

# Feats of endurance

**C**onstable Noel Hanna, a dog handler at Hillsborough Castle has, over the past year and a half become something of a superman in terms of endurance tests. The very remarkable thing about him is that he went straight from running a half marathon to achieving a very impressive record of sporting excellence and achievement.

In November of 1997 he decided to have a go at a 100 mile stage race in the Himalayas at heights of 13,000 ft. There were 40 international competitors and Noel managed to win the event in a time of 15 hours 54. An amazing result on his first real test and he raised over £18,000 for the British Brain and Spine Foundation at the Royal Victoria Hospital.

His next challenge came ten months later when he entered another 100 mile endurance race,

called the Los Angeles Crest. This time it was non stop across very mountainous terrain in the national park with heights of over 9,000 ft. There were a total of 167 competitors in this event, but only 79 finished the race. Noel was placed 19th in the field with a time of 23 hours 51.

The next month in October 98 Noel became the first RUC officer to win the Army Canine Biathlon, which is a six mile course consisting of shooting and an obstacle course accompanied by a dog. There were 44 competitors from the Army, RAF Prison Service and Police.

In April this year he decided to try an even longer race - the "Marathon Des Sables", which was over 140 miles across the Sahara Desert. Commenting on the conditions Noel said "It was a really gruelling race. The location was about 300 miles south of Marrakesh and the extremes of heat and cold were difficult to bear. The temperatures ranged from around freezing point

at night to a sizzling 40 degrees centigrade during the day. It is bad enough simply running in those conditions, but we had to carry our own camping equipment and food. It wasn't easy." Nevertheless Noel finished in 30th place out of 589 competitors.

This month (July) he is competing in the "Bad Water Race", which is 137 miles non-stop across Death Valley in the Nevada Desert USA. There will be only 40 competitors, who are there by invitation only. He thinks that "Bad Water" will prove to be his greatest challenge to date, because it covers three mountain ranges for a total of 13,000 ft of vertical ascent and 4,700 ft of descent. It is one of the most demanding and extreme ultra-marathons.

When asked about preparation for such an event he said: "I am running in the Mourne's regularly to help me deal with the peaks, but my main worry is the tremendous heat which is likely to

be between 120 and 140 degrees Fahrenheit. To acclimatise myself to that I have taken to using an exercise bike in the sauna!"

Later this year Noel is to captain a 4 person Ireland team taking part in the "Eco Challenge in Argentina. This is the toughest of the 10 day multi-sport endurance events, attracting over 50 teams from 31 countries. The Ireland team is made up of 2 from the Republic of Ireland and 2 from Northern Ireland. It is a cross-border / cross-community team fully supported by both Governments. Disciplines include kayaking, canoeing, navigation, rock/ice climbing, mountaineering and horse riding. The team are currently seeking sponsorship to help with the cost of competing in the "Eco-Challenge" so if anyone has any bright ideas, contact Noel.

We wish Noel the best of luck at Bad Water and later in the year in Argentina.

