

Iron Man

WITH MORE TRIATHLONS UNDER HIS BELT THAN ANYBODY WE KNOW, RON BOWMAN NOT ONLY RUNS FOR HIS LIFE, HE'S TRAINING OTHERS TO RUN FOR THEIRS.



A SA CHILD, RON Bowman ran everywhere: around the baseball field, up and down the basketball court, across the Shiprock Reservation in New Mexico, where he spent his early years. Running, Bowman says, gave him a sense of inner peace.

Now fifty-seven, he is still hot-footing it around. Bowman has completed a staggering 100 triathlons (including one Ironman), sixty-seven marathons, sixty-three ultra-marathons (more than the standard 26.2 miles), and four 100-mile competitions, each taking him close to twenty-four hours to complete. In 2006 alone, he ran seven marathons, five ultras, and three triathlons, in addition to training an average of twenty-two hours a week. Oh, yeah, and he also works full time for NASA as a project manager.

“My wife considers it compulsive behavior,” Bowman acknowledges with a laugh. “You have to be obsessive to train and work out for each event. But I’m not obsessive to be obsessive. I’ve run every day for twenty years, but I’m doing it for a purpose: to stay fit. It’s about having goals and being willing to work for them.”

For Bowman, a good-looking six-footer with an easy smile (probably because he has only 12 percent body fat), it’s always been about discipline. A mother’s dream, he kept his room neat, always craving order. By the time he was twelve, he knew he wanted to attend the Naval Academy, which he did, graduating in 1973. His next twenty years

were spent in the Navy, when he was deployed six times in the Pacific and the Mediterranean, including two tours in Vietnam and one in the Persian Gulf.

But he never let the fact that he was at sea interfere with his training, admitting if he doesn’t run for a few days he gets fidgety and a tad cranky. Bowman actually ran a marathon—albeit by himself—when he was onboard a helicopter carrier in the Gulf, running more than one hundred laps on the quarter-mile perimeter deck. He has also participated in Hash House Harrier runs, a

and took a desk job in the admissions office at the Naval Academy until he retired from the military. “Those last three years were my most rewarding,” says Bowman. “I was on the selection committee and got to work with kids, helping them through the hurdles to get into the Academy.”

Mentoring has become as natural a pursuit to Bowman as running. A past president and coach for the running group, The Annapolis Striders, he’s now a coach for the Annapolis Triathlon Club, formed last

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British running club phenomenon that combines fitness and beer. Bowman liked this wacky race so much he’s completed races in Bahrain, Bangkok, Singapore, and the Philippines.

In 1982, he ran his first official event—the New York Marathon—which he calls his “personal worst.” Once the race started, he set too fast a pace for himself, dressed too warmly, and didn’t hydrate enough. He did cross the finish line, but it took him more than five hours. (Eventually he shaved nearly two hours off his time.) In 1988, he completed the Marine Corp Marathon in 3:30:11—his fastest time to date.

That year, he returned to the Annapolis area with his wife,

July, as well as a board director and publisher of its newsletter. He is working with fledgling triathletes on runs, bike rides, and Bay swims in preparation for the club’s first triathlon this September.

“When you’ve run for awhile you can get jaded,” says Bowman, “but working with first-timers is a real boost for me. It’s like taking five-year-olds on their first ‘trick or treat.’ They’re kind of scared of what’s ahead, but their eyes are big with anticipation. Without being too hokey, I explain running is a metaphor for life: It has its ups and downs and gives you the best opportunity to do the best that you can for yourself.”

—GAIL BUCHALTER