

# GOING GLOBAL

*The finish line at this year's Dublin Marathon will be the start of an ultra-running adventure of a lifetime for Tony Mangan*

INTERVIEW: RONNIE BELLEW • PHOTOS: BRENDAN MORAN - SPORTSFILE.COM

**F**OR THE PAST few weeks Tony Mangan's emotions have oscillated between exhilaration and an apprehension that occasionally borders on terror.

Exhilaration because he's about to act on an ambition that he says has held him captive for two decades; apprehension because of all that could go wrong once he's embarked on a globetrotting adventure that could become the material of legend.

The finishing line at this month's Dublin Marathon will just be a beginning for Mangan, the beginning of a journey that, if all goes to plan, will come full circle at the Dublin Marathon

starting line on 28 October 2013. By then he hopes to have circumnavigated the globe, travelling 43,000kms east to west via Canada, the US, Mexico, down through South America, on to New Zealand and the Australian outback, and from there back through South East Asia and the interior of China, Kazakhstan and Russia before bearing east on the homeward stretch across Europe to Ireland.

It's a journey without precedent in several respects. Only one man, Jesper Olsen from Denmark, has completed an authenticated world run, travelling west to east over a distance of 26,000kms in 22 months, finishing in October

2005. In the 1980s an American journalist, Steven Newman, completed a world walk of 25,000kms west to east in four years. A Canadian adventurer, Jean Beliveau, is currently on the 10th year of an 11-year global walk, again west to east, that will clock in at approximately 80,000kms.

In terms of distance, duration and direction, no one has ever attempted what Mangan is about to undertake. So why is a 53-year-old – albeit one who holds two world 48-hour running records – leaving his family, friends, career and homeland behind to take to the road with nothing more than a 40kg buggy packed with ➔

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Tony Mangan will be relying on a Chariot Carrier to transport all the bare necessities during his World Jog adventure. The combined weight of the Carrier along with camping gear, clothing and other essentials will be more than 40kgs



Tony is aiming to run/jog/walk 43,000 kms around the globe, travelling east to west, starting in Dublin on October 25. He aims to finish his round the world trip by running the Dublin Marathon on October 28 in 2013

the bare necessities and a heart load of hope.

The simple answer, he says, is that he feels he has no choice. "The World Jog is not something that was thought up overnight over a few pints. It's an idea that's been incubating in my mind for the last 20 years and it's grown and grown to be an absolute monster. I feel like I am a prisoner of this idea and ambition.

"I remember reading a book years ago, The Longest Walk by George Meagan, about his seven-year walk through the Americas. On the last page he had a line: '...since the day I got this idea I have been a prisoner of my dream'. That line really jumped out at me. For the last 20 years the idea of a world walk, jog, run, whatever, has never been a few hours from my waking mind."

Being made redundant from his construction job last July made up Mangan's mind that it was now or never for his global journey. "Twelve years ago I was about to do it, a world walk. I even had the t-shirts printed but I backed out of the idea in the end. I have realised now that I am not going to have many more years to do this. My competitive career as an ultra runner is over – I will never attain in racing what I had before – and I always said I would do this when I'm older."

Since July, he has been busy burning bridges. He's spent ten weeks refurbishing his house in Crumlin. It's being rented out to help cover his mortgage repayments while he's away and when he's not painting and decorating, he's researching his route, thinking about visas, assembling his travel equipment, and updating

his web site. He's secured some sponsorship from the North Pole Marathon organisers and Chariot Carriers, the manufacturers of the buggy he will be pushing around the world. The rest of the estimated €20,000 cost of the World Jog will come from his redundancy cheque and his savings.

He was so immersed in DIY and planning over the summer he neglected his physical training. "There was a two month period up to six weeks ago when I wasn't training at all I was so busy, but I haven't missed a day for the last five weeks. At the start of resuming my training I went out for a half hour run and I had to walk a lot of it. I was totally out of shape even though I was topping out at 200kms per week when I was at my peak."

The day after the Dublin Marathon, he starts a 10-day, 360km run to Dunquin, the most westerly point in Ireland. He flies to New York on November 6 and from there will catch a flight to Newfoundland. On November 8 he will begin his journey in earnest from Cape Spear, the most easterly point in North America.

His trip is being billed as '1,000 marathons in 1,000 days', but he's not committing himself to running the classic distance day in, day out for three years. "What I would aspire to is roughly a marathon per day, but I am not saying that's set in stone. You don't know how the body is going to react to something like this. Some days I could cover longer distances, other days shorter. And if I feel like walking I will walk or jog. It's not going

to be pure running. Part of my mission statement is that I will cover the 43,000kms on foot and that works out roughly at a marathon a day for 1,000 days. I am optimistic that it will work out. I will run and if I can't run I will walk and if I can't walk I will crawl."

He will be taking an equally pragmatic approach to the logistics of life on the road. For much of the journey he expects to camp out and do his own cooking. Porridge and rice will be the staples along with energy drinks and supplements. When Jesper Olsen was passing through Ireland in 2005 on his world run, Mangan acted as his crewman and he has become firm friends with the Dane so he's well versed on the day-to-day challenges involved.

He's also confident that his global network of ultra-running contacts and friends, as well as the publicity that he expects his journey to generate, will lead to plenty of offers of a hot meal and a roof for the night.

Mangan believes that he will be physically ready for the challenge, but he admits the clouds of doubt are never too far away. "Every morning I wake up and see that countdown clock on the website ([www.theworldjog.com](http://www.theworldjog.com)) and I say to myself: 'Oh my God, there's no getting out of it this time. I'm terrified. I think I may experience a very strange emotion when I cross the finish line in the Dublin Marathon. I don't think anyone is ever terrified after running a marathon – it's usually elation, disappointment, relief but not terror.

"Every morning when I wake up in my nice comfortable bed I think oh God in two months time I could be camping behind a ditch in Newfoundland, perhaps the tent has collapsed with the weight of the snow – will a snow plough run over me?!"

"I think it's natural though to have doubts and fears. People say to me: 'What happens if this happens Tony, what happens if that happens?' The only answer I have is what happens if this, that and the other scenario don't happen? Then I will have the adventure of a lifetime."

**MANGAN IS NO** stranger to adventure. Long before he became a runner, he set off around the world on a bicycle. The man from the Liberties in Dublin was 21 when he packed in his job in August, 1978 and headed on a five-speed Raleigh Corsa for Rosslare, inspired by Dervla Murphy's classic travel book, *Full Tilt: Ireland to India with a Bicycle*.

He didn't even know how to fix a puncture, but that wasn't going to stop him. He was a quick learner in the ways of travel on the road and became physically hardened as he crossed Europe, but little did he know what lay ahead of him on the far side of the Bosphorus.

After some scary scrapes with wild dogs in Turkey, he pedalled on into Iran just as the Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamist revolution against the Shah was about to unfold. By the time he reached Teheran, the Shah had been overthrown

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and communications with the west were in disarray.

With the lifeline of wired money from home cut off, Mangan survived by selling his blood plasma, twice, for \$15 each time. Along with a couple of other stranded western backpackers, he survived for six weeks by cooking omlettes over a kerosene stove. Despite the hardship, he has fond memories of Iran and describes the Iranians as "the most generous people in the world."

When the borders re-opened, he cycled into Afghanistan, again encountering great hospitality. He experienced Afghanistan at its best, when it still retained the ancient and open character of a country that was once a pivotal crossroads between east and west.

"I was there six months before the Russians invaded and at that stage it was super exotic. I never had any nervous moments even though I was cycling through serious mountains in February, through cold and desolated mountain areas. I remember once coming into a village needing water and some food and there was a mud hut and I knocked on the door. These bearded tribal guys came out and it was total Islamic hospitality even though there was a lot of charades to get over the language barrier."

The battered Raleigh Corsa got him as far as South Korea where he worked for two weeks in Seoul teaching conversational English. He bought a new bike, 10-speed, with the windfall from that job and flew to Honolulu for ten days ➡



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(Left) Mangan pictured with a plaque for winning the 24-hour race in the 2001 Texas Ultracentric 24/48-hour even

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on the beach and a bad case of sunburn before travelling on to North America for the final leg of his journey. He cycled up along the west coast via Los Angeles, San Francisco and Portland before swinging north for Canada and southwards again, taking in Boston and New York.

In all he spent 15 months on the road before returning home to Dublin before Christmas 1979. His wanderlust temporarily sated, he settled into a new job as a technician on mainframe computers at a depot in Finglas. When he was laid off from that job in 1983 he used the redundancy money to fund a cycling and backpacking trip through South America. More trips to places as far apart as Iceland and Egypt followed, but it was after discovering running in 1986 that his life really forked off in a whole new direction.

**APART FROM PLAYING** some football, Mangan had never taken sport seriously, but within a few weeks of taking up running he was hooked. After joining Metro St Brigid's on the prompting of his then girlfriend, he ran his first Dublin Marathon (1986) in 3:09 on the back of five weeks training. He pared his marathon PB down to 2:38, but it was only on emigrating to Colorado in 1994 that he discovered ultra-running and realised that the longer the distance was, the more competitive he became.

Mangan was working on oil rigs and, later on, construction sites when he started racing in 50k and 50 mile mountain trail races in Colorado. It's a part of America with a vibrant ultra-running culture and home to events like the 72-hour Across The Years trail run and the Leadville Trail 100, the race that featured as one of the centrepieces of Chris MacDougall's barefoot running bestseller *Born To Run*.

In 2002, Mangan sustained a serious plantar fasciitis injury and returned home for treatment rather than trying his luck in the prohibitively expensive American medical system. With the construction boom in full swing, he decided to stay in Dublin and began to set his sights on Irish, European and World ultra-running records.

He clocked world best times for 24-hour and 48-hour treadmill running at the 2003 Dublin

Marathon Expo, and he reached an ultra-running pinnacle four years later when breaking the world indoor 48-hour running record in the Czech city Brno. He clocked 426.179km in that race, running for 47 hours and walking just 750m for a record that still stands. Earlier this year, a committee of ultra-running historians announced that Mangan's performance in Brno was also the first time anyone had ever ran 200kms for two consecutive days – his splits coming in at 223km and 203km

Eight weeks after Brno, Mangan defied all the conventional ultra-running wisdom by taking on the invitation-only 48-hour race in Surgeres in France, where he finished second, running 401km. In 2008, he regained his 48-hour treadmill running record by running 405km at the Longford Marathon Expo.

Mangan honed his mental fortitude for ultra-running by running back-to-back marathons and distance races, not to mention running in and out of work from the building sites. "One of my techniques when I started was that I used to run back-to-back marathons. I would run a marathon on Saturday and then run another marathon or a 50k run on Sunday when I was already tired starting. My thinking was that I was simulating tiredness and developing coping strategies for the ultra races.

"When I was working on construction – I was doing very heavy physical work that involved a lot of climbing and lifting and sometimes demolition – I almost always ran into work wherever I was. I was working for an agency so it could have been the city centre or Dun Laoghaire or even as far out as Greystones. I would start running immediately from the site gate in the evening. It was the last thing you wanted to do but it was good training. Sometimes it was tempting to stop and walk for a few minutes, but then you get going and that experience stood to me in races. What I found in some of my races was that if I was going through a bad patch I would say to myself to just keep going for 10 or 15 minutes and then I would get going again."

The world of the 24-hour and 48-hour ultra-runner is a mystery to most mortals. How do they do it, why do they do it, what happens to

the mind during the never-ending circuit of laps in competitive running on the track and indoors, and hour after hour on the treadmill?

Apart from relishing the distance and challenge, Mangan says his motivation was going for records. "I loved trying to break records, be they Irish, European or the possibility of world, I just had that competitive instinct. I was never really interested in going for a regular 50k trail run. I prefer set time races, i.e. 24 or 48 hours, as they are standardised, be it a track or road loop. It is just you against the clock."

"The most important thing is that the clock never stops. You can stop and walk, but in a 24-hour race at elite world championship level you won't get away with resting. Nobody sleeps. The last two serious 24-hour races I ran, I averaged about six minutes stoppage time in total in each race between toilet breaks, eating and changing clothes.

"The 48-hour races are a different ball-game," he says. "Only a couple of runners in the world are capable of going the whole way without a break. The second night of a 48-hour race goes on forever. You can go a bit gaga, there's a constant battle going on between the body and the mind. The mind always has to win because the body rebels and tries to close down. A runner can experience a haziness during the second night of a 48-hour race, it can be very tough but as the sun comes up you find renewed energy and the sniff of the finish line can get you through. When you finish one of those races, it's like one long hangover for a week afterwards. But it's worth it because when you are running those races a lot of positive thoughts pass through your mind. You do get incredible highs. You don't really get similar highs in normal life."

**NORMAL LIFE FOR** Mangan in recent years has mainly consisted of long days working as a snagger on building sites and running. There's been the occasional trip abroad and he's also a committed concert-goer. He's been to

(Above) The special 4824 race number he was given for he 2003 Dublin Marathon in honour of his world record achievements in treadmill running; checking out the official confirmation of his treadmill records in the Guinness Book of Records

TOMAS GREALLY - SPORTSFILE.COM



18 gigs so far this year alone, including U2 in Turin, Guns & Roses in the O2, and Bob Dylan in Limerick. He's taking a break from the World Jog countdown to fly to Rome on October 8 to see U2 again.

He's still single and as he prepares for the World Jog and the lonesome highways of Canada and America and beyond, does he ever wonder how his life might have turned out if he hadn't made that fateful trip up to Metro St Brigid's in 1987 and discovered running?

"I would probably have got married and settled down," he says. "There were a couple of girls I was with who ran a mile once they realised I was serious about running around the world."

He fell in love four years ago with an Italian woman he met at the European 24-hour Championships in Verona and says he would have given it all up to get back with her. "She was the love of my life. I was going over for weekends and I was close to packing my bags and going over there to live. I think my ambition to do this trip was one of the reasons it didn't work out... I will never know. I often wonder will I ever settle down, maybe I will when this is over."

For now, though, there's no time for regrets or looking back. There's a sense that the World Jog is a journey he has to at least attempt before his restless spirit will be done with roaming.

"A lot of people think this trip is part of some midlife crisis I am going through, but no, definitely not," he says. "The way I look at it is I am past my best in competitive running so it's time to hang up the competitive shoes and go out there and live my dream." ■

Mangan in action for his club Metro St Brigid's in the 2008 AXA Raheny 5-Mile

TONY'S CHARITY OF CHOICE FOR THE WORLD JOG IS MENTAL HEALTH CHARITY AWARE. THE AWARE HELPLINE CAN BE CONTACTED ON 1890 30 330

FACT FILE

Tony Mangan

**Born:** Dublin, 20 April, 1957  
**Height:** 178 cm  
**Weight:** 69kgs

**Main honours:**

World Indoor 48-Hour Record (426.178km) Brno, Czech Republic, March 2007. World 48-Hour Treadmill Running Record (405km) Longford, August 2008. Winner 'Across The Years' 72-Hour Trail Race (450km) Arizona, January 2008. Second place Surgeres Invitation-Only 48-Hour Race (considered unofficial world championship) 401.11km, France, May 2007. Six international appearances for Ireland

**Irish records:**

24-Hour Indoors (223km), 48-Hour Road (340km), 48-Hour Track (401.115km), 72-Hour Road (450km), 24-Hour Treadmill (222km)

**Other selected personal bests:**

10km Road 33.01 (Phoenix Park, Dublin 1991)  
Half Marathon 75:30 (Wales 1989)  
20 Miles 1:58 (Clonliffe 20-Miler 1990)  
Marathon 2:38:29 (Finglas Marathon 1990)  
50km 3:55 (Colorado Springs 1995)  
50 miles 7:30 (Colorado Springs 1995)  
100km 8:44 (Celtic Plate, Phoenix Park 2004)  
100 Miles 16:15 (World Championships, Taipei, Taiwan 2006)  
24-Hour Track 223km (European Championships, Verona, Italy 2006)  
24-Hour Road 228.299km, former Irish record. (World Championships, Taipei, Taiwan 20 06)  
24-Hour Indoors 223km (Brno, Czech Rep 2007)  
24-Hour Treadmill 222km, former world and current Irish record. (Dublin Marathon Expo, RDS, 2003)  
48-Hour Track 401.115km Current Irish record. (Surgeres, France, 2007)

**Training regime:**

"I run every day when I am in full flight. I don't usually take a rest day; instead I take them as circumstances dictate i.e. a storm outside, an emergency, unexpected event etc.

When I was working in construction I generally ran to/from work. In the mornings if it was more than 9 or 10km from the house to work, I usually ran about 4 or 5km to get transport, but I almost always ran the entire distance home. I tried to get in a run of about 25km midweek and a couple of back-to-back long runs at the weekend, usually 32/35km to 50km.

Having said that, I listened to my body and if my body was not up to it I often stopped on the way home, went into a cafe and read a paper. There are times to push yourself when you are feeling bad and there are times to stop. I didn't get it right all the time in training but I felt even if I hit say 80% of what I wanted I was on the right track.

At my peak I was running 200-220km week. A lot of the running in and out of work was just plodding. I relied on running with my club MSB on Sunday mornings for the faster sessions. If possible and my finishing time with the site allowed it I often ran from the site to meet the club for the Thursday run and then ran the 3km home."