

Dean Karnazes



# Running Like Crazy

50 Marathons in 50 Days: Dean Karnazes Breezes Through Marine Corps Marathon and Keeps Going

**Almost no one notices Dean Karnazes** as he crosses the finish line at the Marine Corps Marathon, which winds down at the Iwo Jima memorial in Arlington each October. Ken Berger, the race announcer, has been calling out racers' information from his podium as they approach the finish, screaming things like: There's Robert Ackerman from Winchester, Virginia! Say hello to the crowd, Robert Ackerman! And: Here's Marcel Bonhert all the way from Hamburg, Germany! Thanks for running the Marine Corps Marathon, and Vigates! But he misses Karnazes completely. Doesn't mention him at all. I only catch him at the very end, his final strides. He glides through the

finish line effortlessly, as if running 26.2 miles in just over three and a half hours is an everyday thing.

Considering this is his 43rd consecutive marathon in as many days, it actually is.

Karnazes is at the tail end of the Endurance 50 Challenge, a marathon of marathons that has him running 50 races, in 50 states, in 50 days. Seriously. It's the latest extreme stunt performed by this self-proclaimed "ultramarathoner" who "loves to test the limits of human endurance."

Over the last fourteen years, Karnazes has made a name for himself among fitness enthusiasts by completing almost inhuman feats, like running a

33.5 hour long, 135-mile race through Death Valley, or swimming across the San Francisco bay, or running a marathon in the 40 below temperatures of the South Pole. Today has been less strenuous. He's only finished one of the ten largest marathons in the country—just like he did yesterday, and like he's going to do tomorrow.

"It felt natural," he tells me just minutes after the finish. He's tan as a penny and looks well younger than his forty-three years. And he's not sweating. Not even a little. "I feel fresh, like I left a little gas in the tank for tomorrow," which is the Kiawah Island Marathon, in South Carolina.

Tired of his days as a "drunken yuppie fool," Karnazes (nicknamed "Karno") started his career as a runner on his 30th birthday, after having an "awakening" that compelled him to go on an impromptu, all night, thirty-mile run through his home town of San Francisco. The run left him blistered, bleeding, and malnourished, yet still "feeling strangely alive." When he healed, he entered a slew of marathons, but they weren't challenging enough. So he began to compulsively train for ultra-marathons (defined as any race that exceeds 26.2 miles) like the Western States Endurance run, a 100-mile footrace through the hills and valleys of northern California, a race that—despite losing a toenail and enduring a bout of night-blindness—he managed to finish 15th overall, his first time out.

From then on it's been a self-competition for Karnazes, a continual raising of his own bar that's led him to pioneer marathons in arctic conditions, swim across large city bays, pen Ultramarathon Man: Confessions of an All-Night Runner, a bestselling memoir, and string together a nationwide onslaught of consecutive 26.2-mile marathons that brought him here to Arlington, hoping to inspire others with his perseverance and perspiration.

In conjunction with his sponsor, The North Face (who he also designs training equipment for), Karnazes wants to use the Endurance 50 to "inspire others to adopt a more healthy and active lifestyle," by providing an extreme example. The event benefits his organization, Karno's Kids, which is aimed at getting kids outside and active. "We have a bit of a problem with our health

here, in this country,” he says. “The numbers are staggering and unfortunate. About a third of our youth—that’s 25 million kids across this country—are overweight.”

The Marine Corps Marathon is the forty-third consecutive time in as many days that he’s tried to combat those numbers. He says that throughout the Endurance 50, he’s heard stories of how “thousands and thousands of pounds” have been lost by those who’ve joined him.

“I’ve learned that inspiration is a two way street,” he says, mentioning the cancer survivors he has inspired and

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the families who’ve renewed their interest in marathon running, hearing what he’s up to. I’m almost afraid to ask him the obvious question: 50 marathons in 50 days! Are you crazy?

“I take that as a compliment,” he says, citing how good it feels to inspire people to get off the couch. When his trainers come and take him away, no one seems to notice the dry, middle-aged ultra-marathoner weaving through the sweat-drenched and crumpled at the finish line.

Before Karno’s out of earshot, before he disappears to catch his plane to South Carolina, I ask him what he’ll do seven days from now, when his “summer vacation” running Endurance 50 finally ends.

He says to me, and with absolutely no irony: “Go for a run.”

After finishing the Marine Corps Marathon, Karnazes went on to complete the Endurance 50 on schedule, at the New York City Marathon, where he ran his fastest time of the whole challenge. Throughout the trek, he went through five pairs of shoes, eighteen pairs of socks, and lost three more toenails. Follow Karnazes at [www.ultra-marathonman.com](http://www.ultra-marathonman.com). 🏃

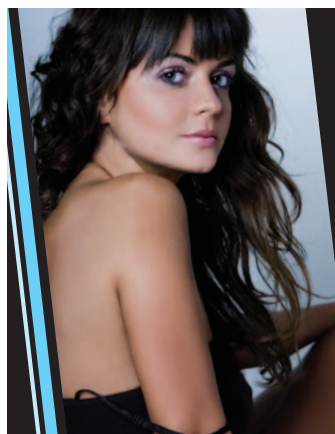


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