

Dancing the Bear

There is no such thing as an easy 100-mile race. There are only variables of difficulty.

Fortunately, one of the mitigating factors of “difficult” is that most 100-milers in the U.S. are run on trails, and consequently, if you can raise your tired head from your aching shoulders and wipe the sweat and occasional blood out of your eyes, the scenery is usually worth all the misery. As is that cocoon of satisfaction when you eventually cross the finish line and find a place to sit down so you don't collapse after all the marionette's strings are cut and every muscle in your body slumps.

Over the past few years, 100-milers have begun to proliferate: everything from the elaborately staged godfather of them all, the Western States 100 to, believe it or don't, bare-bones, self-sufficient 100-milers.

There have been several excellent documentaries done about the famed Western States 100. They are elaborately shot and the stories of the runners who are selected to “star” in the films are typically colorful, and the runners seem preternaturally determined to finish, no matter what.

There have not been a lot of documentaries featuring other 100s. In most cases, this is understandable, because putting together an hour-long documentary takes a lot of money and a lot of effort.

Bill Bradbury and Chris Lott have stepped in to take up the slack by creating a 54-minute documentary covering the Bear 100 Endurance Run in Utah titled *Dancing the Bear* (Soul Focus Productions).

For anyone who is contemplating doing a hundred-miler that isn't Western States, this serves as a good introduction to what's involved, from starting in the dark under a headlamp to tooling into an aid station (think a slow-motion NASCAR pit stop), to running into the next night, again under a headlamp.

The documentary concentrates on two female participants, Kelly Bradbury and Mary Workman, and that may be the film's weakest feature. Both women are obviously dedicated runners, but neither comes across as especially insightful or invigorated by the process of preparing for the race. Perhaps it is fatigue from training so many miles in order to run so many miles while still having a life outside of running, but the effect of both women is nearly flat lined. There is no

inflection in their voices, and we aren't introduced to them gradually enough to get a real feel for their passion and motivation.

Also, it would really help if, as each person is interviewed or filmed, an ID bar was inserted across the bottom of the screen so we know to whom we are listening. The directors cleverly introduce us to all the pertinent characters, complete with an ID bar across the bottom of the screen, but it comes *after* the film is finished. The film might be helped by introducing the cast of characters *before* the film begins, sort of like the primary characters in Saturday afternoon movie serials were introduced at the beginning of each cliff-hanging chapter. Some of the characters, especially *UltraRunning* Magazine publisher John Medinger, are articulate and animated and could have been featured more in order to capture, for the novice runner, the lure of the ultra-long race.

Also, Bradbury and Lott went to a lot of artistic effort to open the film with impressive graphics of an American Indian, tying in the tradition of running ultra-long distances with the Indian culture, but then they didn't sufficiently follow up with that artistic theme.

There is a lot to like in this documentary, but it could have stood to sit around for a few weeks before one last tweak of the themes and variations.

For a marathoner considering moving up to a low-key trail 100, quite a few of the aspects you need to know are contained here, especially the beauty of the course on which it is run. —*Rich Benyo*