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## Pushing himself to the limit

### Eagleville resident Jones prepared for grueling Death Valley marathon

By DAVID BOCLAIR  
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David Jones knows what's coming.

When he takes part next Monday in the Badwater Ultramarathon, a 135-mile endurance test which organizers call "the most demanding and extreme running race ... on the planet," he'll lose everything from his toe nails to his lunch. And he's OK with that.

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"You're going to get sick several times because the heat is so extreme," he said.

The one thing he knows he cannot afford to lose is his focus.

"This particular race is probably 40 percent physical and 60 percent mental," he said. "I've always said anyone can run about 70 miles. You can get physically in shape to run 70 miles, but after that you've got

to have your head in gear and in the right place."

Jones' friends and family have questioned his sanity on occasion.

He has been running for close to a quarter century, and for the vast majority of that time he has been competing over distances that most consider lengthy car trips. Nearly three years ago he set an American masters (age 50-54) record for 100 miles, when he finished third overall in the national championship in 15 hours, 18 minutes, 48 seconds.

Yet this race, which begins in Badwater, Calif., in the heart of Death Valley (820 feet below sea level) and ends on Mount Whitney (more than 8,300 feet above sea level), gets his attention. It includes three mountains, the last of which comprises the final 13 miles and forces the runners to climb nearly 6,000 feet. The entire journey takes more than a day to complete, and challenges the participants to press on while temperatures five feet above the black top approach 160 degrees.

"I'm excited about it; frightened by it," he said. "It scares you a little bit, but being scared of it kind of makes you train harder. I try not to think about it a whole lot until I get there because it is a little unnerving. A lot can happen out there. You can get into trouble physically.

"After you've gone about 70 or 80 miles, and you've thrown up three or four times and you're feeling really bad, there's going to be times that you want to quit. All of it is just so mental. The end of the race ... it's so steep, you look up and you think, 'Can I just put one foot in front of the other one more time?'"



DNJ photo by John A. Gillis

Eagleville resident David Jones will compete in the Badwater Ultramarathon starting Monday in Death Valley.

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Jones, 54, a Murfreesboro businessman and Eagleville resident has completed the race twice previously, most recently in 1997 when he won in a time of 29 hours, 10 minutes. Therefore, it will be no surprise to him this time when he pulls off his sneakers at the finish and several of his toe nails come off with his socks, a bi-product of the heat and pressure built up through so many steps on a solitary road through the desert.

This year he will be a part of a field of 86, nearly three times larger than his last time which includes runners from 20 states and 14 different countries (he is the only entrant from Tennessee) and who range in age from 28 to 69. The runners, more than half of whom have done it at least once before, have been divided into three groups which will start at two-hour intervals.

Even so, he will run much of the race by himself with the exception of occasional visits from his support crew, his wife Pallie and a friend who will provide food, drink and anything else he might need to make it to the finish or — more importantly — survive.

"It motivates you to make sure you have everything right for him," Pallie Jones said. "There is no negative energy in this particular run. You just can't do it. Your life stops, and everything is about him. ... You just have to stay upbeat and positive. ... You know it's awful but you don't want to interject that thought because he doesn't need to hear you say that."




To prepare, Jones recently has run as many as 160 miles in a week (twice his regular average) and as far as 48 miles during a single training run — and he has done so in a sweat suit. Following his runs he has gone into a dry sauna where he has stayed for up to two hours.

None of that, he said, compares to what he will confront once he gets there.

"It's amazing what you go through, what your body goes through and the mental aspect," he said. "You start going through a process that's pretty amazing, and it's kind of a high.

"For whatever reason, I feel more alive when I feel like I'm dying."

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