

Merry Christmas '03 & Happy New Year '04

Hope everyone is having a nice Christmas and are looking forward to a New Year.

Wow, another year past by and I am still in Savannah GA. I enjoy this area for the weather, warm here year around. The town is rich in history and has quite an active social scene. The beach is not bad either, I usually get a ride out there on my bike at least once on the weekends.

I have been at Gulfstream Aerospace for over two years now working on the GVSP & GIV-X corporate jets in Flight Test. I have been doing mechanical and electrical design along with operations support of our flying test aircraft. It has been nice working both sides of the flight test instrumentation side of the house like I did at Boeing.

This year for me started out in New Orleans at the end of another fun Alpha Phi Omega national convention. We had attendance of around 2300 people. This is the service fraternity I have been involved with since college. I am currently helping with the national extension committee in starting new chapters across the country. Locally, I have been helping students at Armstrong Atlantic State University in re-chartering their chapter, expected this spring. They are a fun group and will do well.

I was looking through a local 'What's Happening' newspaper on one Thursday in late January and saw that Tybee Island, about 6 miles from where I live was having a Marathon in two days on Saturday, Feb 1st. Foolishly, I thought, 'Hey, I've always wanted to try and do a Marathon.' Most people will train for a marathon for 18 weeks prior to the run.

As far as I was concerned, so what, worse off, I will just walk. Besides, I have been Hashing a couple of times a week fairly regularly for the last year or so. In addition to the Hashing, which some would argue against any credit towards fitness, I do try and run about 3-4 miles, 3-4 times a week as well. Besides one 13 mile run I did the previous summer in Hilton Head at just under 2 hours, the longest run I had done was a 10K (6 miles). So, it was going to be a challenge.

'So, there I was', at 7AM on Tybee, Saturday morning, 45 degrees (cooler than I like it) starting my very first Marathon. If you have been to Tybee Island, you would be thinking, how in the world can you run a marathon there?? The main stretch of the island is only like 4 miles long and less than a mile wide. Well, we ran all over this island, twice, to get in the 26.2 miles.

At mile 13, end of the first loop, I was there in 2 hours 5minutes. I was happy with that time, but I was already starting to get cramps in the calves, a knee that was starting to give me troubles, and I could tell my body temperature was going down, because I was having chills.

By mile marker 22, my knee was giving me so much trouble, I was walking more than I was running, even though the temperature of the day had warmed up finally to about 65 degrees. I was determined to finish at this point, even if I had to crawl across the finish line. I had put a request out on our local Savannah Hash House Harrier web site, in which Cooter Covers was there waiting for me with a true trail arrow and a 'Beer Check' at the mile 26 marker, with a Pabst Blue Ribbon in hand with a coozie for me to drink while I was going for the finish line. I finished my first marathon, 26.2 miles in 5 hours 15 minutes. After that, I went home, mowed the yard, then went to bed and woke up the next day, 15 hours later.

Well, I really did have fun doing my first marathon. So much, that 13 days later, I had found another one in Clearwater Florida, near Tampa and much warmer, that I did my second one in 5 hours time. I was hooked.

I mentioned the Hash House Harriers, commonly known as, "A drinking club with a running problem". Since joining them, when I lived in Taiwan, then in Wichita, and now in Savannah, I have been fairly active with them. Most often a misfit and cantankerous group of people from all jogs of life, they enjoy socializing with a trail laid out by a 'hare' and some malted beverages. The hare is usually given a 'head' start of 10-20 minutes of laying a trail of marks from intersections (look all different ways for trail), to True Trail (you are going the correct way), to bad trails, back checks and more. This is a fun way to run.

Sometimes we are in town on some of the streets, other times we are deep in the 'Shiggy' as we call it, which means the marshes and woods. One of our slogans in Savannah is: "No blood, no trail". Most often we tell people to bring a dry bag, because you most often times will be crossing water, once in a while requiring you to swim. Our trails are generally only 2-3 miles, once in a while 4-6 miles, depends on the hare.

I have been travelling quite a bit with the Hashers as well. Just this past year, I have met up with groups in New Orleans, Jacksonville, Daytona, Orlando, Ft Lauderdale, Cocoa Beach, Charlotte, Cincinnati, Washington DC, Tampa and others. We had an Inter-America Hash in Costa Rica, where 1000 people from the Americas met up for a week in late May, what a party. I got about 2 hours sleep a night, before we got on busses the next morning for the trail and events for the day.

One of the events they have each time, is the Ball Buster: This year kept to its name. We drove to the west coast from San Jose and started on the beach. Of the 1000 people that attended, there must have been about 70-80 people on the Ball Buster trail. It was 90+ degrees and had to be just about as much humidity as well. We ran down the beach for about 3 miles, then inland for a few miles.

In the middle of the trail, we come upon some mountains. I was about two-thirds of the way back in the pack when we came upon the mountains. Good thing too, because everyone in front of me ended up on the wrong mountain and they were way off trail. Someone behind me, called me back, as they had found trail leading up to another mountain range. Elevation climb was more than 3000 feet, and there was no tree cover, it was totally barren other than some shrubs, so the sun was beating hard down on us. Of course, we go to the top, over and down the other side. The trail leads down a dry river bed to the ocean, where I was the second person in (because the first 2/3 of the group were on another mountain) on a 13 mile trail at 5-1/2 hours. The last person was found from the lost pack about 6 hours later. I look forward to the next big Hashing event in Cardiff, England in late July '04.

My dad retired from the bank at the end of March. I went back for his retirement, there was a nice turnout by the town and friends. He seems to be busier now, as he enjoys buying a fixer – upper house, working on it a month or two to turn it into a rental house. Mother is working at First Farmers Bank in Trust in Converse Indiana now. Chris, my brother, left Steal Parts Inc and is now working at T-N-T Auto scheduling vehicle repairs.

The summer time, brought many motorcycle rides. The first two weekends of August, for the past 5 years have been my pilgrimage to Sturgis, SD. It is just under 2000 miles from Savannah, in which I usually stop through Indiana to see my parents and Kansas City for Alpha Phi Omega staff training. It was beautiful weather again this year. If it is at least 80 degrees, it is warm enough to take my shirt off and get a very nice tan. Most of the states between here and there do not have helmet laws, which make it a much more enjoyable ride. Each year, I look forward to meeting up with friends, was very nice.

Some of these motorcycle rallies are really becoming quite the yuppie events. Everyone trailering their motorcycles. This year, I made a sign and strapped it to the back of my bike, "Silly Yuppie – Trailers are for Boats!" I got several frowns and quite a few thumbs up.

This year was also Harley Davidson's 100 year anniversary. They had their big party in Milwaukee at the end of August. Milwaukee is the headquarters and the most well known assembly plant of HD motorcycles. My boss let me off work for another week to go to Milwaukee. One of the most impressive

things about Milwaukee, was that for the 20+ miles that you entered town, there were people on every over-pass, on the side of the road and in buildings, waving and holding signs that said "Welcome Home". The town and police were extremely tolerant. People were walking around all over the place with drinks in hand, of which is not allowed in Milwaukee. People were doing burn-outs in the middle of the street on their motorcycles, roasting off the tread of their tires, stopping traffic and this all happening as the policemen were standing 10 feet behind them on the sidewalk, shaking their heads and being engulfed in smoke. They certainly let people have a good time.

September & October drew a new interest for me: Triathlons. I bought a bicycle, and did a sprint triathlon in Hilton Head, which was a 500 yd swim, 12.5 mile bike & 3.1 mile run. I don't remember my time, but enjoyed it. I signed up for a ½ Iron Man next, near Columbus Ohio. This was 1.2 mile swim, 56 mile bike and a 13 mile run. My parents were driving through the area and we met for dinner the night before and saw part of the race. I did this in 7 hours 20 minutes. 1-1/2 hours after this event I was in Cincinnati for a run with the Hashers there, and felt great.

So, obviously, next on the agenda is to do the full monty: A FULL IRON MAN, 2.4 mile swim, 112 mile bike and a 26.2 mile run. Yes, people do run a marathon after swimming for an hour and a half and riding a bicycle for 8 hours. I started taking swimming lessons, since I had not learned to swim with my head underwater. I was working my miles up on the bike and the run. It helped that I was on second shift, so that I got a lot of training in during the day.

It is amazing the training, not only physically, but also in nutrition training and understanding that these guys and gals are doing. It is becoming a science of its own. Most of these guys know, how many calories they are burning and how many calories they need to replace in their system per hour with bars and gels that they carry with them during the race. They know how much water and power drinks they need to consume. I even had sodium & salt tablets to take to minimize the cramping of over used muscles.

The location of my first attempt was Clermont FL, outside of Orlando. I say attempt, because it was just that. Still uncomfortable with swimming with my head underwater, I adverted to the side stroke, which took me 2-1/2 hours and was a hard workout for my legs. Then the bike part of the event: there were tons of hills, yes hills in Florida. Two of the hills, most everyone walked their bike up, because it was too steep. At about mile 65, my legs were cramping so severely and I could tell my sugar level was getting low with some tunnel vision that was starting in on me, I had to turn back home (which was only a few miles away at this point). I decided to quit before I hurt myself physically. So, I am looking at which one to try again next year, that is a flatter course. I am looking at probably September in Ohio to try it again.

That sums up my year so far for the most part. I am looking forward to my Christmas time travel plans now. I am leaving for Antartica on Christmas Eve. I am travelling to my 7th continent by a boat cruise. I fly from here down to Ushuaia at the tip of Argentina. The day after Christmas we board the boat and spend a couple of days crossing the Drake Passage, spend 4 days in and around Antartica. I'll be sure and post pictures on my web site of the trip. After returning from the Antartica voyage of 10 days, I am going to spend a couple of days in Buenos Aires and then 4 days in Cuzco to see the ruins of Matchu Pitchu in the mountains of Peru. I am really looking forward to seeing those ruins too.

Looks like I could be here in Savannah for a year or so more, possibly. You never know. As a contractor, I always tell people I am probably here between two weeks and two years.

Hope to hear from you, how things are in your life and what you have been up to. If you are in the area of Savannah or looking for a vacation spot, look me up, I've got room.

Tony Ploughe
103 Melrose Dr
Savannah GA 31410
912-713-3511 (Cell Ph)
ploughe5@earthlink.net
www.ploughe.com