

**RIYADH WHEELERS CYCLING CLUB
2002-2003 SEASON
THE MIDDLE EAST'S PREMIER
VALUE FOR MONEY CLUB**

FOR ONLY SR. 350 YOU GET:

- NEW 2002 – 2003 SEASON CYCLING JERSEY
 - ENTRY TO THE START OF SEASON REGISTRATION PASTA EVENING
 - ENTRY TO 3 SEASON BRUNCHES
 - THREE T-SHIRTS FOR MAJOR RACES
 - 100 km/2 Day event/TT series
 - ENTRY TO ALL 15 RACES ON THE WHEELERS CALENDAR – September to April
 - ELIGIBILITY FOR END OF SEASON AWARDS (8 race minimum)
 - PLUS RACE GIVEAWAYS AND SPOT PRIZES
 - ALL LEVELS OF CYCLISTS ARE WELCOME
 - SEPARATE MOUNTAIN BIKE CATEGORY
- Contact Charlie Dryden, Chairman – e-mail
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**DO YOU
RIDE A
BICYCLE?**

**COME
AND
JOIN US!**

THE MARATHON DES SABLES 2001

The Marathon Des Sables is billed as the Toughest Footrace on Earth. The race across the Sahara Desert covers 250km over 6 days. Competitors carry all the equipment they require, this includes food, a minimum of 2000 calories each day, compass, head torch for night stage, anti venom pump, distress flare, sleeping bag and small cooking stove. Race organisers also issue a daily water ration of 11 liters per competitor at various checkpoints.

I entered the 2001 race following a conversation with Tony Mason, who had successfully completed the 2000 race. (You might remember the article in a previous magazine) Tony worked at the British Embassy in Riyadh, and proved to be a valuable source of information and advice. After 10 months of preparation and training, I joined 630 runners from 35 different countries to compete in the 16th Marathon Des Sables in Morocco.

After a night in a hotel, we were taken to a secret location in the Sahara. Our accommodation was an open sided Berber tent that I shared with 8 others. After a day of compulsory kit checks, we were ready for the big day. The 6 stages of the race were 25km, 34km, 38km, 84km, 42km, 26km. The 84km stage included a night stage.

Off we went into the Sahara, the terrain was brutal. I had decided to pace myself after taking the advice of an experienced ultra marathoner, his advice was to start slow and then go slower.

Day 4 was the big one 84km. Not in the best shape as I commenced but kept chipping away and arrived at checkpoint 4 (45km) for well-earned rest. Daylight was fading and we were issued with glow sticks. After resting I decided to move on; far into the distance I could see the glow sticks of other competitors. The wind had picked up and it was cold, in front of me was a blind man with

his guide singing away in French, this lifted me. I finished the stage at 6.15am with sun rising above the mountains. A Eurosport camera team was filming my efforts, (5 mins of fame?). For the record my time was 21hrs 30 mins, a grueling day. The next stage was only a Marathon (42km). I was feeling good after eating well. I went off strong and finished in 6hrs 32 min, a good day at the office. This stage provided me with a lasting memory. As I ran through a small oasis village Berber children were cheering and clapping the runners, I had no extra drink or food to give them, but I did have a 200-dirham note, I gave this to a small Berber boy, I was having a good day and wanted them to share it with me, as I left the checkpoint the village came out to cheer me. It is an experience I will never forget.

At the dawn of the final day the sight of runners hobbling (and some being carried) into position at the start line is one that will live with me forever. We were down to six from our tent and they were displaying some of the worst blisters that I had ever seen. The final stage finished in the town of Tezzerin and as I came to the outskirts of the town, I was now running on tarmac a strange feeling after the desert, the town was out cheering. The adrenaline was pumping and with the finish in sight I tried to look good for the cameras. Having not shaved nor washed for over a week this was no easy task.

As the race director presented me with my medal I remembered all the hard work, training, and preparation that had gone in to getting me to this point. It has been my greatest achievement and the memories will last a lifetime. For the record, temperatures averaged 45° daytime and 22° at night. I finished in 328th position in a time of 48hrs 32mins. I would like to thank the following: The Riyadh Multinational School, British Airways & Paul Dugan. To Catherine, you made it possible.

By David Hall

