

# A Classic Confrontation Over 1000 Miles

by Malcolm Campbell

The Sri Chinmoy 1000 Mile road race held in New York earlier this year had almost everything, and the high level performances of the five finishers, and the ultra-high level of Stu Mittleman's new world record, have drawn considerable attention from runners throughout the world. British multi-day specialist Colin Dixon had intended to run in New York, but instead decided to organize a similar event in his home city of Hull to raise money for the local Multiple Sclerosis Society. Comparisons between the two events are inevitable, and in terms of achieved times the vote obviously goes to New York. But in terms of a tactical, man-to-man confrontation, the Hull race was the outright winner; we saw a return to racing as it must have been over a hundred years ago and a duel between two competitors that rivals anything seen on the roads this century.

Dixon was anxious that as much money as possible should go to the M. S. Society and as a result the race was run under spartan, but adequate, conditions. The route was on sidewalks around the Sutton Fields Industrial Estate on a circuit that measured exactly 4/5 of a mile. On each circuit the runners would need to step down and up eleven times to pass the various entrances to business premises; moreover, the very uneven surface of the sidewalk sloped downward toward the road. A trailer was provided for every runner and a small allowance was given for the purchase of food. There was a drinks table, but for feeding you were strictly dependent upon the services of your personal handler. If you brought no handler, you had to make your own arrangements. There were no medical personnel available, and you either popped your own blisters or had a handler capable of doing so. Not surprisingly, the small field of five runners consisted of athletes with a good history of survival in multi-day events. Their talents would be tested to the utmost in this one.

The entrants were Dan Coffey, who had run so well in New York, and ranked number two in Great Britain; Tony Rafferty, an Irish-Australian with runs of crucifying length to his credit, and who had completed a 1,000-mile run in Australia only a few weeks earlier; myself, who given the time will run anyone into the ground; Colin Dixon, the probable favorite who was the only entrant not to have completed a 1,000-mile event, but who had impressive credentials over six days; and John "Paddy"

Dowling, a walker who, a few years ago, had completed 1,000 miles well under 16 days in most difficult circumstances. The time limit for the race was 15 days, which was a bit harsh but within the capabilities of us all.

At twelve noon on Saturday, July 26, we started. We found the surface a little strange at first, and at the end of each lap we were obliged to reverse direction in front of the lap scorers' table; this was to prove an added irritation as the race progressed.

Originally I had hoped to average 75 miles a day for the first half of the race but, as my friend Roger Lawton pointed out with good Yorkshire logic, if I could not do this in a six-day race I was unlikely to do it now. I settled for a more realistic target.

After the first 24 hours a surprising John Dowling was the race leader with 100 miles; Dixon was ten miles behind him and a few laps ahead of Rafferty. Coffey had achieved 85 miles but would trouble the lap scorers no further; he was obliged to retire with a groin strain. The "Clockwork Mouse" had completed three 24-hour races in the five weeks leading up to this race, and had probably done a little too much without sufficient recovery time. I completed 77 miles and was thankful the first 24 hours had finished.

At this point our handlers were becoming organised and it became apparent that Rafferty was under a considerable disadvantage. He had no handler and no specific person had been allocated to him. As the race progressed John Dowling's charming wife Dorothy assumed responsibility for Rafferty's well-being; as she was her husband's sole handler, she had undertaken a considerable task.

Dixon had to work hard to close the gap to Dowling, but he took the lead on the third day. After 72 hours he had 232 miles



Malcolm Campbell (left) and Tony Rafferty. Both have cut the toe boxes out of their shoes.

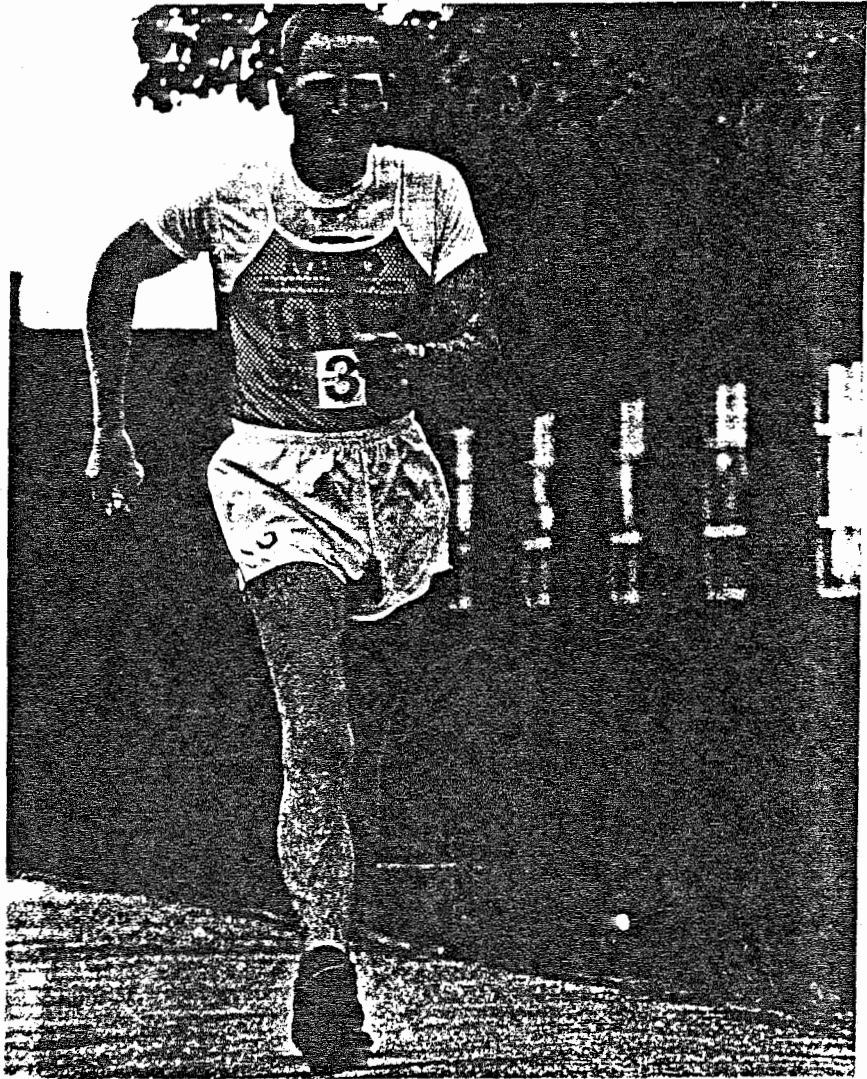
to Dowling's 228. Rafferty was at 215, and I was neatly on 200. It was a typical English summer-rain: cold, strong winds, and occasional periods of hot sunshine when you least expected it. On one occasion Rafferty was blown from the sidewalk into the middle of the road and he could do nothing about it.

I have seen Dixon in many races and the greatest weapon in his armory is his ability to stay awake. In this race he was taking more rest periods than usual, and I wondered if this was a sign of problems or just sound race tactics. In any event, he was the first man to 500 miles, reached just before the finish of the 7th day; for this he won the Nationwide Building Society Trophy. He was about 30 miles ahead of Dowling who was 5 miles up on Rafferty. I was in deep trouble with 433 miles. Pains in my knee began to worry me—not so much when running, but during my rest breaks when it became impossible to sleep. It felt like little men with hammers were knocking on my knee caps. To add to my problems I fell over on the 7th day and injured my hand, which became swollen and later in the race quite painful. I learned after the race that I had broken a bone in my hand.

At the end of the 8th day Dixon retired. He made a few token appearances afterward, but he was out of the race. A visit to a local infirmary confirmed that his blisters and leg injuries were too serious for him to continue further. He had completed 682 laps and was, by only a little, the race leader. However, the real race was just starting and although I was still on my feet, I was in essence a mobile spectator to one of the greatest duels there has ever been on the roads.

Day eight started with Rafferty on 677 laps to Dowling's 666. Every 5 laps was another 4 miles added to the total. At this point laps seemed more significant than miles. Rafferty had to preserve his slender lead or add to it. Neither task would be easy because behind him was probably the greatest walker in the world, and Dowling scented victory. It was now a contest that the gambling public of a century ago would have rushed to in droves. Could the Irish walker catch the Irish runner? When would he do so? How far ahead would Rafferty be each day? Who would complete the most laps each day? All questions would have been the subjects of many a wager. I had more knowledge of both men than most but even so could not pretend to have the answers.

Dowling is a throwback to the early pedestrians. He is 57 years old and was born in Waterford. He has the unique distinction of having represented both Great Britain and Ireland in walking events. He can walk over 130 miles



John Dowling's walking style - he covered 1,000 miles in 15 days without running a step.

in 24 hours and his whole life has been spent in improving his ability. Last November at Gateshead he helped me during my 1,000 mile track race. Afterward I discarded an old pair of Adidas shoes that had given me good service but were not needed any longer. I did not know it at the time, but John salvaged the shoes and removed the soles. The soles were then fixed to a pair of his walking trainers and were now passing me at regular intervals. I remember thinking that they were going much faster and probably much further than they would ever go under me.

Rafferty is in direct contrast to Dowling. He was born in Belfast but has lived in Australia for about 27 years. He is 47 years old and a Sports Motivation Lecturer. He has a deep knowledge and love of the sport. Rafferty has completed the grueling Sydney-to-Melbourne race three times, and has raced through the Simpson Desert in Australia, which is probably one of the hardest runs in the world. Everything he had learned about survival, tactics, and motivation would be needed

now. Imagine the mental problems he would have. His handler was Dowling's wife! He could not ask her to keep an eye on John's progress. It would not have been fair to her or to John. It says much for the sportsmanship of both competitors that although no quarter was asked or given, no sharp practices took place.

During the 9th day both men needed sleep badly. Rafferty could not leave the track for any long period. If he was absent for three hours he would have conceded the lead to Dowling. Dowling would leave the track for short breaks but on his return would be walking faster. His pattern seemed to be that his first hour after a rest would be quite brisk and during this time he would complete about six laps. For the next two hours he would probably cover about eleven laps and in the fourth hour he would cover five laps. When he began to move a lot slower than this he would leave the track for a short break. Rafferty would start with three laps at about 11 minutes a lap, including short walking breaks at suitable points

en route. The next two laps would be appreciably slower and after these he would leave the track for a few minutes.

At the end of the 9th day Rafferty had completed 759 laps (607 mi). He had fought hard to maintain his lead but had to give one lap back to Dowling who completed 749 laps. Both men now needed sleep desperately. It would have been easy for them to have done a deal. They could have both left the track for eight hours sleep and resumed hostilities refreshed, but they were honorable competitors. No deals; no discussions. They just carried on with the battle with respect for each other.

Rafferty was now unshaven and quite unrecognizable from the start of the race. He had been obliged to treat his feet for a number of problems and one pair of his shoes had received considerable attention from a sharp knife. His brain was still razor sharp, however, and he was constantly keeping an eye on Dowling's progress. Sometimes Dowling would try to make a break and walk even faster than six laps an hour for short bursts. At these times Rafferty would stay a little distance behind him, but maintain the same pace. It was utterly absorbing for any informed spectator. Probably the most involved spectators at the race were the lap scorers. They could see this gigantic battle unfolding in front of them, and many of them were reluctant to leave the course after their stint of duty was over. Rafferty reached the 1,000 km mark in 9 days plus 3:40:28. Dowling reached the same point in 9 days plus 6:51:20, almost certainly setting a number of new walking records.

During the 10th day Rafferty made a determined effort to increase his lead. He ran briskly and his walking breaks were faster than earlier. He wanted a bigger lead; needed it if he was to have some decent sleep. He finished the day with 848 laps, 15 ahead of Dowling. The next day was probably the most important day of the race. The two men had been covering about 65-70 miles a day, and Dowling had always felt that he could manage 80 miles on one of the days before the finish, which perhaps could win the race for him. On day eleven Dowling made a determined effort to catch Rafferty, but every time his pace increased so did Rafferty's. It was quite astonishing that both competitors completed 80 laps (64 mi). Dowling had developed some foot problems but, like Rafferty, he was unwilling to discuss them in great detail during the race. The following day they were still at it and Dowling pulled a couple of laps back. Rafferty recovered these laps and four more besides on the following

day and the end of the race was now in sight for both men. After 13 days Rafferty had completed 880

miles and Dowling 864½. The weekend has arrived and the race will soon be over. On Friday evening Dowling gains a few laps and then loses a few. It's a bitter battle as both men are now in some pain, but Rafferty gently eases ahead. They continue through Saturday oblivious to anything but the race and each other. Both are looking for signs of weakness in the other and an easy ride to the finish.

The end came during Saturday night. John had severe problems with one of his feet and his walking had lost a little of its easy style. Tony seemed to sense this and increased the distance between them. Just before five o'clock on a misty Sunday morning Tony Rafferty won the first 1,000 mile road race in England this century with an Australian record of 14 days plus 16:45:11.

John Dowling was at the finish line to welcome the victor, but he now had another battle on his hands: He had to beat the time limit of 15 days. He needed rest and took it and at nine o'clock on Sunday morning, with about 9 miles to go, he seemed certain of finishing. At this point a Chaplain arrived and John retired to take Holy Communion. This had happened the previous Sunday and the service had lasted about ten minutes. This time it lasted 40 minutes, and I was certainly worried about the lost time John was racking up. He eventually returned to the race and completed the 1,000 miles with nineteen minutes to spare.

These athletes will have learned much from this race. They will have learned because they want to learn. They have been to places we can only dream about, having gone beyond mere tiredness and pain. The walker and the runner have shown us excellence in a highly visible form and for those of us with eyes to see they have shown us the true meaning of sporting competition.

## RESULTS :

### The MBS Alveronic 1000 Mile Road Race

Hull, England 4/5 mi loop  
July 26-Aug 10, 1986

1. Tony Rafferty, Australia  
14 days+16:45:11
  2. John Dowling, Ireland (walked)  
14 days+23:41:20
- |                  |        |
|------------------|--------|
| Malcolm Campbell | 750 mi |
| Colin Dixon      | 528 mi |
| Dan Coffey       | 85 mi  |

# Tony Rafferty plans coast to coast ultra



A race across Australia between the world's 20 best endurance runners would provide a great spectacle, according to distance runner Tony Rafferty.

Rafferty, a world-class endurance runner, is in Perth to raise sponsorship for a proposed run from Adelaide to Perth as a fund-raising project for the Australian Freedom from Hunger Campaign.

The 47-year-old Irish-born Victorian will accompany former American marine Sarah Fulcher (24), who is attempting to become the first woman to run from Sydney to Perth.

She left Sydney on September 22 and passed through Melbourne earlier this week. The pair will leave Adelaide later this month. They are expected in Perth before Christmas.

"Australia leads the world in ultra-marathon running," Rafferty said. "We have so many great runners who can hold their place in any field internationally."

"The Westfield Sydney-to-Melbourne race is the world's No. 1 endurance race. Now the time is approaching when a race across the continent would create a tremendous impact throughout the world."

Rafferty also believes Fulcher's performance will encourage women's participation in endurance running.

Rafferty, who has lived in Australia for the past 27 years, earlier this month finished sixth in the world six-day championship in France.

This year he has also contested the Box Hill 24-hour race, the Colac six-day event, the Westfield Sydney-to-Melbourne Classic, set an Australian record for running 1000 miles in Queensland, reduced the record by another 16 hours in Hull, England, and run across the Simpson Desert. Next weekend he will compete in the Adelaide 24-hour race.

— Courtesy of West Australian News.

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Geoff Hook is making good progress finalising our Constitution and we are hoping that our association will become incorporated early this year.