

Fourth Annual Sri Chinmoy 3100 Mile Race: A Finn and a Prayer- June 18-August 8, 2000

By Sahishnu Szczesiul

The longest race on the ultra calendar, fourth edition of the Sri Chinmoy 3100 Mile Race took place again in the summer of 2000, around the notorious .5488 of a mile (883.2 meters) city block in Jamaica, New York. The extreme race on the concrete course encompasses 51 days of a maximum of 18 hours running and moving- a different direction each day being one of only a few variables on the menu other than running, and running and more running. This race tests the grit and determination of the toughest of the tough. A minimum of 60.7 miles per day is quite difficult, indeed. But the endless circumnavigation of the course (5,649 laps) is difficult to digest for runner and spectator alike. Coupled with the variable summer weather of New York in June, July and August, the runner has to be strong in mind as well as body to be able to reach the goal. Although the field was only four runners this time, two were veteran returnees from the previous last three editions.

Namitabha Arsic, 35, from Nis, Yugoslavia (Serbia) returned after successfully completing the 3100 miler the previous year in 49 days, 16 hours. He finished second overall. The young train engineer had had several long runs to his credit in years past, including near finishes in the 3100 and 1000-mile races. His glowing attributes for this race included a tremendous improvement from year to year coupled with a steady, smooth running style and a great appetite for running. Since American Ed Kelley, two-time winner of the race had decided not to run this year, Namitabha was the immediate favorite to become super-long distance champ.

Suprabha Beckjord, 44, from Washington, DC cheerfully joined the fray as well, aiming to be the only four-time finisher of the 3100 miler. A veteran of 14 multadays and over 20,000 multi-day miles in the 1990's, Suprabha was still the only woman finisher of the 3100. The competition of 1999 was her most difficult multiday to date. She needed an extra day to finish when the hottest July on record in New York nearly fried her and her running mates last year. In the year 2000 she had spent most of February and March trying to recover from the flu and had trained sparingly for the big race. We hoped the weather would not be as brutal as last summer. Suprabha was still considered a favorite to take top prize.

The youngest competitor was **Pekka Aalto**, 29, from Helsinki, Finland. The light-running style of the blond, blue-eyed Scandinavian belied a toughness and subtle speed we had seen in his previous two multi-days. In 1999 he finished second overall, first male in the 700 Mile Race, and just six weeks earlier he finished second to new course record holder Rimas Jakelaitis in the spring Ten-Day affair. Pekka had run 670 miles in ten days, which would have won all but two of the five editions. I had a suspicion that the easy-going Finn had more capacity to reveal.

Oldest among the four athletes was **John Wallis**, 63, a retired educator and lecturer from Ludington, Michigan who had enjoyed training the last few years after injuries had halted previous attempts at multi-days. Ultra history buffs might recall that John had set the masters 1000-mile record in 1989, and had completed the inaugural Trans Am (2935 miles-64 stages) in 1992. In 1996 he won our 700-mile race as an age 59 -year old.





As expected, Namitabha Arsic took the lead and ran with few breaks on the first day test of the 51-day adventure. He did not have a full-time helper

yet, but he forced himself to be disciplined; 'don't waste time, don't take unnecessary breaks.' He reached 77.3 miles (124.5 km).

Second in line was the Finnish hope Pekka Aalto with 70.2 miles (113 km). It was a learning process for the youngest man in the group. Suprabha Beckjord reached 68.6 miles (110.4km) before calling it a day, still pleased that everything was working well. John Wallis ran 63.1 miles (101.5 km), taking a few breaks, setting himself up with a regular routine, surely needed since he had no one to help him save time. He had a smile on his face as the first totals were on the books.

After the first six days, Namitabha had carved out a 12-mile lead on Pekka Aalto- 407 miles, to 395 miles for the younger runner. John Wallis had reached 378 miles, just a mile better than the petite Suprabha who was thankful that the weather was holding at just below 80° F. She was used to Southern weather, having lived in DC for many years. They were both keeping it going in various ways. It was a boon for the runners to adapt to the high mileage during the break-in portion of the race. The year before, the intense heat was almost too much to bear. The peak of summer heat had not arrived yet in this event, but at least all four were moving along well.



Namitabha Arsic on Day 6



Pekka Aalto on Day 6

Vajra helping John move along

After Day 26 Suprabha no longer had the energy to go past 60 miles, and that proved to be the eventual path for her. A fifth straight summer running 2700 miles, and then three straight 3100's took its toll on her body. She still hung on and stayed in the race, but it would take her four or five extra days. Sri Chinmoy was happy to allow her to reach 3100 miles. As long as she could hang on and run near 50 miles a day, she would get to the Goal.

It was also apparent that John could not sustain 60 miles a day- his body just would not allow it, and the fatigue and sore muscles and back issues vanquished his chance at 3100 miles. Yet, he vowed to carry on, and with the help of Vajra Henderson, our irreplaceable masseur and blister expert, a plan was crafted to get John to 2700 miles.

The two gentlemen decided that 50-55 miles max would get John to the secondary target. It was doable, and probably by the end of the race. John's determination and noble profile would almost guarantee his now primary goal. It was a relief to see him show up every day for the 6:00am start.

There seemed to be two 'competitions' within the race- the first two runners and the second two. These are what drive runners to excel at their

On Day 34, Pekka became ill with a sickness that affected his stomach and GI tract. It pushed his efforts way back to 50 miles or less for over four days, which suddenly opened the door for Namitabha. The veteran then fashioned a 17-mile lead.

However, shortly after Day 38, with the help of some Swedish blueberry syrup and pancakes, Pekka decided the final places at the top and created the lustre of a fine performance. It was evident to this observer, that he possessed a talent rarely seen in multi-days. In five consecutive days, he managed 68.6, 75.7, 71.3, 70.2, and 68 miles, all but clinching first place with a 16-mile cushion. His eyes began to sparkle, and his confident demeanor returned. The 29-year old courier delivered the finish only four and a half days later, reaching 3100 miles in his first



The last few days of the 3100 were not as hot as a normal summer would offer. Namitabha Arsic was able to take 36 hours off his previous best finish from 1999. He completed 3100 miles in 48 days, four hours, about 20 hours behind Pekka. His inner content and outer confidence never wavered, and his smiles beamed an inner joy.

On the 49th Day, John Wallis reached the goal of 2700 miles, watched by his wife who flew in from Michigan to join him for the heroic ending to John's multi-day career. He knew it was time to stop. It took him 48 days, 14 hours to reach 2700 miles, the furthest a man over 60 years of age had ever run on a certified course. He thanked everyone watching him finish, and was all gratitude to Sri Chinmoy for helping him reach his goals.

Six days later, Suprabha Beckjord finished the 3100 Mile Race for the fourth time in 54 days, 15 hours. She was an expert in keeping her body and mind in motion, and this year, 2000, she did not fall down on the course, a great reminder of how hard she had pushed the year before. We wondered whether she would be back for more multi-day magic. When you go deep into reserves, there is a chance that you cannot refill the reserve inside, even after a year or two off. Suprabha was just throwing caution to the wind. Her trust in Sri Chinmoy guiding her journey was resolute and steadfast. Plus she loves running! We knew she would be back.





a conclusion the very happy with the efforts four runners recover. We had

beast of a race to most observers, and even the ultra community paid little attention to its growth or evolution. However, in the years that followed, after a bottoming out of small fields, a new wave of faster and fit men would toe the line. We as organizers were happy this one was over, but we did not have the vision that Sri Chinmoy had for this event. It would only be a matter of time before more runners came to the strange race around the block, and revealed who they were, and what this race had to show to the world.

One of the four runners went home to his Helsinki, Finland abode, and still immersed in the grasp of long running events, wished to come back to run the Sri Chinmoy 700 Mile Race, the short part of the Ultra Trio, which had been flourishing since 1987. Pekka Aalto not only returned to the 700-mile event, but won it again with a fine effort- 700 miles in 9 days five hours. Sometime shortly after his victory, and his third excellent performance in all three of our multi-days in New York, Pekka Aalto became Ashprihanal. His spiritual name, given by Sri Chinmoy (True aspiration) immediately shaped his spiritual journey, and his hope to return the next year was almost carved in stone. It was obvious that Sri Chinmoy saw what capacity the young man had, and I recall, when we asked Sri Chinmoy whether Ashprihanal should could back only 5 weeks later after winning the 3100, to do the 700 Mile Race, Sri Chinmoy said, " Hah, for him, 700 miles is like drinking water!"

The Fourth Sri Chinmoy 3100 Mile Race had come to next evening with the awards ceremony. Sri Chinmoy was the runners and the race in general, and was impressed and transcendent performances that we witnessed. All travelled back to their home countries or cities to rest and hoped that some would return next year. The 3100 was a

The Fourth Sri Chinmoy 3100 Mile Race Final Results June 18 – August 13, 2000

.5488 mile / 883.2079 meters certified

1. Pekka (Ashprihanal) Aalto, 29, Helsinki Finland 3100 miles = 47 days+13:29:55

1000km = 9:06:36:40
 1000 miles =15:01:51:08
 2000km =18:14:03:10
 1300 miles =19:12:31:59
 3000 km =28:07:30:39 NR
 2000miles =30:09:00:43 NR
 4000km =38:15:30:10 NR
 3000miles =46:04:35:41 NR
 5000km =47:16:05:13 NR

2. Namitabha Aleks Arsic, 36, Nis Serbia

1000km = 9:05:02:35
 1000 miles =15:02:47:21
 2000km =19:00:07:10 NR
 1300 miles =19:15:54:09
 3000 km =28:15:18:00 NR

3100 miles = 48 days+04:18:38 NR

2000 miles =30:16:24:24 NR
4000km =38:11:21:30 NR
3000miles =46:13:20:47 NR
5000km =48:06:12:09 NR

3. Suprabha Beckjord, 44, Washington,DC USA 3100 miles = 54 days+15:51:34

1000km = 9:15:30:52
1000 miles =16:01;12:21
2000km =20:00:57:31
1300 miles =21:00:16:43
3000 km =30:15:35:14
2000miles =33:10:16:42
4000km =43:03:22:46
3000miles =53:01:18:30

John Wallis, 63, Ludington, Michigan USA

2700 miles =48 days+14:00:27

1000km = 9:14:12:15
1000 miles =16:00:07:50
2000km =21:00:43:35
1300 miles =22:04:14:20
3000 km =32:15:02:30
2000 miles =35:10:02:04
4000km =45:00:09:32

Poems dedicated to the 3100 runners by Sri Chinmoy

*I shall no more walk along
My darkness-mind-road.
I am determined to walk
Run and sprint
Along my heart's sunlit path.*

*I have bravely forgiven
All my yesterdays
So that today I can cheerfully run
Towards my Destined Goal.*

*To run from the known
To the unknown
Is to run from bondage
To freedom.*

*Because of your humility-mind
And your purity-heart
You will before long become
In the inner world
An ultradistance runner
With striking speed.*

