

On Your Own Time



WHO RALPH JACOBSON

DAY JOB/Industry Title Global Consumer Products Industry Marketing Executive, IBM

HOBBY Extremely masochistic bicycle racing

FEATURED HERE Furnace Creek 508™, a.k.a., "The toughest 48 hours in sport"



HAS THE HEAT GONE TO THIS MAN'S HEAD?

Ralph Jacobson rides a bicycle 508 miles through Death Valley — in just 48 hours. And he wants to do it AGAIN!

■ **THROWING UP, PASSING OUT, WASHING OUT — ALL ARE HALLMARKS OF THE NOTORIOUS FURNACE CREEK "508,"** the infamous, eponymous-miles-long California bicycle race from Valencia through Death Valley and the Mojave Desert to Twentynine Palms. Held since 1983, it is the world's premier ultramarathon bike race — "The toughest 48 hours in sport."

Solo, two-person relay, and four-person relay divisions are offered. Intended to assure the ultimate endurance test, the race rules forbid drafting and pack riding in all divisions. There is a 48-hour time limit for the solo division and a 46-hour time limit for the relay team division.

WHY WOULD ANYONE — LET ALONE A SEEMINGLY RATIONAL, INTELLIGENT, 46-YEAR-OLD IBM EXECUTIVE — DO IT? "I don't know, except for some reason I thought it would be cool," says Ralph, who lives in Santa Clarita, CA, near the start of the race, and had never trained seriously, let alone in desert terrain.

So, he decided to sign up for the 24th Anniversary, 33rd 508, slated for October 6-8, 2007. Knowing entries would be strictly limited — apparently, there is no shortage of people willing to abuse their bodies to the max — Ralph started monitoring the 508 website in March. When 508 registration opened in May, he immediately entered.

Instead of being assigned numbers, each rider or team in the race is identified by an animal totem. Why? In their state of extreme exhaustion and sleep deprivation, the racers often can't remember their number when they have to call it out as they ride by a time station in the middle of the night. "My wife, Jackie, picked the totem, 'Rottweiler,'" says Ralph. "We have two. And they're tough."

ASSEMBLING A CREW — THREE PEOPLE WILLING TO FOREGO SLEEP FOR TWO DAYS to ride behind him in a support vehicle with water and food — was a challenge in itself. "My eighteen-year-old son, Steven, reluctantly 'volunteered' to spend

the long weekend following me," Ralph says. "But I was running out of luck getting any more people to sign up. This was a truly selfless gesture for any person to do, and truly selfish of me to even ask." After running into multiple dead ends, happily Ralph received offers from two 508 aficionados, Bruce Moore and David Hunter-Inman, to back him up.

ON RACE DAY, THE WEATHER, A DECISIVE FACTOR, COOPERATED. "It very easily could have been blistering hot with Santa Ana wind," Ralph says. "I was not afraid of hot or cold — only wind. They have had 508 races in the past where the wind never let up. That may have stopped me."

Fortunately, on both race days the weather was as perfect as one could hope for — "Very little head wind, even some good tail winds at times," Ralph says. "Not bad at all."

No? "Through the long days and long nights, I was always looking down and just pumping the crank: *Geez! Will this ever end?*" Ralph laughs. Eventually, it did. *He actually did finish.*

HOW DID RALPH JACOBSON MANAGE THIS INCREDIBLE FEAT?

"In the end, I realized this race is 98 percent mental. Just think about what you'll do and say 'at' the finish — not 'if you'll finish.'" *In other words, just like winning in CPG.* ■





FEEL HIS PAIN ... Picture yourself riding a bicycle continuously — for 508 miles. That's like riding from San Diego to San Francisco — but across the hot, dry desert — uphill, with 35,000 feet of elevation (more than Mount Everest is high) to gain.



... LOOK FOR HIM IN THE NEXT '508': "I cannot stop thinking about this. I want everyone to take up bike riding. I cannot understand why they wouldn't. I am thankful I discovered this race. It has changed my life. It has changed my relationship with my son, Steven. I have made two new friends from total strangers, David and Bruce, who dedicated their time to my selfish, personal challenge. All for the simple love of the sport. I think I'll do this again. The 508 has a Hall of Fame for Five-Time Finishers. I'll shoot for 2010 to be inducted. Let's roll!" — Ralph Jacobson