

Runners and Their Souvenirs

How we end up with dozens of drawers full of stuff

by Shawn Young

Running is a minimalist sport, but you wouldn't know that by looking at the roughly 450 race T-shirts, dating back to 1981, that Susan Siderman has stored in boxes. And the race-number bibs. And the medals, which she has tied to a tambourine that she says "has to weigh 20 pounds."

Until a move prompted a partial purge about a year ago, Siderman had "every T-shirt and every other giveaway

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—Tziporah Kasachkoff

from every race I ever entered." She still has all the shirts—13 boxes of them in storage, and more waiting to be packed. "I never even thought about wearing them," says the Mercury Masters team member.

As anyone who races regularly knows, it doesn't take long to amass quite a trove of shirts, bibs, medals, trophies, free samples, and other miscellaneous stuff. Some are treasured mementos of special races; others are entertaining, attractive, or useful. And when it comes to ugly clothes that don't fit or trophies we'd feel self-conscious displaying, many of us do the only logical thing: Put them in boxes and hang onto them for years.

I Can't Throw That Out

"At no time did I ever think I was building a collection," says Siderman's teammate Tziporah Kasachkoff, who ran her first New York City Marathon in 1984. The temperature hit 80 degrees that day and she finished in misery, vowing, as so many runners do, that she would never run another marathon. Fifteen New York City Marathons and countless

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other races later, she has all her marathon shirts, along with most of her Mylar blankets and baggage-check bags.

"The strange thing is that I don't collect anything but this," she says. "I can't part with it. Each shirt, each medal was such an achievement, and it continues to be."

Relatively few longtime racers keep souvenirs from every race, but if the race required staying power, the

souvenir tends to have it, too. Given what can be involved in preparing for and running 26.2 miles, it's no surprise that the marathon in particular seems to bring out obsessive tendencies.

"I get a little crazy with the marathon stuff," admits Robert Wolfe,

who has run 33 marathons and has a 2:37 PR. "Each of my marathon numbers is attached to its corresponding medal and is hanging, in chronological order, from my tool desk," he says. "Each number—this should confirm that I'm a little obsessed—has every mile split and the finishing time and place written on the back."

Because the tool desk is really a pegboard in a little closet, "nobody ever sees them, they're just there," Wolfe says. People do see his T-shirts, but not because he wears them. His aunt took the first 28 and made him a quilt that hangs on his wall.

Emotional Bonds

"If something is emotional, I become attached to the souvenir," says Cara Macari, co-owner of the Urban Athletics running stores in Manhattan and a frequent top age-group finisher in NYRR races. She once kept a rose given to finishers of the NYRR New York Mini 10K until it literally disintegrated. Among her most valued keepsakes is



Photography by Ed Haas



Getting Creative

Horton is thinking of having some of her T-shirts made into a quilt, as many runners do. But some athletes find their own original uses for the memorabilia. Among them:

- Using medals as Christmas tree ornaments
- Using old bibs as table numbers at a wedding
- Using medals as awards for kids
- Hanging medals from the ceiling around a mirror ball and having a disco-themed party
- Using the little runner figures atop trophies as competitors in a race tableau

Lucimar Araujo ran this year's Mini in a festive pleated miniskirt made entirely of old race numbers. "It's a celebration of all my races, all my accomplishments," she says.

Diane Kenna, a New York Harriers member and frequent racer, accumulates race freebies throughout the year. On the first Sunday morning in November, she hires two vans to take friends and teammates to the ING New York City Marathon start. For the past 18 years, as runners have arrived at her Manhattan apartment, they've been invited to help themselves to a heaping tray of free food samples, energy gels, grooming products, shoelaces, and whatever else she has picked up throughout the year.

"The portable mini-toilet paper rolls, that was a big hit," says Kenna, whose guests have been known to liven things up by surreptitiously adding unlikely items like airline booze bottles to the mix.

Objects of Desire

Anything for a T-Shirt is the title of one history of the New York City Marathon and its co-founder, former NYRR president Fred Lebow. But the most coveted race trinkets often fall into the category of Anything But a T-Shirt. Since most runners have far too many shirts (often in the wrong size), almost anything else can become an instant treasure. Mugs, socks, gloves, and bags have extra cachet. The "buff"—a tube of lightweight synthetic fabric that can be worn as a hat, a headband, a neck gaiter, or a balaclava—is an enduring

a shirt from the 2004 Motorola Austin Marathon. Her goal had been to break three hours and she was in shape to do it, but the flu had other plans for her. Reeling from the start, she kept on anyway.

"I really had no business running," says Macari, who finished with a nosebleed and a 3:04 PR. "It was such a disappointment then, but now it's a very different memory." The T-shirt that started off as a symbol of everything that went wrong that day "has become a positive reminder of overcoming obstacles and not quitting."

The Minimalists

Macari's husband, Jerry Macari, is the anti-collector. He has run—and won—more races than he can count, but the co-owner of Urban Athletics and a

weeks. I didn't care about anything else." His hope had been to hit the sub-2:22 qualifying time for the U.S. Olympic Trials. In the end, he ran 2:24, and although he didn't reach his goal, that medal is a badge of honor.

"I got as much as anybody could get out of this body," he says.

Kathleen Horton, an Urban Athletics team member and a longtime competitive runner, had a mishap on her way to minimalism. About 10 years ago, her trophy collection had reached overload. "I literally had shelves and shelves of these things," she says. "There was just too much tackiness and it was too show-offy." So she decided to take a photo of all the awards and put it in an elegant frame on the shelf.

She arranged everything on a nice piece of black velvet and took the

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—Cara Macari

former NYRR age-division runner of the year has only one memento: his finisher's medal from the 1988 Boston Marathon. It is emblematic not just of that race, but of a whole chapter in his life as a runner.

"I trained like a crazy man for two years," Macari says. "I did 120-mile

shot. When the photo came back from processing as an indistinguishable black blur, she had already thrown out the awards. "I was surprised that I wasn't more upset," she says. She had redecorated her shelves, and "it looked so much better."