



PROFILE

# Marathon man

The world's fastest septuagenarian just gets faster

**NAME:** Ed Whitlock

**STARTING LINE:** Milton, Ontario

**AGE:** 74

**SPORT:** Marathon

**SPEED READINGS:** At the Toronto Waterfront Marathon in September, Whitlock smashed his own 2003 world record for marathoners over 70. His time? 2:54:48. Age-adjusted, that means he ran the equivalent of a 2:06:52 race. To put that in context, the current world record is 2:04:55. The Canadian marathon record, set by Jerome Drayton in 1975, stands at 2:10:08.

**FALSE STARTS:** At 17, Whitlock clocked a 4:31.4 mile in England and was the 1951 three-mile champ at London University. In 1952 he emigrated to Sudbury and stopped running—for 20 years. Sudbury, back then, was a veritable runner's purgatory. "There were no tracks, no clubs. It was a non-event up there. So I let it all slide away." His competitive comeback

came in 1979 with the 1,500-metre world championship title for the 45-49 age category. An injury and work pressures kept him from the circuit in his 50s. "That's all an excuse, really, I could have done it if I was organized."

**DAILY GRIND:** Most competitive distance runners throw speed training into the weekly mix. Not Whitlock. He doesn't even cross-train. Nor does he keep exact records of his routine, but figures he averages 160 kilometres a week. In addition to one or two marathons, he competes in about 30 shorter races a year.

**THE QUICK AND THE DEAD:** Whitlock trains in a cemetery, not because of his fine sense of irony, but due to a healthy fear of traffic. "Cars tend to aim for you in this town," he insists. He was clipped once (luckily it was only a Volkswagen Beetle moving at a crawl) but he's been road-wary ever since. Public scrutiny also makes Whitlock a tad uncomfortable. "I have an unhealthy fear of not looking good and disgracing myself."

**BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS:** Whitlock swears by tea and toast. He's not keen on special diets, or even supplements. "I eat what's put in front of me," he says. What's invariably put in front of him, in addition to the ubiquitous tea, is a lunch of soup and bread and a dinner that is usually light on meat. "We don't go in for fast food, not that I have a vendetta against it or anything." Whitlock, at 5'7", weighs in at 116 pounds.

**JUST DOING IT:** There is no runner's high for Whitlock, no endorphin payoff for all that hard slogging. The one recurring thought that plagues him mile after mile is this: "When is it going to end?" So what, exactly, does Whitlock get out of it? "Not much, really. I'm a creature of habit."

**DOWN THE ROAD:** Whitlock recently accepted an invitation to the Rotterdam Marathon in April, billed as one of the world's fastest. He should fit right in.

—Kate Barker