

Thaddeus Lawrence — supported by Racers' Toolbox — has taken part in gruelling challenges in the Sahara Desert, the Gobi Desert in China and even in the Polar Desert of Antarctica. He is about to go on his fourth desert endurance race in Atacama in South America. These ruckcase races involve him being in extreme weather conditions in desert environments for days; in the daytime it's sweltering hot and the nights are blizzard cold.

So while this corporate trainer sees his races as a metaphor for life, we see him as someone we really want to have a nice hot cuppa with.

First of all: Do you have to be nuts to want to take part in endurance races?

It does help to be nuts. There are plenty of sane people but, again, if you put nuts among nuts, we are all sane and we are wondering why the world has gone nuts and are not doing races like these.

What's the definition of an endurance race? What's the minimum distance?

Anything that is under the category of 'ultra' would be more like a marathon, which is 42 kilometres. I guess if you do the length of Singapore and one step more, it would be considered an ultra. There is no specific definition, it is a personal definition as I think someone who does not exercise or have sporting experiences and suddenly tried to run 10km — it would be quite a stretch for them. There is no official standard definition and it is a relative experience.

Do you train yourself by going to the gym or running outside of working hours?

I should be doing a lot more but I don't. There are times where I go to the gym and run on the treadmill, not my best loved activity as I do not understand the purpose of travelling to a place to run on a piece of rubber. The only time that I run is at these races and in preparations. The completion of the journey of the race



STRIKING DISTANCE

MOST OF US COULD BARELY SURVIVE A 1-KM RUN, SO WHAT'S IT TAKE TO BECOME AN EXTREME ENDURANCE COMPETITOR?

is more important than my ranking. I train my physical self just to keep myself at a fairly decent phase.

Explain what you mean by "journey of the race".

I am there to enjoy the race and people that are from so many different backgrounds, be it nationality, race, socio-economic levels, dreams, goals and visions —

you have this assortment of people that come together who share a common pursuit. The most memorable part of the trip is the friendships that are struck up. There is the people aspect and the nature aspect. I am out in part of the world that very few people get to see, or experience rather than pop out of a tour bus.

Are there specific regimens that you do to get yourself ready for these competitions?

I go for my tests at Racers' Toolbox and they draw up a training programme for me based on my heart rate. It is very detailed and it is on a weekly basis leading up to the race. The training is mostly running. Unlike training for a marathon, the

"I do not stick to a strict regimen, it is more like a process of self discovery and to test where my limits are mentally and physically."

focus is time on your feet rather than speed running. For nutrition, I have a dietician who tells me that I should eat as much as possible.

How many races have you taken part in?

I have done three and this coming one will be my fourth desert series. I did Sahara in 2009, Gobi desert in June last year and Antarctica (the polar desert) back in November last year.

Which was the toughest?

I found Gobi really hard, the one in June 2010. With extreme sports, you have an abstract idea of what it is but your mind is still very open and everything is still a surprise. Whereas for the Gobi desert, you have this fear that comes in where you feel that you have to watch out for this and that...

Like what?

I found it really cold at night as it went down to just below freezing, so dealing with the temperature extremes of being cold at night and sweltering in the day was difficult. To add to that, the nature of the terrain was not easy in comparison to the Sahara — which was flatter. The Gobi had a lot more ups and downs, which made it tougher. For Antarctica, participants are invited and you must have completed two other desert races to compete.

Have you ever wanted to give up at some point, and just go have a nice cup of hot chocolate instead?

Never! That is the difference between these and the shorter races — shorter ones are easier to quit. For the marathons in Singapore — which costs only \$50 or \$100 when you sign up — you are running on routes and can just hop into a cab and go home. Whereas in hot desert races, the registration fees are

US\$3,000 (\$4,200) and for Antarctica it was US\$10,000 just to sign up, and that excludes the travelling fees and food costs — I paid all that myself. I usually raise funds to sign up for these marathons and get sponsors to help me. If you put that much in, your stakes are high and you can't flag a cab in the middle of the desert and go home. The idea of quitting has never come into my head.

While in Antarctica during the race, how did you manage to braue the ridiculous sub-zero conditions?

By keeping warm. Having no experience of such conditions before, it was all experimentation as we went along. We have all the different layers so it's about understanding the concept of how to dress for such conditions. At the starting line, you want to dress in a way that you are just cold, as when you start moving, your body will heat up. Before you get too hot, you have to start shedding layers and, before you get too cold, you have to put the clothes back on or hypothermia might set in. Likewise, when you are too hot, you would perspire and the cold air might get to you.

You are a corporate trainer and professional speaker: Do these endurance races have anything to do with your profession?

It is a credibility issue and I use my races as a metaphor for life in my talks. I always tell them that you can run 10 kilometres, you just put your head down and run and you are done. But a lot of people push



themselves and they suffer for the next couple of days. You can always tell when someone has run a marathon on the weekend when they start walking bow-legged after. In a multi-day race like these, you need to pace yourself and be stronger and stronger, and keep a bit of reserve in the tank.

Before attempting these races, are there any rituals that you perform?

It is about putting myself in a positive frame of mind and emotionally as well. I do pray when I am running. It is my default. I also think of people a lot as I seek people's support. That is my ritual.

For more about Thaddeus Lawrence: www.dreamscomealive.com
For more about advanced fitness assessment and training: www.racers-toolbox.com

