



Thousands followed Meltzer's progress along the Pony Express through online, video and social media updates and satellite tracking.

Human Express

KARL MELTZER RUNS THE 2064-MILE PONY EXPRESS TRAIL

On Day 37 of his 40-day Red Bull Human Express run from Sacramento, California, to St. Joseph, Missouri, Karl Meltzer stumbled upon a golf course. He had already run 23.5 miles that sunny October morning, putting him in Hebron, Nebraska. ♣ Meltzer was in need of a diversion, something to take his mind off of churning across the vast pancake that is middle America. So he walked into the pro shop, where a surprise awaited him.

"The lady working there was like, 'No way! My daughter has been following you the whole time!'" says Meltzer. "Here's a cart, here's some clubs, here's some balls. Go have fun."

He shot a 44 over nine holes that day, said goodbye to the nice lady in the pro shop and ran another 23.4 miles. For many, the quirky chain of events would be an opening tale in a memoir. For Meltzer, it was just another day on the road—all 2064 miles of it.

In running nearly two-thirds of the way across the country, evoking images of a modern-day Forrest Gump in the minds of double-taking farmers, the sport's winningest 100-mile racer did more than simply retrace the 150-year-old (and loosely defined) Pony Express route. He undertook the challenge to "raise the bar" in long-distance running—and to prove to himself that he could complete it.

"The coolest thing about doing this,"

Meltzer said on Day 30, from outside Osh Kosh, Nebraska, "is you're seeing the wide-open countryside at five miles an hour. Mostly we meet country folk, people who seem to avoid 'the big city.'"

That afternoon, a rancher had walked up to Meltzer and said, "I got somethin' for ya." He handed Meltzer six pounds of freshly cut strip steaks and vacuum-packed burgers and insisted the Red Bull caravan camp on his property.

"It's amazing," Meltzer said that night, after devouring a full rack of ribs, mashed potatoes, rice and a half-pint of chocolate ice cream. "People get word of what's going on, and they want to give you something. Nothing major, just a nice gesture. Two days ago it was farm-fresh eggs."

Later in the trip, an 86-year-old woman who ran an RV park brought over a freshly baked pecan pie. Meltzer, who was crewed

every five miles by a team that included Hardrock 100 record-setter Krissy Moehl, lost only seven pounds from his 144-pound starting weight, quite an achievement when you consider he averaged 53 miles a day for nearly six weeks (he took one day off in Utah, where he lives, before powering over the Wasatch and Uinta ranges).

His biggest run was his finale, a 105-mile stretch finishing in St. Joseph, that he completed in 20 hours 23 minutes on October 24, to deliver a letter from the mayor of Sacramento.

Meltzer burned through seven pairs of Hoka One One shoes, allotting each pair 300 miles before moving on to the next. Remarkably, he suffered not a single blister. "I try to make things look easy," he said two days after finishing. For good measure, he downed an average of three beers after each run.

"A lot of people wondered if it'd be a life changer," said Meltzer, 42, who coaches a dozen athletes online in his spare time. "It didn't change my life. This is just what I do."

Lesli Shooter, a former U.S. Ski Team physiologist whom Red Bull contracted to follow Meltzer, marveled at his body's response to the repeated pounding. "He's very in tune with the intensity he can perform day after day," Shooter said. "He regulated it remarkably. That's a perfect example of an elite athlete."

Meltzer's top pace hovered around seven miles per hour. He climbed more than 91,000 feet and averaged 4.81 mph over the duration, with a fastest 50-mile split of 9:02 and a 25-mile best of 4:20 on the final day. His performance improved dramatically when he slept eight hours a night compared with seven, Shooter said. Perhaps most surprising, he ran through only 15 minutes of rain.

Meltzer initially balked when Red Bull approached him about the Express, which is mostly on roads, but figured it would make good training for a second record attempt on the Appalachian Trail next summer [in 2008, he ran it in just under 55 days missing the record by about a week]. To stay motivated, he imagined racing against a tiny man running 50 miles a day and pushed himself to remain in the lead.

Meltzer made some money from the run, but that wasn't his only return. "When Red Bull came to me and said, 'How many miles a day do you think you'll do?'" I said 50. They said, 'Fifty? How about we put down 40.'

"But I said I could do 50 and I did. That's what mattered to me." ■