

The Greatest 100 miler

Cavin Woodward's 1975 World Record run

by Andy Milroy and Ian Champion

This is an updated versions of an article that was first published in RRC Newsletter No.153 of May 1997. The event is still one of the greatest feats in running history, unlikely ever to be replicated.

Distance running can be a fairly predictable sport; runners set off at an even pace to finish in a time close to that they have achieved before. Sometimes however a runner emerges who is touched by genius, who seeks to break the mould. Over thirty years ago, such a runner produced his greatest performance, a performance that still is regarded with awe by ultrarunners across the world, not just for the times achieved, but the sheer audacity of the run.

On October 25, 1975 (Yes, 35 years ago.), at Tipton in England, perhaps the greatest 100 mile race ever staged took place. It was a British Road Runners Club promotion held three weeks after the London to Brighton Race. All 18 competitors had been very carefully selected from a far greater number who had wanted to run, and although only three of these had previously competed in a track "100 miler," all were vastly experienced ultrarunners.

The two most experienced entrants were probably Ron Bentley, the then holder of the 24 hour track record 259.603km, although until the last moment he was a doubtful starter because of injury. Also New Zealander Siegfried Bauer, who had averaged 124km a day in running the 1,600km from Pretoria to Cape Town and 114 km a day on a 2,125 km run of the length of New Zealand. Bauer had also run 6:56:08 at the Unna 100Km in Germany in early September. For many however, the most intriguing competitor was Cavin Woodward, who had recently won the Brighton in 5:12:07, just over a minute outside the course record. He had also set a new world best for the 30 mile track event earlier in the year.

Before the race Woodward had looked at Derek Kay's splits in setting the world track best for 100 miles (11:56:56), and decided that such even paced running was not his style. The Woodward method of running a race was to go off as fast as he could for as long as he could. "No matter what pace you start at, you will slow eventually, so start at a fast pace which will give you momentum." He added, "The reason why I go out in front is because I want to run my own race. If you are in a bunch, and the front runners stop, you have to chop your stride. In front I can speed up when I feel like it, slow down when I come to a hill, judge the traffic, and do what I want to do."

However, even he had his doubts about his ability to blast a 100 mile from the front. As he said later, "My one big problem with this race was I did not know if I could cover the distance. The longest race I had run was the Brighton. I knew I could run 50 miles, so I decided to go for as fast a time as possible for 50 miles and then 'hang on' as long

as I could to see if I could cover the 100 mile course." So he devised three schedules. The first would break the world record of 11:56:56 by 20 minutes; the second would break it by five minutes; and the third would break John Tarrant's British record of 12:31.

The first schedule had ten mile [16km] splits of 55, 59, 62, 64, and 65 minutes for the first 50 miles, giving a 50 mile time of 5:05. Woodward would see how things went, and if possible try to break the world record of 5:01:01. Woodward used the carbo loading diet prior to the race. He ate kippers, grapefruit and so on for three days, then ate normally with potatoes, sandwiches and the like. During the race he was to use the electrolyte drink supplied by the organizers, in this case Accolade, the race sponsors.

A dull and misty dawn broke to reveal a scene reminiscent of some medieval tournament, with brightly coloured tents that would shelter the many handlers ready to bring aid to the present day warriors who would be fighting out on the yielding but soft cinder track. The day was never to be warmer than 12°C, not really warm enough for comfortable running.

When the race started, Woodward took off like a marathon runner, a speed that appeared to surprise the timekeepers and recorders as they sat in their drafty stand. Even those who were used to his blitz starts had figured he would treat an event four times the marathon with at least some circumspection.

The first mile was passed in 5:19, five miles[8km] in 27:49, ten miles[16km] in 56:27, 15 miles in 1:25:22, and 20 miles [32km] in 1:54:26. At this point, Woodward was running at almost ten and one half miles [17.5km] per hour, and his very fast initial pace had apparently seduced the majority of the field to respond. Fifteen of the 18 at 20miles were inside a world record schedule. (But that is not too unusual in an ultra race of that duration. Despite their most earnest pre-race pledges, male ultrarunners tend to go off too fast!)

When Woodward reached 20 miles, he was 26 minutes ahead of the even paced schedule to break the existing record. His lead over the field was 16 minutes, with Martin Thompson of Australia in second place in 2:10:37, Derek Funnell third just over three minutes back, and Tom O'Reilly less than a minute behind him. They were followed by a group two minutes later consisting of Siegfried Bauer, Fred Howell, Bill Carr, Alan Richards, and John Berry. Woodward reached the marathon point in 2:31:22.

By 30 miles [48.2km] Woodward was now two minutes and ten seconds inside his fastest schedule, so things were looking good. He had a few twinges in his right calf, and shoe trouble, but nothing major. The 50km mark was passed in under 3:01 – this is in a race that was scheduled as well over three times 50km!

By 40 miles [64.3km] he was 3:42 inside schedule, so it was set up for the next ten miles. Laps of 1:36 were planned for the next 20 laps, and 1:33 for the last 20 laps. He covered 80km in under 4:57 and reached 50 miles in 4:58:53 to be the first man to run faster than ten miles [16 km] an hour for 50 miles.

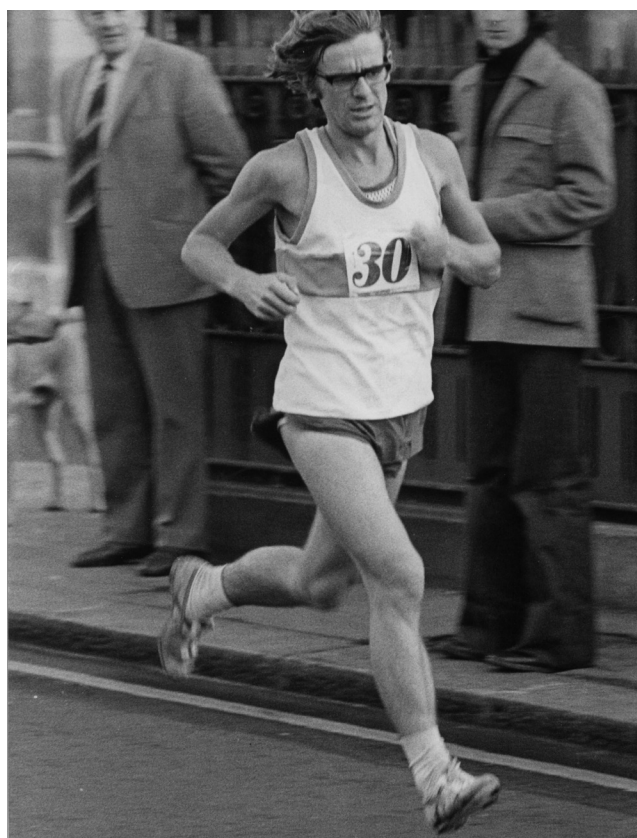
Woodward was relieved to have broken the 50 mile record. It meant that the effort had been worthwhile. Something had been achieved even if he did not succeed in breaking the 100 mile world best. He relaxed a little, knowing that he could take two hours longer to complete the second 50 miles than he had the first, and still break the world 100 mile mark. He pushed on for three more miles before he made his first toilet stop. He had been determined that he would not do that until after 50 miles. Tom O'Reilly was second through the 50 mile point with 5:32:49, having overtaken Martin Thompson (5:45:20).

Woodward's schedule for the next 50 miles was ten mile [16km] splits of 74, 75, 76, 80, and 86 minutes. In the first 6 hours Woodward had run 94.54km. He took another stop to check on a blister at 59 miles but decided that it would last out to the finish.

By 60 miles Woodward was nine minutes inside his fastest schedule, and pushed on to take the 100km world best with a time of 6:25:28. It took a massive 34 minutes off the previous best mark, which had been set in Germany only the week before. (The RRC had only just decided to start recognizing metric ultra distances, and Woodward was not really aware there was a 100 km world best.)

Thirty years later such 100 km times are still rare; only one runner has bettered it on the track. Reflecting on his run, 20 years later Woodward felt that he could easily have improved on the 6:25, remembering his various stops, but that might have had long term consequences for his final 100 mile time. In second place, Tom O'Reilly had produced the then third best track mark of all time of 7:00:18.

By 70 miles [112km] Woodward had fallen back to six



minutes inside his fastest schedule, but still covered 119 km in 8 hours. Following a further stop at 78 miles, Woodward was now only two minutes inside schedule. By the time 80 miles [130 km] was passed he was paying the price of his earlier speed and there was a marked drop in his pace.

There was just the chance that Tom O'Reilly, who was gradually reducing the distance between himself and the leader, would provide an upset that would have been unthinkable earlier in the day. However, O'Reilly himself was having problems. He had three bad spells between 65 and 80 miles, and stopped each time. On the final occasion, the tough veteran, Ron Bentley had said to him as he passed, "Get going." He did, and was not to stop again until he reached the finish.

Dr. John Brotherhood took a sample of Woodward's urine, decided that he was beginning to suffer from fatigue, and advised him that his temperature was dropping too fast and that more clothing was needed. An additional T-shirt, a pullover, and rugby shirt, plus tracksuit bottoms, started to warm him up, and eased the pins and needles that he had begun to suffer in his arms, perhaps because of his high arm action.

Despite these problems, Woodward took the world 150km best with 10:44:55, and from then began to pick up his pace, with the end in sight. From 90 miles he was running sub 5:00 minutes kilometres. From 95 miles he pushed hard, all the time coming closer to his fastest schedule. His last mile was 7:07, and he broke the world record by 18:02 with 11:38:54, bettering Derek Kay's record set in Durban, South Africa, in 1972.

Woodward had taken 6:40:01 for his second 50 miles, a differential of 1:41:08 between the two 50 mile splits. His 50 km splits were 3:01, 6:25:28, 10:44:55, with 54 minutes for his last 10.93km. Mentally he had kept going, and coped with the repetition of track running by checking his lap times and working them out.

A large crowd gathered to cheer the winner in the final stages, but now he had finished, the other competitors had to push on steadily into the darkness for another four hours or more. Tom O'Reilly finished 23 minutes 28 seconds behind for second place, (taking third place on the then world all time track rankings). In third, a further 32 minutes, 19 seconds after, came local runner Bill Carr, who had run a very even pace while other runners had had their good and bad patches. The rest of the field came in at regular intervals until Bob Jeans finished in 13th place, 12 minutes inside the tough 16 hour time limit.

The final result was:

1	Cavin	Woodward		11:38:54
2	Tom	O'Reilly		12:02:32
3	Bill	Carr		12:34:51
4	Martin	Thompson	AUS	12:42:50
5	Fred	Howell		12:49:29
6	Alan	Richards		12:59:48
7	Ron	Bentley		13:29:56
8	Siegfried	Bauer	NZL	13:31:55
9	Derek	Funnell		13:49:24
10	Bob	Meadowcroft		14:42:30
11	John	Berry		14:55:38
12	Ken	Shaw		15:35:44
13	Bob	Jeans		15:47:58

Woodward commented afterwards, “I was told before the race that the one thing I could not do was blast off with 5m 30s miles [3m 43s kms]. Of course I did, and I broke the world 50 mile record. Then I heard, ‘He will now drop out somewhere in the race, so who will break the 100 mile record?’ I went on and broke the 100 mile record as well. It was a great sense of achievement when I did do it, as I had had doubts.”

“I did not want to prove everybody had been wrong. I proved that it could be done. I hope I have altered the outlook of some runners. I hope I proved that running even paced is not the only way of winning races and breaking records. I would like to think that if a runner wants to try and run ultras fast right from the start against the wishes of his coach or trainer he could convincingly argue that that was ‘the way Cavin Woodward did it’”.

If Woodward had not run the 100 miles in his own way, it is possible that people would still be saying that the only way to run a 100 miles is to start slow, and pace yourself through the race. Woodward had no injuries following the race, and in fact represented his club in the Birmingham League races the following weekend, being one of their six scoring runners!

So how remarkable a runner was Cavin Woodward? Well, British pedestrian George Hazael also broke the 50 mile and 100 mile records in one race, but that was back in the undeveloped days of the early 6 Day Races in 1879. [Hazael’s times were 6:14:47 and 15:35:31] Woodward’s contemporaries, Mike Newton and Tom O’Reilly had the chance to see Woodward at his peak. Newton, who finished a distant second to Woodward in the 1978 Isle of Man race, described him as a genius.

O’Reilly, a good friend of his, made some interesting observations. He felt that Woodward was not a remarkable runner at the shorter distance, so his success was not due to just “talent”. [1500 meters: 4:11 (’76); 5km: 15:01 (’72); 10km: 30:47 (’72); 10miles: 50:38 (’75); 20miles: 1:46:04 (’75); and marathon: 2:19:50 (’73)].

Most of his marathon runs were tackled as part of his training for ultra races, or as a depletion run for the carboload-ing diet. It would have been interesting to see just what he could have achieved if he had focused all his attention on the marathon.

In O’Reilly’s opinion, Woodward’s success as an ultrarun-ner was due in a large part to the fact he was extremely tough mentally. Any man who can contemplate setting a 50 mile record and then “hanging on” for another 50 miles to break the 100 miles, has got to be a remarkably determined individual!

I asked both Woodward and O’Reilly recently why they thought ultrarunners in recent years had not made substan-tial improvements on Woodward’s marks. Only a handful of men have surpassed Woodward’s 100 km time, in an event that is now widely contested internationally.

Woodward’s comments were enlightening: “People were more lighthearted in those days — if you blew up there was another race next week. Runners have more to lose nowadays, there is more pressure, and more to win.” When Woodward won the Migennes 100km race in France in 6:26, a course record, he won a bread board, the same as everyone else!

O’Reilly elaborated on this theme. Admittedly, the top run-ners were fast marathon runners for that period (he himself was a 2:20 performer, and Don Ritchie 2:19), but the main reason was, that it was easier for runners to run their own race in an ultra event. There is more stress now in the top events as the runners run tactically, carefully watching their main protagonists. Twenty years ago ultrarunners ran for their own satisfaction, there were no national vests, and very little status attached to Ultrarunning. Running for your country is a great honour, but also a great responsibility.

Will we ever see the like of Cavin Woodward’s 100 mile run again, see a runner break the 50 mile or 100 km record, en route to the 100 mile or 24 hour best? Well, a male runner only has to run just over seven minutes faster at 50 miles than Woodward. 16 minutes faster at 100 km, and ten minutes faster at 100 miles to achieve that. It is within the bounds of possibility. If a runner comes fresh to the sport and is not bound by the limits of what is assumed to be achiev-able, then anything is possible. Who would have predicted in the heyday of Jean-Gilles Boussiquet that a runner would set a 24 hour world best en route to a new 48 hour mark as Kouros did at Surgères?

Comparing the fastest 100 mile races:

Distance	Kharitonov	Ritchie	Woodward	Kouros
10 miles	1:07:41	1:02:24	56:27	1:03:11
20 miles	2:15:02	2:05:29	1:54:26	2:07:43
30 miles	3:21:07	3:08:17	2:53:51	3:13:05
50km	3:28:15	3:15:02	under 3:01	
40 miles	4:28:04	4:10:57	3:56:18	4:19:31
50 miles	5:37:22	5:15:58	4:58:53	5:27:44
60 miles	6:45:38	6:24:37	6:09:45	6:38:39
100 km	7:00:22	6:39:59	6:25:28	6:54:43
70 miles	7:55:55	7:38:07	7:29:53	7:52:10
80 miles	9:08:51	8:54:45	8:50:01	9:09:07
90 miles	10:18:21	10:12:04	10:17:22	10:29:34
150km	10:41:47	10:36:42	10:44:55	
100 miles	11:28:03	11:30:51	11:38:54	11:46:37

Yiannis Kouros’ mark was set on the road.

Kharitonov is by far the most even paced effort. His 100km split was just over a half hour slower than his personal best for the distance. He had the advantage of having Ritchie’s record as a target, just as Ritchie had Woodward’s mark as a target. Ritchie broke Woodward’s record by eight minutes, Khari-tonov broke Ritchie’s by just under three minutes. Woodward took EIGHTEEN minutes off the previous record.

Here are a few pages from the rather nice printed programme for the Accolade 100-mile race in which Cavin Woodward set his 100 mile World Best.

ROAD RUNNERS CLUB and TIPTON HARRIERS
AN ASSOCIATION OF AMATEUR ROAD RUNNERS. MEMBER OF TIPTON SPORTS UNION TRUST LTD.

'ACCOLADE 100'

100 MILES TRACK RUNNING RACE (Under A.A.A. Laws)
FOR THE 'PERCY CERUTTY CUP'

at GOSPEL OAK STADIUM, WEDNESBURY OAK ROAD, TIPTON.

on SATURDAY 25th. OCTOBER 1975
STARTING AT 6.00 a.m.

OFFICIALS.

Presidents of the Meeting:

Harold B. Lee, F.R.C.S., President of the R.R.C.
George T. Price, President of Tipton Harriers
Bert Ward, President of Tipton Sports Union

Referee: C. Arthur Bourne.

Judges: J. C. Jewell (Chief), P. Goodsell, J. Gripton, K. Rickhuss,
L. W. Stevenson.

Timekeepers: R. Hutchison (Chief), J. Coomber, F. Evans, T. Reynolds
A. Roberts-Downing, P. Saw, A.A. Tomkins, J. Skidmore,

Clerk of the Course: J. Dixon.

Starter: Bert Ward.

Medical Officer: Dr. J. Brotherhood.

Announcer: D. Denton

Press Officers: B. Clifton, J. Jewell.

Leader Board: V. Gutteridge (Chief), K. Atkins, K. Hall, J. Housego,
J. Legge, T. Taylor, F. Thomason, I. Thomson.

Recorders: H. Artiss, D. Bagshaw, B. Baldard, D. Bonsor, R. Claxton,
B. Cole, R. Cressey, M. Evans, R. Farmer, R. Giles,
B. Grimmer, J. Grundy, D. Harris, S. McHugh, I. McIntosh,
D. McWhirter, J. Offley, L. Oppen, A. Parsons, A. Phillips,
F. Popplewell, A. Risley, K. Robinson, D. Rose, M. Casse,
R. Brown, H. Haden, P. Gaston, B. Joines, R. Porter.
H. Timms, G. Wood, and other members of Tipton Harriers.

Leader Board/Recorders Liason: M. Bowerman, D. Fownes, A. Gutteridge,
B. Harbach, J. Severn.

Competitors Progress Boards: W. H. Gutteridge (Chief) B. Boyce,
P. Clayton, R. Rowley, G. Roberts, D. Wayman, R. Williams

Competitors Refreshments: S. Walton, P. Boxley, R. Cleere, J. Malpass
R. White.

Stewards R. Andrews, R. Griffin, L. Walton, A. Whittle, J. Casse,
J. Halle, R. Lawton, J. Teesdale, and members of Tipton Harriers.

Race Progress Reports and Results: Mrs. E. Bourne, Mrs. R. Cleere,
Mrs. J. Goodsell, Mrs. J. Gutteridge, Mrs. M. Casse
Mrs. S. Gutteridge, Mrs. K. Robinson, Mrs. M. Jones,
Mrs. L. Gutteridge.

Cine and Photography: R. Gutteridge, J. Coomber.

Officials Refreshments: The Ladies of Tipton Harriers.

General Refreshments: The Ladies of Tipton Sports Union Club.

(13)



ROAD RUNNERS CLUB

An Association of Amateur Road Runners
Affiliated to the Amateur Athletic Association, N.C.A.A.A.,
M.C.A.A.A., S.C.A.A.A., Welsh A.A.A., S.C.A.A.A., and R.W.A.
(Founder: Ernest Neville 1883-1972)

TIPTON HARRIERS

Member of Tipton Sports Union Trust Ltd.

ACCOLADE 100

INDIVIDUAL

TRACK RUNNING RACE

for the "PERCY CERUTTY CUP"

at the GOSPEL OAK STADIUM
WEDNESBURY OAK ROAD,
TIPTON, WEST MIDLANDS

on SATURDAY, 25th OCTOBER, 1975
Starting at 6.00 a.m.

sponsored by Nicholas Products Ltd. (Slough)

BETTING STRICTLY PROHIBITED Official Programme 15p.

100 MILES TRACK RUNNING RECORDS.

World

DEREK KAY (S. AFRICA)
11hours 56mins 56secs.
Durban October 1972.

U.K. All Comers and National Record
The late JOHN TARRANT 1933-1975
(Salford Harriers)
12hours 31mins 10secs.
Walton on Thames 26th. Oct. 1969

COMPETITORS.

- 1 RON BENTLEY
 - 2 GORDON BENTLEY
 - 3 RON JEANS
 - 4 CAVIN WOODWARD
 - 5 DON TURNER
 - 6 KEN SHAW
 - 7 ~~BRIAN ADAMS~~ *Daryl McWhirter*
 - 8 FRED HOWELL
 - 9 BOB MEADOWCROFT
 - 10 DEREK FUNNELL
 - 11 BILL CARR
 - 12 MICK ORTON
 - 13 COLIN HUNT
 - 14 GERRY ARCHER
 - 15 JOHN BERRY
 - 16 MARTIN THOMPSON
 - 17 ALAN RICHARDS
 - 18 ALAN HERRET
 - 19 SIEGFRIED BAUER
 - 20 TOM O'REILLY
- Tipton Harriers
Tipton Harriers
Salisbury & District A.C.
Leamington A.C.
Epsom & Ewell Harriers
Cambridge Harriers
Winsford A.C.
Wakefield A.C.
Altrincham & District A.C.
Epsom & Ewell Harriers
Tipton Harriers
Tipton Harriers
Wolverhampton & Bilston A.C.
Hillingdon A.C.
Wakefield Harriers
Traralgon H. & A.A.C. (Australia)
Tipton Harriers
Southampton & Eastley A.C.
Scottish Harriers & A.A.C. (New Zealand)
Small Heath Harriers

Time Limit: In fairness to both Competitors and Officials the Road Runners Club Council have set a time limit of 16 hours only under exceptional circumstances will any Competitor be timed after 10 p.m.

(14)

Comparative Table showing the intermediate time schedules for Derek Kay in 1972 and John Tarrant in 1971 plus an even pace schedule to complete 100 miles in 11 hours 56 minutes 00 secs.

MILES	JOHN TARRANT	TIME	H. M. S.	DEREK KAY	TIME	H. M. S.	EVEN PACE SCHEDULE		1975 Race Leader
							100 MILES	11 hrs 56 min	
							TIME	TIME	NAME
10	1-10-18			1-10-53			1-11-36		
20	2-21-48			2-20-30			2-23-12		
30	3-33-36			3-30-18			3-34-48		
40	4-45-02			4-37-49			4-46-24		
50	5-58-14			5-48-46			5-58-00		
60	7-19-11			6-59-42			7-09-36		
70	8-31-08			8-10-28			8-21-12		
80	9-49-06			9-24-07			9-32-48		
90	11-10-12			10-39-45			10-44-24		
100	12-31-10			11-56-56			11-56-00		

Result

- 1st. *Cavin Woodward 11-38-54 W.R.*
- 2nd. *Tom O'Reilly 12-02-32*
- 3rd. *Billy Carr 12-34-51*

AWARDS:

- 1st. PERCY CERUTTY CUP - 'ACCOLADE 100' GOLD MEDAL, SASH AND LAUREL WREATH
- 2nd. 'ACCOLADE 100' SILVER MEDAL AND SASH.
- 3rd. 'ACCOLADE 100' BRONZE MEDAL AND SASH.

PRIZES TO ALL FINISHERS.

R.R.C. Certificate to All Finishers.
Commemorative Pennant to All Competitors.
TROPHY and REPLICA to First TIPTON HARRIER to finish.
Donated by J. Round (Metals & Machinery) Ltd.

(15)