

by JEFF HOLLOBAUGH

So, how tough can it be to win 8 consecutive TAC Cross Country titles? All it involves is showing up and winning 8 years in a row. In fact, it sounds pretty darn simple after talking to the only man who has ever done it, Pat Porter.

The man from Alamosa, who spent much of the summer on a motorcycle cruising the Southwest with his girlfriend, Olympic high jumper Trish King, makes it clear that he wants his career to be about more than cross country titles. And there's more to him than his notorious panther tattoo:

T&FN: How important is the TAC cross country race?

Porter: Important. It's been pretty important to win over the years. It's important because everybody makes a big deal out of it. To be honest, I never looked at it as going for 8 in a row. It just turned out that way after 8 years. People try to win national titles; I just happen to have won 8. I guess 8's kind of important.

People think this is why I didn't run outdoors after TAC. I just didn't run outdoor because I was just beat, just beat up. Didn't care. I got on my motorcycle and rode 4000M and didn't think of running.

T&FN: Did the pressure get to you?

Porter: Nah. There's pressure in every race. It's not something that's detrimental to me. It's something you live with as an athlete. I took six solid weeks off this summer; didn't run a step. I took that off because I was starting to crash.

I came back from Seoul last fall, and started cross country training the day I got back. When everyone else had a break, I was gearing up for cross country. I just didn't have a rest, and I was starting to get really fatigued. And I wasn't even going to run TAC outdoors.

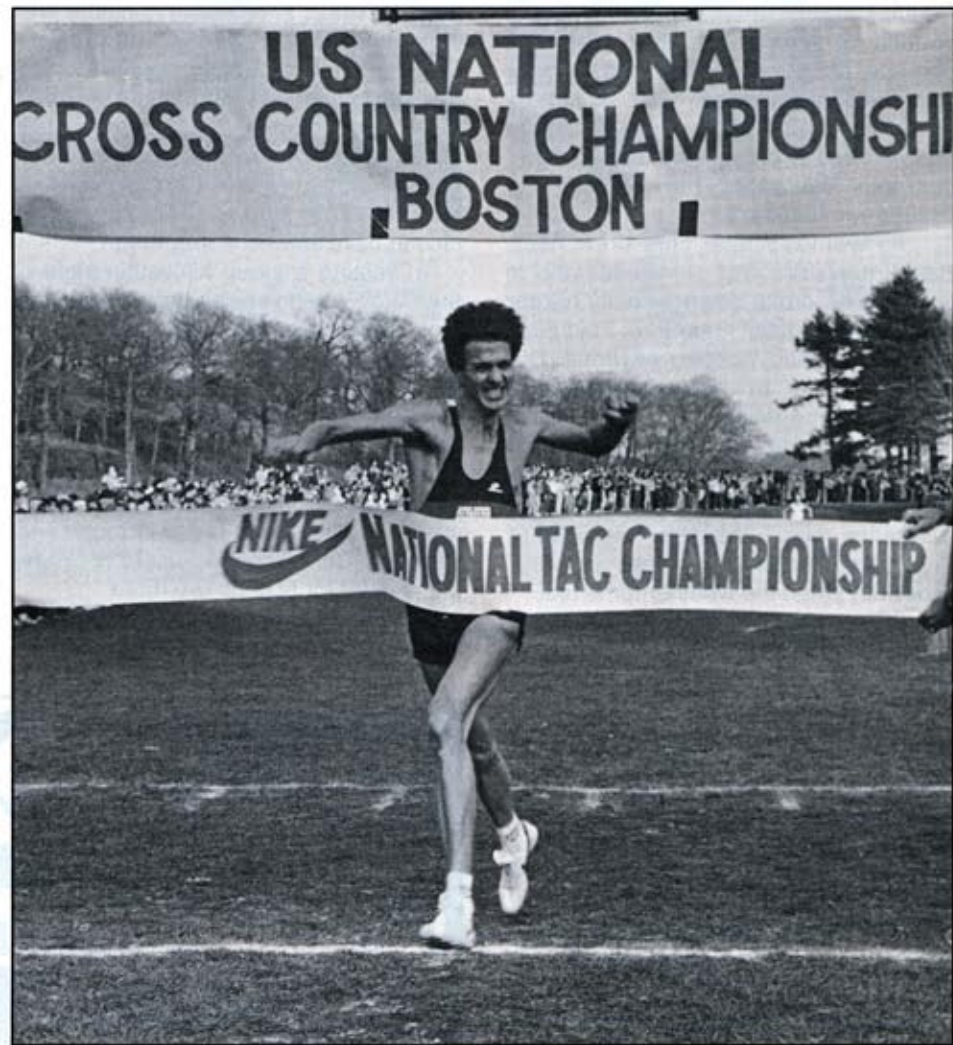
It was either TAC outdoors or the whole European season. I thought, "Well, TAC's one race." I won it. . . and took a much-needed mental break, because I was starting to really crash.

T&FN: Word has it you won't run the World Cross Country race.

Porter: We'll have to see what happens. A lot of people ran fast in Europe last summer, and I've usually come off a real hard cross country season and jumped right into track. So I've never gone into a track season

T&FN INTERVIEW

PAT PORTER



The quintessential Porter, winning TAC cross country—this one his third, in 1984.

fresh. I know I can run. . . I can run as fast as almost anybody out there, if I'm ready for it. I just haven't had the opportunity to do it, so we'll have to see what happens. So the World Cross is kind of tentative right now.

T&FN: How has your relationship with Coach Joe Vigil evolved?

Porter: Good. He's a coach, but he's a good friend too. We can talk about anything. If I'm having trouble with my life, I can go chat with him. We've got a good relationship going.

He's been real busy the last few years. The athlete and coach one-on-

oneness has kind of grown apart a little bit. You know, he's got the Adams State team, his work with Reebok, and his involvement in TAC. He's got a lot of irons in the fire. Unfortunately, mine's not the first one he grabs anymore, but it's still a good relationship.

I know what I have to do to get fit, probably just like everybody else my age. But it's nice to have that reinforcement of a coach being there when you're feeling lackadaisical; when you're not excited, to have someone kick you in the pants and get you motivated. He's good at that. That's kind of what I miss when he's gone.

T&FN: You've been at it a while now. How have you aged as a runner?

Porter: I think quite well. Pretty well. Injurywise, I've had nothing major. I broke a bone in my foot once. And then I got a bone spur, but that I got chipped out. Other than that, I've come through really well.

I think I've aged well—I PR almost every year at something or other. So I keep improving.

T&FN: How long do you see yourself keeping it up?

Porter: I think about Carlos Lopes. I've got 8 years before I get to the level where I thought he might be old. I'm 30—he was 38 when he was still kicking everybody's butt. World Cross Championships back-to-back, an Olympic gold medal.

And I haven't even started marathoning yet. I've got a lot of way to go in the 5 and the 10. I'll probably be doing that at least five more years before I even start the marathon.

T&FN: Do you get many calls from marathon directors?

Porter: All the time. I don't know. I just haven't had the right incentive yet. Money isn't something that you talk about all the time. They all contact me: "When you going to run one?" I haven't had anybody seriously approach me yet. I think I can run a really good one. I really think so.

Of course, experience is everything in a marathon. Obviously, I don't have any. I've traditionally done marathon-type training. I do long runs, long intervals. I've always run pretty high mileage, because it's worked best for me for the shorter distances. The transition in training wouldn't be that great. I think I can adapt pretty well to it.

On the other hand, [laughs] a lot of other people have said the same thing and died ugly deaths out there.

T&FN: How does an elite runner make it financially in this country without road racing every weekend?

Porter: I do get road races, I do clinics, things like that. I've got my Nike contract, which is very nice. I was never money-motivated to start with.

T&FN: That's clear from the races you choose.

Porter: Yeah. I guess maybe I'm a purist. People razz me for that, but I'm doing what I like to do. There will be a time for the money. And like I said, I'm still improving. Some money will come; more money will come. But if I

turn in six digits a year, what's the difference, you know? What's more money? I'm doing fine with that. I don't need to push.

T&FN: Most of the articles on you sound the same, focusing on Pat Porter as the nomadic harrier type. . .

Porter: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. . .

T&FN: So what's different now?

Porter: More transition to the track coming up. There are a lot of people out there running fast that I know I can at least run as well as. I've never run a track season fresh yet. This year might be the beginning of it.

Who knows, [laughs] I may blow up. I may run worse, I don't know.

T&FN: Did hearing about all the sub 27:20 races last summer get your interest up for track?

Porter: Most definitely. I'm totally confident I can run that. There's no doubt in my mind. It's just a matter of getting in there fresh. You can't go into a race like that half-cocked and expect to run that fast.

In '88, I trained for World Cross but didn't emphasize it. I ran 27:46 early in '88 and hadn't really trained hard for it at all. To go into that and not be fully trained and still run 27:40s in the U.S., early. . . by the end of the year, I can run in the teens. I know I can. I'm kind of excited thinking about that.

T&FN: Do you have any pet theories on why you're one of the few elite American distance runners who even bother with the track?

Porter: Because 28:20 will not get you a pat on the back in Europe. Unless you're the best, a Saïd Aouita or a Steve Cram, you don't make anything in Europe. Nobody's going to give you any money—a hotel room, maybe. And so why go over there? You can stay home and make some money. It's just different priorities.

When you go to Europe and you tell somebody you ran 28-something on the road, they go, "Oh, that's nice. Let me do my business over here with the real athletes."

T&FN: You might as well spend your summer motorcycling.

Porter: Yeah [laughs]. Don't knock it. I was beat from training, and it was what I needed.

We covered Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico. Not too far from where I live. It was fantastic. We got two Harleys.

I tell you, there's nothing like it.

Porter Passes Lash

Pat Porter is now the most successful cross country runner in American history. Don Lash, running for Indiana and the Indiana State Police, won 7 national titles between 1934 and 1940.

Porter tied that record in 1988 and broke the knot with his soggy run in San Francisco in November (see p. 62).

The winners of three or more AAU/TAC titles, dating from 1890:

- 8 — Pat Porter ('82-'89)
- 7 — Don Lash ('34-'40)
- 5 — Willie Ritola' ('22-'23, '25-'27)
- 4 — Frank Shorter ('70-'73)
- 3 — Frank Bellars ('07-'08, '10)
- Willie Kramer ('09, '11-'12)
- Fred Wilt ('49, '52-'53)

Although it was kind of hot in a lot of places. Through Arizona it was around 100°, over 100° in some places. You've got to wear a coat or something, because if you don't, you'll just smoke. You'll get burnt. You'll get blistered. But most of the time it was nice. Riding over the mountain passes was really fun.

T&FN: How do you compare to Trish as an athlete?

Porter: She's just a talent. She can do anything. I'm glad we don't do weight room workouts together. She could make me look silly.

T&FN: Can she outlift you?

Porter: I can get her on the bench and most other things just out of male pride, but I wouldn't even try to compete with her in the squat. She's tough.

Patrick Ralph Porter was born May 31, 1959, in Wadena, Minnesota, and is 6-2/135. He graduated from Evergreen (Colorado) High School in 1977, and attended Metro CC in 1978 before transferring to Adams State College. He graduated with a degree in marketing in 1982. His 10,000 best of 27:46.80 ('88) ranks him No. 9 all-time among Americans.

His placings at the World Cross Country Championships: '82—64th; '83—9th; '84—4th; '85—12th; '86—6th; '87—7th; '88—28th; '89—31st.

His progression (with U.S. Rankings in parentheses):

Year	Age	5000	10,000	Major Meets
'77	18	9:40.2M	—	—
'82	23	—	28:26.27 (9)	6)TAC, 1)OF
'83	24	13:50.271	28:04.31 (6)	5)TAC
'84	25	—	27:49.5 (5)	3)OT, 15)OG
'85	26	13:34.98	28:12.46 (4)	3)TAC, 2)WCP
'86	27	—	27:57.3 (6)	—
'87	28	14:01.8	28:07.9 (6)	4)TAC
'88	29	13:33.91(9)	27:46.80 (2)	3)OT, 11h)OG
'89	30	—	28:15.59 (2)	1)TAC