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Runner, 78, inspires others as he completes 3,000-mile trip

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WKU graduate Stan Cottrell, 78, is running a marathon each day for 100 days to

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Stan Cottrell's legs are taking him across America. At 78, he is running a marathon each day for 100 days to travel from Los Angeles to Washington, D.C.

Cottrell, a Munfordville native who graduated from Western Kentucky University with a bachelor’s degree in health, biology, psychology and sociology, will have run more than 3,000 miles once his Amazing Friendship Run concludes in August. Having already trekked through the desert heat of California, Arizona and New Mexico, Cottrell will pass the mountains of Colorado before moving on to the Midwest.



A coast-to-coast run through the United States is nothing new for Cottrell. 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 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.”

Cottrell said he doesn’t like to label himself as “old.”

“I feel like I’m about 8 years old,” Cottrell said. “I’m still in elementary school and the teacher just said it’s time for recess.”



Cottrell believes his journey has a purpose that extends beyond the benefits of long-distance running.

“This is about reuniting America,” Cottrell said. “This is about sending a message of hope that encourages you to come out of your house and move around outside.”

Cottrell has shared his message of friendship and unity in the 40 countries he’s visited. After nearly 270,000 miles of running, Cottrell sees value in being able to live and work with a diverse group of people.

“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 friendship is the rarest commodity. It’s far more rare than the gold of Fort Knox.”

Completing a 3,000-mile run in 100 days is a difficult task, so Cottrell brought along multiple medical experts. His friends Ken Rolfsness and Janice Wade are monitoring Cottrell’s amniotic shot regimen. The amniotic fluid from each injection stops inflammation, Wade said. Rolfsness and Wade feel like Cottrell is running in the body of a 35-year-old.

“He’s running fast, he’s strong and even his skin looks great,” Rolfsness said.

Rolfsness was amazed by Cottrell’s ability to withstand the brutal temperatures in Arizona. While members of Cottrell’s traveling party saw their shoes melt in the hot sun, Cottrell managed to finish his 30-mile run. On another day of running, Cottrell was attacked by a dog while trekking a mountain pass. Cottrell dodged the canine, but he injured his groin in the process. He continued his daily marathon after treating the injury.

The advertisement features a large blue text graphic on the left that reads "WHY WON'T PBMs LET US SAVE ON Rx?" with a "LEARN MORE" button below it. To the right is the NCL (National Consumers League) logo and the text "PBM ACCOUNTABILITY PROJECT". On the far right is a photograph of an older man sitting at a desk, looking down at a laptop. A play button icon is visible in the top right corner of the image area.

Rolfsness said, “He’s always asked, ‘How do you do it when you reach the end and can’t go no more?’ He says, ‘Five more minutes. That’s all I need – five more minutes.’ ”

While performing his summer run, Cottrell is raising funds for several charities, including WLOC Clothes for Kids Inc., which supplies underserved children in southcentral Kentucky with the clothes they need for every season.

“I was one of those children who lived without a coat and without shoes,” Cottrell said. “I’d like to think I’m doing something that will keep a child from crying and shivering in bed because of the cold.”

When Cottrell steps out of his RV for a run, he ties a Salvation Army flag around his neck. The flag once belonged to astronaut James Irwin, who had taken the item with him to the moon. For Cottrell, the flag reminds him of the importance of being a person who wholeheartedly helps people succeed in what they strive to do.

“You have a spark of greatness within you,” Cottrell said. “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.”