

FITNESS

'Truly inspiring': 78-year-old Kentucky man is running across USA for the third time

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A soaking rain didn't slow 78-year-old Stan Cottrell and a group of local runners who showed up to support him Monday morning in Jeffersonville, Indiana.

"A little rain won't hurt us," Cottrell reassured the cluster of 40 plus soggy turnouts as they trotted across the Big Four Pedestrian Bridge into Kentucky.

The native of Munfordville, Kentucky is currently on a cross-country run that will take him from Los Angeles to Washington D.C.

"It was 116 degrees while I ran through Arizona last month," he told the Courier Journal. "The soles of the shoes of one of my crew melted on the pavement in that heat. Then it snowed as I crossed over the Rockie mountains, so this warm Kentucky rain just feels like a blessing."

Cottrell's swing through his home state puts the Guinness World Record holder and renowned ultra-long-distance runner two-thirds of the way through his mind-boggling trans-USA run called the "Amazing Friendship Run."

For 100 consecutive days, Cottrell will spend six hours on the road in order to knock out 30 miles of running each day.

Think about it. The nearly 80-year-old runs four miles over the official marathon distance each day and he's doing it for 100 days — in a row.

"He's truly inspiring," said Lorri Roberts, a Louisville runner who came out to meet and run with Cottrell on Monday. "I think we'd all like to continue to be active as we age and Stan proves it is possible."

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Inspiration, motivation and spreading kindness are the key reasons the septuagenarian is crossing the country on foot — again.

This is not his first coast-to-coast run, it's his third. In 1980, he set a Guinness World Record for the fastest run across America when he finished the feat in 48 days.

"I've been running for 73 years," Cottrell said. "When I was a student at Western Kentucky University in 1964, I was one of the first southerners to run the Boston Marathon. I was running long distances back in those days, and as the old saying goes, 'people thought I was touched in the head.'"

Before he became an international running phenomenon and Nobel Peace Prize nominee, Cottrell was a Kentucky boy who grew up on a farm in Hart County. Running was part of everyday life on the farm and was simply how the little boy got from here to there.

"Daddy would get me up at five in the morning and I'd have to round up all the cows before school," said Cottrell. If it took him too long to catch the livestock, he'd end up running again, this time to get to school.

"I got to be known for my running. In fact, the neighbors would ask my daddy if I could chase down their livestock when it got loose. One time the sheriff wanted me to run after a moonshiner," Cottrell told The Courier Journal. "I wanted to know what to do if I caught him."

When he was 12 years old, Cottrell won the 100-yard dash at the county fair. He was small for his age but he beat all the bigger kids. At the end of the race, he received a compliment that would change the course of his life.

"You are small but those legs can fly," the official told Cottrell as he presented him with the blue ribbon. "You could be a champion."

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"I had never heard the word 'champion' before but from that point on I wanted to be one," remembers Cottrell.

He was offered a one-semester scholarship to run at Western Kentucky University.

"They didn't think I would make it past the first semester because they didn't think I was smart enough to pass the courses," he said. "But five years later, I graduated with a bachelor's degree in health, biology, psychology and sociology."

His first job out of college was as a teacher in Louisville at Southern High School. He also coached the cross country team.

"I still hear from some of those students," Cottrell said. "I never asked them to run a workout that I couldn't do myself and I ran with them every day."

He continued running after he left teaching. When he began working for a Louisville-based healthcare company, Cottrell became interested in the idea of corporate wellness.

"I wanted to attract attention to the importance of healthy living so in 1966, I ran from the Tennessee line to the Galt House Hotel. Unfortunately, I was too far ahead of my time and no one would listen," he said.

But he didn't let the naysayers slow him down.

"Those early foundational principles of life and living and integrity, kindness and gentleness were forged in me up and down those hollers where I grew up," he said. "I realized that if I used the door-opener of sports I could spread that message."

In 1984, Cottrell spent 53-days covering 2,125 miles from the Great Wall of China to Guangzhou. He ran similar ultra-long distance friendship missions around the world

totaling more than 260,000 miles. His runs have taken him to 40 counties including China, Argentina, Kenya and across Europe.

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"Here's the beautiful thing, everywhere I have run all across the world I have been greeted by people who have come out to see me," he said. "I realized a long time ago that my mission is to utilize my ability to run these distances to encourage people to discover what they can do well."

Now 78 years old, Cottrell began his third run across America on May 7 from Los Angeles and plans to arrive in the nation's capital on Aug. 14. When he arrives in Washington D.C., the Kentucky native will have run 3,000 miles.

Along the route, he rotates through 12 pairs of Hoka brand running shoes and he changes his shoes every two hours. To fuel his body, he eats only nutritious foods like grilled chicken or fish, fruits and vegetables and whole grains.

"Too many people eat recreationally, by that I mean they don't think about whether the food they are consuming will help their body function, they think only about how it will taste," said Cottrell. "I will make one exception when I arrive in my hometown of Munfordville. I'll eat my brother's biscuits and gravy."

When Cottrell arrived at the KFC Yum! Center in downtown Louisville on Monday, he made a brief stop to receive recognition from Louisville's Mayor Greg Fischer and a second from Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear. In the pouring rain, he turned to the runners who had come out to run with him and belted out a pretty decent version of "My Old Kentucky Home" and then he took off for Munfordville for a hometown celebration.

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"The people that come out and run with me, they know it's not a competition," Cottrell said. "We're just celebrating the uniqueness of the human family and the fact that we each

have a unique purpose in life. You have something you can do that nobody else can do. All I am trying to do is encourage you to discover what you do well.”

Cottrell's run is also raising funds for several charities, including the Friendship Sports Association, Go Vets Foundation, Larger than Life, WLOC Clothes for Kids Inc., Feed the Children, Hope for Families, Multiple Sclerosis Foundation, and TongueOut. You can donate to Cottrell's race and learn more about how to support these causes at friendshipsportsassociation.org.

"If I can get up and move at 78, everyone in America can," said Cottrell. "We are creating a movement of spreading positivity, kindness, and unity. Everyone, young and old is welcome to join in and run with me for as long as they wish, be it a block, a mile, or more."

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