

Running Away From It All

ROBERT GARSIDE IS NOTHING IF NOT DEDICATED. For the last six years, the 36-year-old Briton has had but one goal: to be the first man to run around the world. Since starting out in New Delhi in October 1997, the self-titled "Running Man" has dodged bullets in Russia, outrun thieves in Mexico and found true love on the run in Venezuela, to name a few adventures.

Garside expects to finally hang up his sneakers during the first week of March, when he'll complete his global loop back in New Delhi. This real-life Forrest Gump talked to NEWSWEEK's Liz Krieger from his hotel in Cairo, where he's gearing up for the last leg. Excerpts:

KRIEGER: Why?

GARSIDE: To be the first to do it. To get the record in the books. I have gotten kind of possessed with this goal.

Bravado and pride are involved?

A bit, I'll admit it. Every guy wants a little bit of glory. But this goal is an expression of who I am. It's a journey of the mind and spirit as much as just a really long jog.

You must really love running.

I always was into running, from the time I was a child, scampering around in the forest behind my house, to days in school when I was winning medals for cross-country and captaining the football team. As a child I'd hang by my fingertips off the balcony at home just to shock my parents and to test my endurance.

Why not just run marathons?

They just don't motivate me. Besides, what's all the rush about?

What kept you going on the hardest days?

I've got no choice. I burned all my bridges at home—I sold my stuff, dropped out of university a year before graduating, cut myself off from my whole life there.

You've had your share of nightmares.

Oh, yes. I spent five nights in a jail in China, because I apparently didn't have the right visas and because of my "suspicious" video equipment. It was horrible. In Eritrea,

which I just completed, there were minefields to contend with. I was chased in Panama and held at gunpoint. I think they wanted my sack. I eventually was able to run away.

How have you changed your route in light of current events?

Parts of the Africa route and the whole Middle East route had to be totally overhauled. I was planning to run through Turkey, Saudi Arabia and maybe even Iraq, but it became clear that doing that was just not possible.

In Latin America I was running a lot and running fast—like a madman. It was pretty dangerous in some parts there, so maybe that's why.

Any places you didn't run through that you'd have liked to?

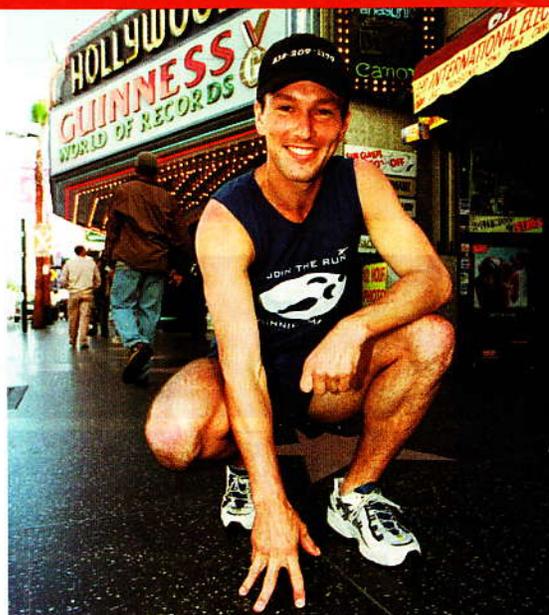
Canada. The Congo. Saudi Arabia—just the name is so alluring to me.

How have people received you?

So many people have fed me, housed me, clothed me and even run alongside me over the last six years. When I ran out of money in a deserted town in Australia, I met a farmer coming out of a pub who just gave me \$500 on the spot. I guess he just liked my project.

Aren't you lonely?

I don't mind being on my own. It gives me time to think, to process everything. Not that I don't like running with other peo-



ROBERT THORPE

ple—I do. A man from Spain ran half of Tibet with me. It was great. When I was in Australia I overtook a woman on the road who was in the midst of an around-the-world walk. We stopped and chatted. She's a kindred spirit, a fellow wanderer.

How do you decide how much to run each day?

I don't wear a watch, so I don't know hours. I just run what I feel. In Latin America I was running a lot and running fast—like a madman. It was pretty dangerous in some parts there, so maybe that's why.

That's when you fell in love?

I met my girlfriend, Endrina, in Caracas, Venezuela, in April 2000. She trailed me through Central America and through the United States. I couldn't and I won't finish this without her by my side. Before Endrina, this was a lonelier pursuit. Now it's not. Humans aren't meant to be entirely alone.

Are you homesick at all?

I'm desperately homesick. I miss old friends. I miss a really good pot of tea.

What were some highlights of the trip?

I was blown away by the Amazon and the Himalayas. I've also had the chance to meet diverse people like Nelson Mandela's jailer in South Africa, the late Prince of Nepal and even Libyan President Muammar Kaddafi in Eritrea.

What will you do when you're done?

I am planning to run across Antarctica next. I'm also thinking of swimming around the world. I'm not a great swimmer, but I have endurance, so I should do OK.

So no sitting still any time soon.

Oh, no, I can't do that for too long. I just don't believe in it.