

Running 51 marathons in 50 days clearly isn't difficult enough for Sam Thompson



**TOP 10**  
Every month, *MF* brings you a countdown of the weird and wonderful from the world of fitness

# The world's top fitness feats

Ultra-runner Sam Thompson recently clocked up 51 marathons in 50 days to earn his place in *MF*'s top ten most impressive feats of fitness

## 1 Greatest marathon runner

Between July and August this year, 25-year-old Sam Thompson ran 51 marathons in 50 US states in 50 days. This came as a shock to fellow ultra-runner Dean Karnazes, who had been planning to run 50 marathons in 50 states in 50 days – one short of Thompson's total. 'He [Thompson] snuck up on us but what he did is incredibly inspirational,' Karnazes told *MF* before he set off on 17th September. 'I don't get caught up in the one-upmanship but stay tuned after the 50 marathons because I might not stop there,' he added, getting caught up in the one-upmanship. You can follow Karnazes' progress at [endurance50.com](http://endurance50.com).

## 2 Longest river swim

In 2004 Slovenian ultra-marathon swimmer Martin Strel took a dip in the Yangtze River in China. He emerged 51 days and over 4,003km later after completing the longest ever recorded swim. Next year he plans to tackle 5,460km of the Amazon in 70 days ([amazonswim.com](http://amazonswim.com)), which works out at around 218,400 lengths of your local pool.

## 3 Fastest Everest climb

For most, climbing Everest takes months of preparation and weeks to complete. For Sherpa Pemba Dorje, though, it's a day trip. In 2004 the Nepalese mountaineer scaled the world's highest peak in eight hours and ten minutes, beating the previous best by over two hours.

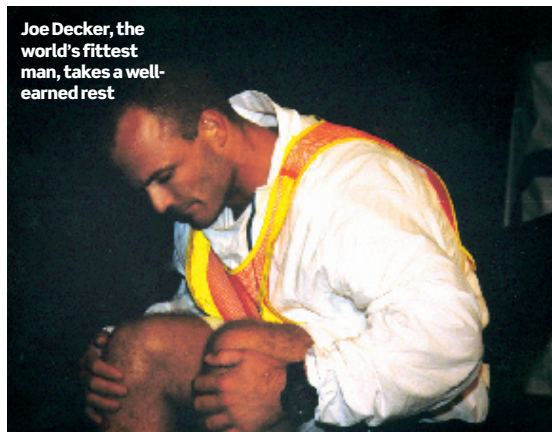
## 4 World's fittest man

A controversial one, this. To earn the title of 'world's fittest man', Joe Decker spent 24 hours doing 100 miles of cycling, ten miles of running, ten miles of hiking, five miles of power walking, six miles of kayaking, two miles of swimming, ten miles on a Nordic Track, ten miles on a rower, 3,000 ab crunches, 1,100 push-ups, 1,100 jumping jacks and 1,000 leg lifts before lifting 278,540lb. The title of 'world's fittest athlete' is also claimed by Brit Paddy Doyle, but we've gone with Decker because he did his challenge when he was ill. 'I was suffering from pulmonary oedema [a respiratory condition] from the Raid Galoises adventure race. I was in pretty bad shape,' Decker says. Not bad for an off day, eh?

## 5 Greatest cyclist of all time

'To be physically fit you have to be well rounded,' says Mr Fitness himself, Joe Decker. 'Lance Armstrong can ride a bike but he can't military-press his own body weight.' Maybe, but anyone who saw Armstrong destroy the Tour de France field to win in 2004 would accept his inclusion. The sixth of his seven Tour wins involved five stage victories and took him clear of the five-time winning pack of cycling

Joe Decker, the world's fittest man, takes a well-earned rest



Lance Armstrong's phenomenal Tour de France record makes him the greatest ever



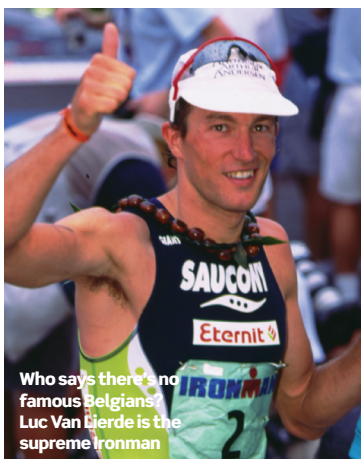
legends Eddy Merckx, Jacques Anquetil and Miguel Indurain.

## 6 First Pacific solo row

Jim Shekhdar doesn't have the profile or the medal haul of Sir Steve Redgrave or Sir Matthew Pinsent, but in 2001 the 60-year-old from Leamington Spa became the first person to row solo and unsupported across the Pacific Ocean. The 8,000-mile trip from Peru to Australia took 274 days and was nearly cut short by sharks, ocean-hogging oil tankers and diminishing food supplies.

## 7 Fastest Ironman

There aren't many people who can run a marathon in under two hours 42 minutes. And there are even fewer who can do it after swimming 3.8km and cycling 180km. But that's what Belgium's Luc Van Lierde did in 1996 when he set the current Ironman World Championship



Who says there's no famous Belgians? Luc Van Lierde is the supreme ironman

record of 8:04:08. It's not the fastest ever Ironman but that time was less than 15 minutes faster than this one, and it was done on an easier course without the intense competitive element of the sport's main event in Hawaii. Oh, and it was achieved by one Mr Luc Van Lierde. He also demonstrated the technical ability of the Olympic distance (1.5km, 40km, 10km) without the drop-off in speed associated with longer races.

## 8 Heaviest bench press

If you ask the average bloke in the gym how much he can bench press, he's likely to say, 'I can do about 80kg...' and he's probably lying. That's why you can only admire US power-lifter Scot Mendelson's vein-popping 1,008lb (457kg) world record, which he set earlier this year.

## 9 Longest jog

Only one man can officially claim to have run round the world and that's Danish ultra-distance runner Jesper Olsen (not to be confused with the diminutive Man Utd winger from the 1980s). The 26,232km jog, which started and finished in London, took a knee-knocking 22 months between 2004-2005 to complete, although he did sort of cheat by flying over the watery bits.

## 10 Hardest endurance fighter

No fitness feat list would be complete without an entry from MF's old chum and serial record-breaker Paddy Doyle. In November 2005 he fought 141 one-minute rounds of kumite (karate sparring), winning 127 and losing 24. 'For the last 25 rounds I was in a complete daze. I was concussed for about a month afterwards,' says Doyle. Not surprising, really - his opponents were a mixture of British, European and world champions. ☐

Do you agree with our selection? Have we overlooked another Herculean effort? Let us know by emailing [letters.mensfitness@dennis.co.uk](mailto:letters.mensfitness@dennis.co.uk).

You know how your fingers go wrinkly if you have a long bath? Spare a thought for Martin Strel, who swam 4,003km

