

Elite runners continue to amaze

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Any city worthy of being called a city seems to have one. Victoria's goes this morning. Annual marathons have become part of the urban fabric, if only for one weekend a year, in cities across North America.

At the head of the surging mass of about 10,000 runners who will put sneaker to pavement in the 29th Royal Victoria Marathon, half-marathon, 8K or kids' races, will be those solitary few so far ahead that it will leave the rest of the heaving pack in amazed wonderment.

The elite runners will operate in a different universe today on the streets of Victoria and Oak Bay. But come next week, they are really no different than you or your neighbours. Top-women's seed Cheryl Murphy of Victoria will ready her six-year-old daughter and five-year-old son for school and then the 39-year-old physiotherapist will be off to work at her clinic. Todd Howard, an acupuncturist, will be back at his Market Square office Tuesday as president of the Pacific Rim College for complementary and integrative medicine.

The difference between them and the rest of the crowd out today is that Howard has twice been the top North American finisher at the prestigious Berlin Marathon and Murphy was fifth last year in Ironman Canada and sixth this year at the world duathlon championships in Belgium.

Well, OK, they're really like the rest of us only up to a certain point.

"I have a busy life," said Murphy, who won five CIS medals during a starry track career with the University of Manitoba Bisons.

"I get up very early in the morning to train, then it's back to the house to get the family ready and after that off to work."



CREDIT: Debra Brash, Times Colonist

The best of the best -- Jim Finlayson, left, Cheryl Murphy and Todd Howard -- are on their mark for today's marathon.

That's a three-part juggling act that in its own way is even more impressive than the juggling of Michal Kapral, the 'joggler' whose feat of keeping three balls aloft while running marathons has landed him in Guinness World Records and who will be in today's Royal

Victoria Marathon.

But if the elites weren't running, they really wouldn't feel they are fully living. These people need to run as much as they need to breathe and eat. So much so that Howard will run today's Royal Victoria Marathon just two weeks after having to drop out of the Toronto Waterfront Marathon.

"Running is my daily meditation and stress reliever," said Howard, a 29-year-old transplanted American, who competed in track on NCAA athletic scholarship at the University of West Virginia.

"It's a part of what keeps me going. I would be lost without it."

Although a triple threat as a world-class triathlete -- she was 28th last year in the Ironman Hawaii world championships -- Murphy said she is being drawn back out of the water and off the bike to her original sporting love.

"First and foremost, I've always been a runner," she said.

No kidding. Her first stab at the 42.2K marathon distance, in March at the Snickers Marathon in Albany, Ga., yielded a heady second-place finish behind Janet Chereobon of Kenya and a berth to represent Canada in the world marathon championships next year in Berlin.

"Running is so pure. I like the simplicity of it," said Murphy.

Among the luminaries in today's RVM 8K are 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics silver-medallist triathlete Simon Whitfield of Victoria and American marathon legend Dick Beardsley, second by inches to Alberto Salazar in the race-for-the-ages 1982 Boston Marathon

Jim Finlayson of Victoria, who has represented Canada at the world cross-country championships three times, will contest today's RVM half-marathon after running the Toronto Waterfront Marathon two weeks ago. Sometimes you just need to push the envelope, he said.

"Normally I wouldn't recommend it [such a short turnaround between major runs] but I'm excited by it and there's a curiosity factor in seeing how my body will respond," said the former UVic Vikes CIS medallist.

"At the top level, runners are very motivated and they have a very strong work ethic."

The RVM begins today with early starts at 6:30 a.m. and the main start at 8:30 a.m. The undulating route begins on Menzies and winds through downtown into James Bay and Beacon Hill Park, along Dallas Road to Gonzales Bay and

through the neighbourhoods of Fairfield, Oak Bay and Uplands before the turnaround and retracing of the route.

Chief among the several vehicular restrictions along the route is that no traffic will be permitted on Dallas Road between 7:30 a.m. and 2 p.m.

To view the course map and for additional details, go to www.royalvictoriamarathon.com.

For a personal perspective, log onto the Times Colonist website and read web editor Denise Helm's take on her preparations for race day on the blog [Woman on the Run](#).

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