrity. Not only did he will himself to run so far with so little experience and sleep, but he also split the prize money with the race's top runners. He said he didn't know there was prize

money and felt bad accepting it. "Those other runners worked as hard as I did," he explained.

Today, a memorial in the shape of a gumboot stands in the Beech Forest where Cliff grew up. In later long-distance races, professional runners adopted the "Young Shuffle," mimicking Cliff's energy-saving gait. But what Cliff Young will be remembered for most was his big heart. The locals remember him as bonzer, the Aussie slang word for excellent.

Cliff Young never ran for notoriety or money. He simply wanted to see how well he could do. For all of us, doing our best is what our life story is all about. Win or lose, gumboots or running shoes, we win the race when we just don't quit.

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