

AURU
Australian Ultra Running
5 year review 2002 – 2006

I was appointed as President of AURA in July 2002, so am now mid way through my fifth year. It is therefore timely to review the last five years and to plan for the next five. Whether I remain in office depends very largely on the wishes of members and my Committee.

Highlights

The key achievements during this period are

1. the fielding of official Australian men's teams at the IAU 100km World Cups in 2004, 2005 & 2006, the fielding of a women's team in 2006 (the first in many years), the fielding of a men's team in the 24 hr World Cup in 2006 (the first ever) and the fielding of representatives in the IAU 50 km trophy final for the first time ever. Hopefully the foundation has now been set whereby we will be able to field official teams every year from this point forward in these major international races.
2. the raising of the standard of 50km and 100km road racing and the rekindling of interest in the 24 hour track event. There is quite some interest from promising athletes who have not previously represented Australia, to qualify for the 24 hour World challenge to be held in Canada in 2007.
3. the closer association with Athletics Australia, through the Australian Athletic Federation
4. the closer association with the International Association of Ultrarunners
5. the development of the Hall of Fame, to recognise the achievements of past Australian ultra runners and to perpetuate awareness of their exploits
6. the emergence of interest in the AURA aggregate points competition, more so in 2006, designed to increase awareness and to stimulate participation and excellence
7. the development of the AURA 100, 200 and 250 clubs to stimulate interest in achieving those marks in track racing
8. the improvement in the presentation of Ultramag with the introduction of partial colour from the December 2004 issue.
9. the introduction of Life Memberships and the various annual awards, such as male and female athlete of the year, rising star awards, the Bryan Smith trophy for outstanding contribution to the sports and the Cliff Young gumboot award.
10. the introduction of AURA annual championship races for 50km and 100km road, 24 hr, 48 hr and 6 day track and trail.

Race participation

Schedule 1.1 shows total event participations. They have grown almost four-fold from 1548 in 2002 to 6162 in 2006. This is nothing for which AURA can claim credit as the majority of the numbers come from Oxfam (Melbourne & Sydney), Six Foot track, Great Ocean Road and the more recently established Kokoda Challenge. However, it shows very clearly that there are people out there who are prepared to participate in ultra events.

Schedules 1.1 and 1.2 show that the major growth has been in trail events. I believe that this is not necessarily because people prefer trail to road. The huge numbers of people who run the Comrades marathon in South Africa is evidence of this. What I'm saying is that if the Oxfam Sydney race was conducted along the Pacific Highway between Sydney and Newcastle it would be no less popular. It's just that the logistics and costs favor off-road events.

Schedule 1.3 shows the huge growth experienced by the two Oxfam events in particular. This highlights the need for well-planned and well conducted marketing. It also raises the desirability of including the corporate sector and the consequential need to involve a charity.

Schedule 1.4 shows the trends of the various trail races promoted by AURA with numbers of more than 20. Schedule 1.5 shows the trends of the minor races with contestants of less than 20.

Schedule 1.6 shows the trend with road racing contrasting the Great Ocean Road marathon with all others. GOR won hands down, presumably because it's easier (being just longer than a marathon) and has a marvelous vista, combined with aggressive marketing.

Schedule 1.7 shows the trends with the races other than GOR. The Canberra 50 km is the most popular, again because it's marketed in conjunction with a major marathon. Full marks to Dave Cundy for having the courage to include the 50km option many years ago.

Schedule 1.8 shows the trends with the various track meets. Coburg leads the way, largely because of the influence of racewalking legend Tim Erickson and the race/s being available for racewalkers, especially those seeking Centurion status. It is interesting to note that the level of participation in 24 hour racing has slumped since the years of Westfield (1983-1991) when 24 hour races were used to enable those contestants to qualify. I think it safe to say that Coburg, Adelaide and Gold Coast track races would not survive without the options of shorter events (6 hr and 12 hr). It is a great pity that the Cliff Young Six Day race was not held in 2006 and I hope that it is able to resume in 2007.

Schedule 2.1 shows that marathon racing in Australia is buoyant. This is important to us, as marathon racers are likely to at least try an ultra at some stage. It is our job to make the experience interesting and one which the participant would like to repeat.

It would be remiss of me if I were to not mention the wonderful job done by Kevin Tiller and his crew at CoolRunning for the promotion of running in general.

AURA membership

Schedule 3.1 shows the trend in AURA membership numbers. They have increased from 178 in 2002 to 260 in 2006, not a huge increase but nonetheless significant.

Schedule 3.2 shows the trend in the three major States i.e. Victoria, NSW and Qld. The big mover is Qld where numbers have increased from 23 to 61, a jump of 165%. Vic has improved from 62 to 80, an improvement of 29%. NSW has been disappointing with an increase of only 17%. Schedule 3.3 shows the trends in the other States.

Quite clearly the membership numbers have a direct relevance with available races. At one end of the spectrum, Qld and Victoria both have active trail, road and track racing whereas NSW has virtually none, except for Six Foot which, although a great race, is barely beyond a marathon.

Financial

Annual subscription revenue has almost trebled over the 5 year review period. In 2006 it was \$15,662, compared with \$5,815 in 2002. Schedule 4.1 refers. A hard decision was taken in 2004 to increase subs from \$25 to \$45 per person, effective 2005. It was thought that this may have had a temporary detrimental effect on membership numbers, but numbers actually increased in 2005 from 209 to 248. No doubt this was due in large part to the color magazine and increased interest in races.

The cost of producing Ultramag, remains static at \$11k, up from \$7.3k for the mono version in 2002. At 250 members, the cost of production is approximately \$10/copy. However, most of this is in set-up costs and extra copies cost less than \$2 each.

Moneys spent on sending athletes to contest world championships and for the AURA points score competition are considered monies well spent. These costs have been more than covered from revenues from donations, advertising and provision of insurance. Details of sundry revenues are contained in schedule 4.2.

AURA remains in a healthy position financially with funds on hand at end 2006 of \$11k after allowing for payment for printing the December issue of Ultramag and after allowing \$5.6k for payments to 100k WC athletes.

Summary

To summarise, long distance running is alive and well. Participations in marathons including SixFoot and Great Ocean Road are higher in the five year review period. Participations in Trailwalkers and the Kokoda Challenge show conclusively that given the right circumstances and with good marketing, numbers can be increased very substantially. Participations in other ultra races, with which AURA is more closely aligned, have increased by 50% from 608 in 2002 to 904 in 2006.

The position of AURA and ultra running in Australia has been consolidated and the stage is now set to move forward exponentially with proper planning, promotion and marketing.

Ian Cornelius
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