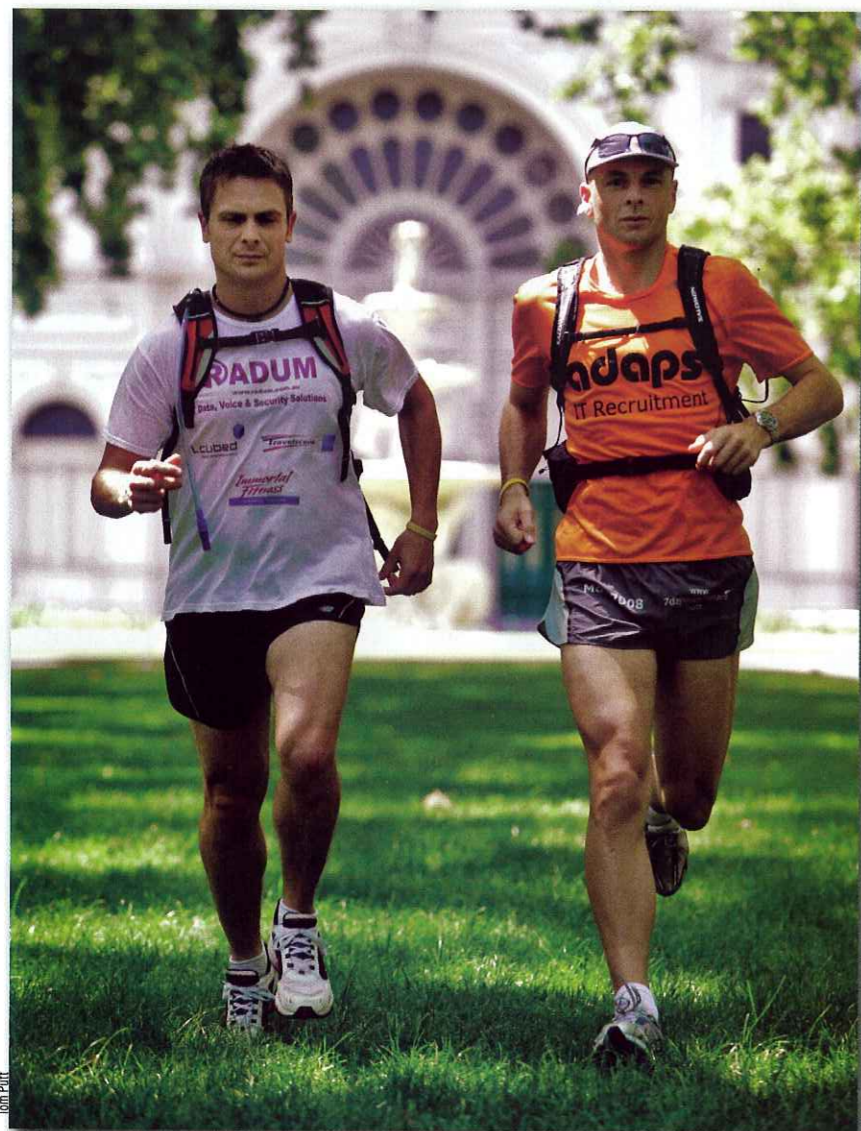


WARM UPS

ON THE RUN	18
HUMAN RACE	22
TRAINING	24
MIND & BODY	29
HEALTH	32
FUEL	34

“(ST VINCENT’S SOCIAL WORKERS) REALLY HELPED US, ESPECIALLY GET TO THE POINT WHERE WE WERE ABLE TO TALK TO EMMA, AT THE AGE OF SIX, AND EXPLAIN HER MUM HAD CANCER.”

— PAUL GLADWELL, who lost his wife to cancer 10 years ago, is raising money for the oncology facility at St Vincent’s in Melbourne by running the Marathon de Sable. Page 22.



Tom Pitt

THE MEMORY OF LOVED ONES LOST TO CANCER HAS INSPIRED TWO MELBOURNE MEN TO TAKE ON THE GRUELLING MARATHON DE SABLES ACROSS THE SAHARA DESERT. CLAIRE BURKE EXPLAINS.

Men With a Cause

IT'S GENERALLY ACCEPTED THE MARATHON DE SABLES, OR MARATHON OF THE SANDS, across the Sahara desert in Morocco, is an event reserved for the particularly bold, audacious and slightly insane. Considered the toughest footrace on earth, the exact course is unknown until two days before the event, but competitors can expect to transverse approximately 240 kilometres of hilly sand dunes, dried up river beds, and rocky mountain terrain in searing 40 degree heat. Supplied with just a tent and daily rations of nine litres of water, all essential items – including an anti-venom snake bite kit – are crammed into

a backpack and carried for the six stage race which takes around seven days. Each day competitors make their way to a check point to refuel and rest, as the temperature dips to around five degrees at night.

TWO BLOKES WITH A CAUSE

Martin Edwards, 36, and Paul Gladwell, 41, workmates from Melbourne's St Vincent's hospital training for the Marathon de Sables, happily admit their interest in exploring the somewhat obscure make them good candidates for such an exposing event. "It's a little bit nutty," concedes Martin, who has twice run South Africa's 90 kilometre Comrades race.

Paul, the veteran of three Ironman races and a handful of marathons, had been attracted to running the Marathon de Sables since reading about a former British bomb disposal expert who lost both his legs in a removal operation gone wrong and later completed the epic race on prosthetic limbs. "An amazing quote from him was 'I had one thing over everybody else – getting sand in my shoes wasn't a problem.' I just thought 'I have to do this race one day'," he says.

Armed with the appropriate amount of eccentricity and with the idea planted, the catalyst for actually committing to the race came from the desire to raise money for the social services team within the new oncology unit at St Vincent's. It's a cause close to Paul's heart, as the social workers proved invaluable when his wife, Andrea, was treated at the hospital before losing her battle with cancer 10 years ago. She was 32.

GUIDING LIGHT

When Paul's wife, Andrea, was diagnosed with breast cancer, the couple, while understandably shocked, felt confident they would beat it. They were young, fit, and healthy, with surely too much energy to be overcome by cancer. And they were just starting their family, they had a pre-school daughter, it didn't seem right that they wouldn't pull through this. But Andrea's cancer was particularly aggressive and she didn't respond to the treatment usually effective in her type of cancer. The young family were forced to contemplate that Andrea's

cancer diagnosis may not have a happy ending. And it was coming to terms with this that Paul found guidance from the social work team at St Vincent's invaluable. Paul's instinct was to protect his family from the devastation they faced, and especially shield his daughter Emma from the confronting and frightening possibility that her mother may not survive. Dr Carrie Lethborg, an internationally renowned social worker, became instrumental in helping Paul understand the best thing he could do for Emma was tell her what was happening.

"Carrie really helped us, especially in getting to the point where we were able to talk to Emma, at the age of six, and tell her that her mum had cancer.

"Carrie described me as the father lion figure wanting to protect my pride, my family. She ended up convincing me that by not telling Emma, delaying telling her, can lead to resentment. There are very gentle ways of treating something so huge in a little person's language."

It was a confusing, emotional and sensitive time, but raising his daughter as a single parent and watching her grow into a young lady, Paul knows he made the right choice. "The way we were guided in dealing with the subject before and after Andrea passed away, has worked incredibly well," says Paul.

"Emma would back me up on that. There's none of that underlying resentment or sadness because everything was always talked about. I've got a relationship with her that I wouldn't have if things had been different and that's an incredibly positive thing.

"Emma has grown up to be an amazing young woman," he says, brimming with pride. "She's just finished Year 12 and topped her class in three out of five subjects."

THE RETREAT

The care, understanding and counsel provided by the social work team during Andrea's battle with cancer is so appreciated by Paul that after her death he began raising money for a space within St Vincent's for cancer patients and their families. Known as The Retreat, Paul's space is a holistic care centre which enables patients

to escape the 'clinical environment' of the hospital; switch off mentally; access positive living information; and talk to social workers privately.

Now, with the oncology unit moving, Paul is determined to ensure a new Retreat is built.

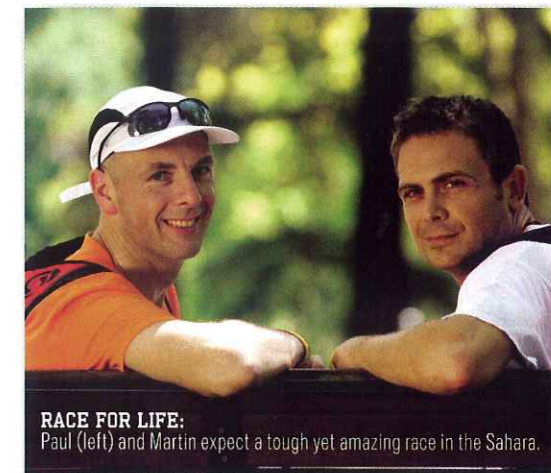
Martin and Paul have already raised \$10,000, but hope to raise around \$50,000 which will allow The Retreat to be fitted out to be one of the best social work facilities for cancer patients in Australia. "We could kit it out with toys for kids, research material, and even put some money towards research into helping patients deal with a cancer diagnosis," says Paul. "There's a heavy emphasis on the clinical side of cancer with drugs and treatments. But that psycho social part of the diagnosis and how people deal with it mentally is not something that gets a lot of press."

THE LONG ARM OF CANCER

Martin also understands the sadness of watching a loved one lose their fight with cancer. His father passed away in 2006 following a short battle with pancreatic cancer. He'd overcome it once before, in 2000, but when it returned it was so aggressive little could be done. With treatment futile, he returned home and died peacefully a short time later. "I could really draw parallels with Paul's story in the way our family was treated while my dad was sick," explains Martin. "There was great care and understanding extended to us, as well as the treatment my dad got, so when The Retreat came up as something to raise money for, it seemed a natural thing to do."

NOT FOR THE FEINT HEARTED

Running 240 kilometres through the desert in scorching heat is not something that's easy to prepare for, yet Martin and Paul have developed creative ways to simulate the conditions they may face during the Marathon de Sables. They've cut all hint of speedwork from their training, instead focussing on long slow running, armed



RACE FOR LIFE: Paul (left) and Martin expect a tough yet amazing race in the Sahara.

with backpacks filled with the equipment they'll be carrying during the race. Their running is focussed on sand or rocky surfaces, teaching their legs to adapt to uneven terrain. To acclimatise to the extreme heat they've been training whenever possible in the Little Desert National Park, and routinely add layers of clothing when they run. They've built their mileage to around 180 kilometres per week.

The first three stages of the race consist of 35 kilometres each, the fourth is an epic 85 kilometres, then a marathon for the fifth stage, capped off with a 20 kilometre run home. "Our plan is to stick together, keep our pace conservative, and conserve as much energy as possible for the first three days, because for the fourth you're out there for 48 hours," explains Paul. "Some of the sand dunes and mountains are almost 45 degree gradients. There are pictures of people pushing each other to get over them. The race is a lot about making sure you're eating and drinking enough to finish in the best shape possible, ready for the next stage."

While their preparation has been necessarily meticulous, and they expect the race to throw up the most testing conditions they'll ever likely face, both could barely contain their enthusiasm about the adventure. "It's going to be insane, but it's going to be an amazing and very exciting week," says Martin.

TO DONATE

Visit: www.7daysinthesahara.com 