

## ALBERTO SALAZAR

**A**lberto Salazar is a proud man. Talking about his 1983 season is not particularly easy for him, its results having been far off what he had hoped—and what his admirers had expected—they would be. Salazar came into the World Championships year riding the crest of successive No. 1 rankings in the marathon, an event in which he held the World Record and had never lost.

Although the year started well enough, with a pair of road ARs in the 10K, things soured quickly, as the mantle of marathon invincibility came tumbling down in the big head-to-head with Rob de Castella in Rotterdam, Salazar ending up 5th.

He fared no better on the track. Hampered by bronchitis, he was a humbling last-placer in the World Championships 10,000.

December's Fukuoka Marathon was supposed to bring retribution. It did not, as he ended up 5th again, although those who read into the results a little deeper will discover that his time there, 2:09:21, is the fastest ever turned in by an American on a non-point-to-point course.

Despite his setbacks, Alberto has grown and matured and he is gracious in his explanation and analysis of what went wrong. He is not bitter or angry. The only hint of temper he exhibits is when the title of "unbeatable" is hung on him. He knows that that pretension is—and always was—meaningless, especially in the marathon.

He has become a more complete marathoner: strong, patient, thoughtful. He has extracted lessons from each competitive disappointment and then put it behind him. He doesn't brood; he only plans ahead. He will be a factor in Los Angeles.

Despite the fact that his marathon season wasn't quite good enough to get him into the World Rankings, Salazar remains the best road racer in America, as he rates as the T&FN Road Runner Of The Year for the third straight time (see p. 82).

Alberto shared his thoughts about his generally disappointing 1983 year and his hopes for 1984 as he helped infant son Antonio eat breakfast, all the while hoping that his water pipes would soon be repaired after the late-year cold spell which blanketed the country had done its dirty work in Eugene:

**T&FN:** Talk for a moment about Fukuoka. What were your goals going in and how do you feel about the outcome?

**Salazar:** I thought I would do better than I did. I was quoted as saying I was in the best shape of my life. I believed it. Now, looking back, I see that was ridiculous.

The reason I thought I was in such good shape was that I had had 10 good weeks of training. I had had a lot of long runs, 24-mile runs. My mileage was high, no injuries, no soreness. I hadn't been sick. So I thought I was in better shape than I was.

The reason for that is, I usually go into the 10 weeks of training in better shape; 27:30 10,000 shape. This time I went into the 10 weeks out of shape. I



Charles Shaffer

couldn't run 5 miles at 5:00 pace. Before, I would go into the buildup able to run 6-plus miles at 4:25 pace.

That's the difference. I would go into the 10 weeks in great shape. Looking back, I just wasn't in good enough shape for Fukuoka. I had good strength but not the speed. I just couldn't pick it up at the end.

**T&FN:** *How about 1983: what do you see as the high points and the low points? Why wasn't it a very good year?*

**Salazar:** Well, there weren't many high points. I won the cross country trials and got 4th in the World Cross Country. That race wasn't even very gratifying because, even though I was only a second behind the winner, I never was in command or pushing the pace. That was the start of the downfall; the first hint of my not running well.

**T&FN:** *How did finishing last in the Helsinki 10,000 affect you?*

**Salazar:** Being back there was embarrassing. At the same time, I didn't want to quit. It was ridiculous, though, all that talk about being last. Not making the final in the first place would have gotten less press. Even if I had dropped out, that would have gotten less press than being last. Still, I would rather finish 17th than not finish at all.

**T&FN:** *Did Helsinki change your thinking about the 10,000 and your future in that event?*

**Salazar:** It didn't change my thinking; the whole year did. And so did the strain of preparing to run two events; the shorter speedwork necessary to run a 10,000.

I still think I can run a good 10,000 and still train for the marathon. But to maximize my chances of winning at 10,000 and continuing to train for the marathon—it's just too hard.

It's just too difficult to develop that sprinting speed and do the other training besides. I realize that I can't do both, but it wasn't just Helsinki that did it. It was the entire year. A lot of the colds and illnesses I got were the result of stress. So much mileage, so much work.

**T&FN:** *Do you think your two marathons in 1983 hurt your image?*

**Salazar:** Maybe the image other people had of me; that I was "unbeatable." Anyone can be beaten. I know what I have done and I don't really care what people think.

It's great to be acknowledged, but now people are writing me off. I was able to run those times before anyone else—well, at least I was the first one to do it since Derek Clayton did a dozen years ago. I knew I could do it then and I did it. It's only a matter of time until I get everything right again.

**T&FN:** *Prior to Rotterdam, the media did hang that unbeatable title on you. Did you believe it?*

**Salazar:** No. I didn't believe it. A lot of my comments have been distorted. I was asked, "What will it take to beat you?" I said it would take someone who was fast on the track, a good 10,000 runner. That doesn't mean that unless someone has run my times, I won't get beat. That's ridiculous. What I meant was, if I'm at 100% and I'm running against someone 40-60 seconds slower than me, I feel I have the advantage. That was changed to, "No one can beat me." Dick Beardsley almost beat me and he is slower at 10,000.

**T&FN:** *Did finishing 5th in both your marathons bother you?*

**Salazar:** The second one bothered me more. At Fukuoka, I was disappointed that I didn't fight for 3rd place. I know I could have beaten the Soh brothers.

I was so disappointed and disgusted with myself that I pretty much jogged that last half-mile. That bothered me. I thought to myself, "You never did this before, when you were climbing your way up the ladder. Now you're not fighting."

I will never do that again. Anyone who beats me will really have to work for it.

**T&FN:** *What was the Rotterdam race like, meeting Rob de Castella for the first time and losing?*

**Salazar:** In terms of de Castella, I met him in the last two World Cross Country races, so I knew him. I knew he liked to hang back in races, and I never did that, a holdover from track racing where you can't let the leaders get away. So I saw that in the marathon being up there the entire time isn't so important.

As far as losing, it was disappointing. On the other hand, I'm glad I went. I wasn't sure I was going until the morning I left. I had a sore groin, but not a big problem, so I just wasn't sure if I could run. I had run other marathons with similar problems—Boston, New York—and I didn't back out of those races and I didn't want to back out of Rotterdam.

People told me I had everything to lose and nothing to gain if I ran. But I thought there was something to lose if I didn't run at all. I've never been afraid to run and lose, so I ran but I felt I did the best I could. I've seen a lot of runners who only run safe races—when you're 100% fit. Sometimes you have to run when you're not fully fit, though.

**T&FN:** *If everyone—de Castella, Seko, Cierpinski—lines up in Los Angeles, who would be the most troublesome?*

**Salazar:** I would say... de Castella... and Seko... and Cierpinski. There could be a lot of other guys, too.

**T&FN:** *Are you concerned about who is in a race or do you just follow your own plan?*

**Salazar:** I run according to who is up there. If I can get myself strong enough, I

can handle whatever anyone else can do in the race. If I can get myself to 27:30 shape in the 10,000, or even 27:20, and do all the strength work, I'll be very confident that I'll be able to stay with anyone.

**T&FN:** *Give some feelings about your leading competitors. First Rod Dixon.*

**Salazar:** I don't think he is a proven marathoner, not that you have to be. I just don't see him as a top threat. At New York, they had perfect conditions; he ran a good time, but I don't think he's capable of running much faster since he really tied up at the end. I'm not so worried about him.

**T&FN:** *Lopes?*

**Salazar:** He's a definite threat, just because of how well he ran the first marathon he completed, Rotterdam. He got a silver medal in Montreal in the 10,000, but he never really runs to win. In Helsinki, he was in good shape but played right into the kickers's hands. I think he's a guy who will always be 2nd or 3rd.

**T&FN:** *Seko?*

**Salazar:** He will be very tough. The only weakness he has is that the Japanese runners are very regimented. Everything is done for them; they're very pampered. Los Angeles will not be like that. It will be a lot different. Also, he always runs behind someone, a nice even pace. I'd like to see what he does in an Olympic marathon.

**T&FN:** *Cierpinski?*

**Salazar:** He's won two gold medals. When I look at his times and what he has done, I think, "There's no way he will win." But the fact that he has won twice means he has a good chance. I think if other people run to their potential and he runs to his, he will get beat. The question is whether people will run to their potential.

**T&FN:** *de Castella?*

**Salazar:** He's the toughest to beat. He's very consistent and he runs shorter distances, too. He's also run a lot internationally.

**T&FN:** *Given your results in Helsinki, do the Olympic Games take on added importance? Do you feel added pressure to do well?*

**Salazar:** Less pressure actually, because I have realized there is a lot of luck involved. In a particular meet or two, you can't expect everything to go right. I hope it does, and I'll certainly do everything possible to win.

If it doesn't happen and I did my best, it will not be the end of the world to me. Before, I used to think that if I didn't win an Olympic medal, I wouldn't be able to live with myself. I would always be disappointed.

That's ridiculous. Now, just a few months after Helsinki, it's like it never happened. It's just another track meet. I'm not afraid of doing badly now and that takes a lot of the pressure off.

—continued—

# Next month in T&FN ...



## Heading undercover ...

Olympic years always open with great indoor seasons, and 1984 will be no exception. The February issue of *T&FN* will bring you all the hot excitement from the early season extravaganzas: Millrose, Sunkist, Dallas, Chicago, Mason-Dixon. Expected to spice the action are a bevy of top European stars, headlined by the Women's Athlete Of The Year, Jarmila Kratochvilova.

We'll also have our traditional complement of revealing features and tell-it-all statistics. Plus our ongoing Olympic Preview series will look at the women's marathon and the men's shot and discus. Material you have to have in the Olympic Year.

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### SALAZAR INTERVIEW—continued

I will admit there is a feeling of more tension. The average sports fans, not just track fan, knows about the Olympic Games and is counting on me to do well. But the pressure doesn't bother me. I want to do well, for myself and for the United States. There are a lot of average Americans who support me. I'd like to please them, to pay back that support.

But I'm not making it an unduly pressuresome thing. The person I have to live with is me and as long as I feel as though I've done my best, I'll be able to live with myself. If other people's hopes aren't met, well, that's their concern. It's foolish to base your whole life and happiness on one race.

**T&FN:** *What did you learn from the World Record?*

**Salazar:** Well, for years I dreamed of setting World Records and winning gold medals. I always thought of it as something I wouldn't achieve until my late 20s and I was prepared for that. Then to get the record so young was such a surprise. I was only 23; it was a bit of a letdown.

All of a sudden I was at the top and I was being a lot more careful. I no longer had that attitude that I would kill myself to get to the top. I noticed the mental eagerness wasn't there. I think once you get away from that desire, you won't stay even; you'll drop back. My attitude now is to do whatever it takes to stay at the front.

**T&FN:** *What do you use now as a motivator? The Olympic Games?*

**Salazar:** Yes and just coming back and showing people and myself. I'm disappointed in myself, in the way I ran over the past year. The big motivating factor is to do my best. I don't want to look back and say, "You could have done better."

**T&FN:** *Is it possible your early successes set you up, if you will, and made the times when things weren't going well that much harder? It seems you get a lot of press when you don't do well.*

**Salazar:** I was built up as being unbeatable so that if I was beaten, I would be judged a lot harder. Even though I finished 5th in my last two marathons, the times have been decent.

There are a lot of athletes who are ranked one year and then don't even appear on the list the next year. Injury, illness and luck can easily put you out of the Top 10.

Look at Ovett and Coe. At least I competed. When you get built up so high, you get knocked down that much farther if anything goes wrong.

**T&FN:** *What will happen to Alberto Salazar after the Olympics? Will he stay in the sport through 1988?*

**Salazar:** Yes. Another World Championships; another Olympics. After that, I don't know.

**T&FN:** *Would you like to lower the marathon best again?*

**Salazar:** Yes, definitely. I know I can run faster than my record—regardless of what happens after the New York course gets remeasured. I know I can run 2 minutes faster than I did at Fukuoka. I recovered too quickly after that race.

After my other races, I could barely walk. The week after Fukuoka I ran 80 miles. Twelve days later, I was doing intervals. It really showed me the strength is there.

Also, I didn't rest enough before Japan because I was experimenting with a new taper. I did a hard track workout over there, too. In hindsight, I probably left a bit of my race on the training rack. Now I know I definitely will rest more before Los Angeles.

**T&FN:** *How did the setbacks of 1983 affect your life away from track?*

**Salazar:** I'm disappointed when I run poorly, but my faith as a Christian helps me take it in stride. I believe whenever anything happens, there is a reason. That doesn't mean that I don't have any control. I think God gives us a lot of accountability for ourselves, but I feel that if I've done the best I possibly can, for the right reasons, then I can accept it. I feel it's God's will.

I really believe a lot of those trials and bad times that I went through last year that God was trying to teach me something. I'll be a lot stronger this year physically and spiritually. I've realized for the first time that running isn't the most important thing in the world and shouldn't be. I can survive without it. That feeling has really taken the pressure off.

It is terrible to feel as though you have to win—it's much better to relax. I used to think you had to go to the line all steamed up, ready to go. Now I think that's a real waste of energy. The 1983 season was tough on me at the time, but by not collapsing, I think it's made me a better person. □

Alberto Bauduy Salazar was born August 7, 1958, in Havana, Cuba, and is 6-0/145. Married to former Oregon 10,000 runner Molly Morton. Competes for Athletics West. Graduated from University of Oregon ('81—redshirt in '80), Wayland, Massachusetts, High School ('76). Holds WR, AR in marathon; ARs at 5000, 10,000, indoor 5000 (13:22.6) and road 10km (28:01). Has run more sub-2:10 marathons than anyone (5). TAC 10,000 champ '81, '83. PRs (with World and U.S. all-time positions): 3000—7:43.79 '79 (10, x US); 5000—13:11.93 AR '82 (8, x W); 10,000—27:25.61 AR '82 (5, 7 W); Mar—2:08:13' WR, AR. His progression (with World and U.S. rankings in parentheses):

Year	5000	10,000	Marathon
1975	14:14.6		
1976	14:04.8		
1977	13:47.8	29:03.4 (x,10)	
1978	13:37.33	28:46.55 (x, 7)	
1979	13:22.31 (x, 4)	28:06.12 (x, 2)	
1980	13:23.62 (x, 5)	27:49.3 (x, 2)	2:09:41' (4, 1)
1981	13:22.61 (x, 4)	27:40.69 (6, 1)	2:08:13' (1, 1)
1982	13:11.93 (8, 1)	27:25.61 (2, 1)	2:08:51' (1, 1)
1983	13:28.131 (x, 7)	28:00.36 (x, 1)	2:09:21 (x, 1)

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