

Doug Schwab photo

JACKI HANSEN

I first met Jacki Hansen four years ago when she was a mile-a-day, fair-weather jogger intent on gaining reasonable fitness. Her mile a day stretched a little and one day she was introduced to coach (and former Hungarian running great) Laszlo Tabori. It took Jacki a while to realize that 10 laps and 15 x 110 was the warmup, not the workout. It took longer to get her to come down off her toes (cured by inserts) and pass through the continual injury cycle that develops when the intensity and the mileage increase too fast. Her progress was reasonable as she ran a 2:16 880 and a 4:45 mile within the first couple of years.

Jacki's first marathon, in December 1972, was a pain-etched 3:15. But that was the spark. From there, her confidence and strength grew. She won the women's division at Boston in 1973 with 3:05 (in 80-degree heat). Under Tabori, her training went as high as 140 miles a week.

In September 1974, on a trip paid for by a generous friend, Jacki competed unattached from the official US team at the first women's world championship marathon in West Germany. She ran 2:56:25, placed fifth overall, and led US finishers. Two months later at Culver City, Calif., she obliterated the women's world record with 2:43:54.6.

Jacki is 26 years old, 5'2", 105 pounds. She works in an insurance office in the Los Angeles area. In addition to her marathon world best, Jacki also has the fastest six-mile (34:24). A different interview with her appears in the 1975 *Marathon Handbook*.

RW: Why did you get so involved in running?

Hansen: A lot of people ask me "why running?" Why not something else? I suppose I run for all the fringe benefits of being in shape and feeling healthy. Now I'm actually afraid to get out of shape. All those fringe benefits are nice, but they are not the complete reason why I run. Why



I run comes from within me. It is something I feel I have to do, something I like doing best, and I feel best when I'm doing it.

RW: Do you find it addictive?

Hansen: If I said it was addicting I would be admitting I was enslaved by it. Running involves freedom of choice but it still dictates my whole life. It's self-actualizing.

RW: I can remember you started out as a half-miler. How does anyone go from the half-mile to the marathon in such a short time?

Hansen: Add 25 miles plus (laughter). The truth is that I always felt stronger than I did fast. I always wanted to know how far I could go without stopping, how long could I last. I watched Cheryl

Bridges set the world record for the marathon at Culver City one year (1971) and I was really inspired. I wanted to jump in the race. It didn't look so bad.

The next year I ran the 880 and the mile and had my best cross-country season. Then I noticed that the whole year had slipped by and I had forgotten to train for the marathon as I had secretly promised myself to do. However, Laszlo didn't believe in it (marathon running). He always said it was something you could do if there was nothing else you could do.

So the week after cross-country nationals, on a week's notice, I told Laszlo I had entered the Culver City marathon. He just said in his Hungarian-English, "You will go far." I was determined to go as far as I could. I finished... somehow.

RW: Three-fifteen was a creditable mark at the time.

Hansen: I was delirious. I learned what it was all about. I went the first 20 miles thinking, "I've got this thing licked. What's the big fuss all about?" I clipped along at seven-minute pace until 22 miles, undaunted. The rest of the race I can't remember. It was the hardest thing I had ever done in my life. Back to the drawing board.

RW: Laszlo Tabori is often described as eccentric, demanding and domineering. To say the least, he is unique. What are your impressions of him as a coach?

Hansen: I suppose with any legend there are exaggerations, although in Laszlo's case most of them are true.

I do see there are many ways to get into top condition because there are that many different individuals. I suppose an awful lot of it is believing that what you are doing is right. The confidence factor can't be underrated. Laszlo will always know when you are ready and will come to you and tell you exactly where you are. And he's always right.

Before Culver City '74, he knew what was coming. I only saw him at interval workouts and races, yet he put it all together in his head and let me know how he thought I would do. I had run 58 minutes for 10 miles in a road race and a 4:50 mile in practice. For this his prophecy was, "You will do *very* well."

RW: Some of your training is prodigious, lots of miles. I can remember your buildup before your first trip to Boston and those 140-mile weeks...

Hansen: It was hard to do those 20-mile days because I kept breaking down, but the truth is that I did enough of them to carry me through Boston and the rest of track season. I got PRs from the mile through the marathon after that.

RW: Did you envision after your first trip to Boston what was in store, a remarkable 2:43 marathon?

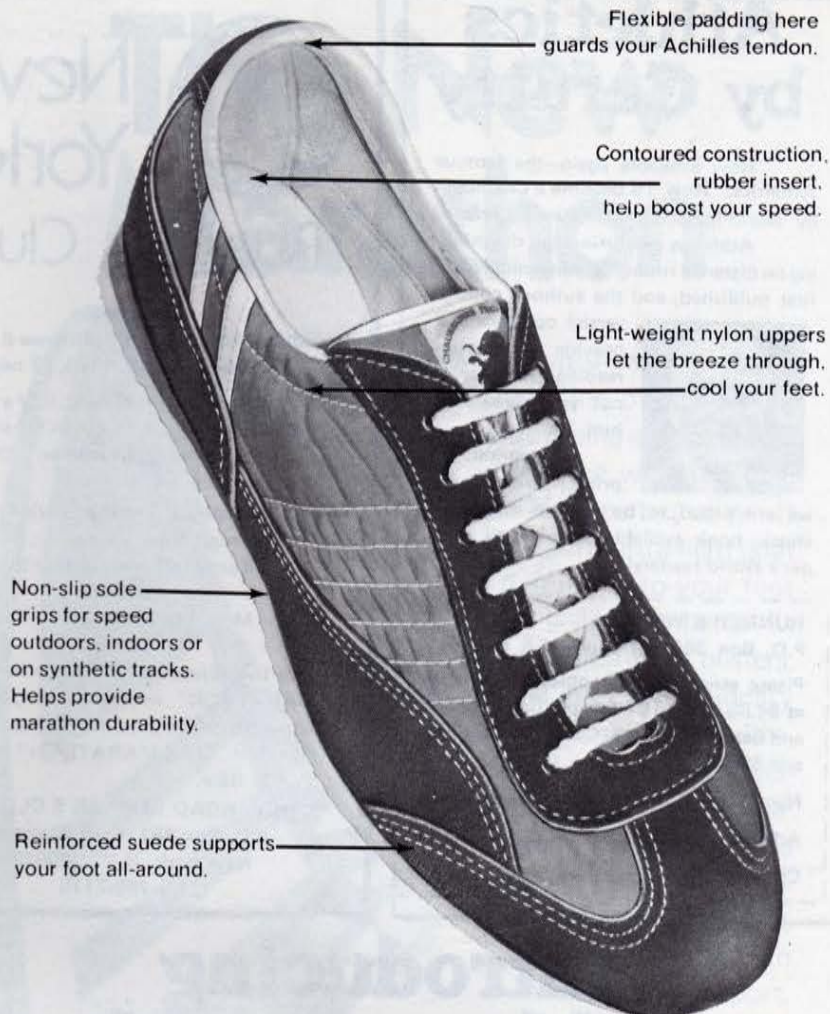
Hansen: No, I was still in awe of Cheryl Bridges' 2:49. I couldn't conceive of 6½ minutes per mile. I was impressed.

RW: When did all the awe come down? When did you realize that you were ready to step right into the world-class women's running scene?

Hansen: Probably after the Games (women's world championship in West Germany) when I ran 2:56.

RW: At Culver City, what was your pre-race goal?

Hansen: Conservatively speaking,



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I was thinking in terms of breaking 2:50. I didn't want to be irrational or hope for too much. People kept talking world record to me. But these were people who were going to watch, and that makes it much easier to say.

During the race, I had a hard time hearing my splits (61:48 at 10, 2:04:25 at 20) because Laszlo was screaming so much. I had no idea I was under 2:46 until I had a block to go. All the race advice towards the end made me irritable because I was trying so hard to concentrate. When I turned the corner with only a block to go, above all the madness I recognized Tabori's voice say "43 and half." I sprinted so I could get in the 43s.

RW: The world championships in West Germany must have been a great experience. What did you think of Dr. Ernst van Aaken ("Interview," Jan. 75) after you had met him.

Hansen: Dr. van Aaken is without a doubt the most impressive man I have ever met. Not only do you get the impression that you are in the presence of a real genius but a very warm-hearted, congenial man. He's basically lots of fun.

We spent a lot of time talking about all the methods of training, the physiology and his theories on women distance runners.

He drove up to the hotel the morning before the marathon and woke us all up with a good-morning and a song in German for each contestant. He also ran a one-man PR campaign and told all to come to see the race.

RW: How's the atmosphere in Europe for women's athletics?

Hansen: Women's athletics in Europe is on a level closer to men's athletics than it is here. To be an athlete in Europe is like being a national hero. It's not looked upon as a silly hobby. They recognize the value of participation and dedication. The women get their own admiration and attention there.

RW: Women's athletics has beaten men to the punch by officially promoting a world championship marathon outside of the Olympics.

Hansen: That's healthy and I'd like to see, as would most running aficionados, world championships every two years or so. It is a progressive step.

RW: What changes in women's athletics would you suggest?

Hansen: I'm fortunate to be in a district that stages women's championships at the longer distances. However, at the national level it's not so well organized. I'd like to see declared national championships that are well attended by

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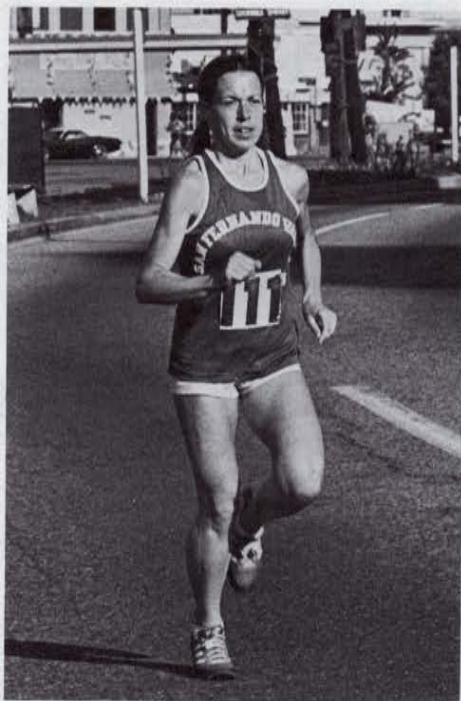
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Hansen en route to 2:43. (Schwab)

quality runners. Perhaps this can only be accomplished by offering international competition and spots on US teams.

The girls don't run the distances because there is limited competition, no tours or trips that are attached. Then the promoters say they won't hold meets because the good girls won't show. It's a vicious circle.

On the international level, they should open up the meets and include longer track races for women, such as 3000, 5000 and 10,000 meters. If these events were added, there would be tremendous improvements because milers would go up and others would come down to fill the void.

Basically, the whole problem revolves around the Olympics. Because the Olympics only allows races up to 1500 meters, it sets a precedent for all women's racing. The Olympic Committee should keep up with the times and add the longer distances. As it stands now, there is an empty hole for any girl who wants to run farther than the 1500.

The world championship marathon has shown that there is interest, and the competition is now worldwide. Maybe the answer is a world championship every two years, free of political entanglements.

RW: What's in the future for Jacki Hansen?

Hansen: For a while, I want to concentrate on the shorter distances (she ran a mile in 4:52.1 a month after Culver City) and revise all my track PRs. Then it's off to Boston. But whatever happens, I will keep on running and running and running some more. •

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