

Adventure teams rarely have the luxury of sticking to a bike trail.

Racing for glory

■ A local team is on its way to the Adventure Race World Championship this month – after beating seemingly insurmountable odds to capture both third place in a three-day qualifying event in the wilds of New Hampshire, and a berth in the Worlds.



by Carol Latter

The five-day, non-stop race in Portugal, set for November 8 to 13, will pit 70 teams against each other in a grueling competition that will leave little time for sleep or food.

Hartford resident and team member Fritjof Pameijer said while three of the four team members have been racing together for several years, this will be the most challenging race of their lives. "While we are not sure of all of the disciplines, we do know we will be mountain biking, trekking, snorkeling, canyoneering, inline skating and paddling while navigating through remote wilderness, and being entirely self-sufficient for the duration of the race."

Berlin Bike

Adventure Racing Team got its start three years ago, and since then, has been consistently ranked as one of the top teams in the nation.

While other members fill in on specific races from time to time, the core members are team captain and Bloomfield resident Ben Moore, 42, who owns his own carpentry business; Simsbury resident Ernie Lawas, 40, principal and co-owner of a new engineering company; and Pameijer, 36, an architectural engineer. Jenny Johnson, 30, a Bethlehem, New Hampshire grade school teacher who competed against Berlin Bike in the qualifying race, will join them for the Portugal event.

These self-described "amateurs" will compete against professional teams.

There's actually more than glory up for grabs. The first place team will win \$35,000; the second place finishers will get \$17,500; and the third place team will take home \$7,500. Fourth and fifth place teams get \$5,250 apiece. And then, of course, there are the bragging rights.

Regardless of the outcome, taking part in the international competition is a dream come true for the team members.

At one point, it seemed like a dream that would elude them.

The team got off to "a miserable start" in the New Hampshire Untamed New England Adventure Race – the only North American qualifier for the Worlds. Within six hours of starting the race, they had made navigational errors that put them seriously off course. "We quickly dropped from the front of the pack to 40th place," Pameijer said.

"Navigation by map and compass is certainly challenging," explained

Lawas. "Even if you have some poor quality information that goes into describing the course, you have to do your best at putting together all of the information you have, [to find] what you believe is the proper route. It's almost a matter of interpreting what the race instructors intended you to do, versus what the race instructions actually say. If you're in mud up to your knees in a dense forest, you're probably not in the right spot."

During the New Hampshire race, he said,



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"10 to 12 teams followed us in and did the same thing. When we had spent probably in excess of two hours trying to find the proper route and you see the majority of the group pass you by, it's very disheartening and demoralizing. **You have to master your own emotions about it and bring your team back together. It isn't over till it's over.**"

Pameijer said, "We were determined to at least finish the race, [so] we continued on, making the time cut-offs to remain on full course

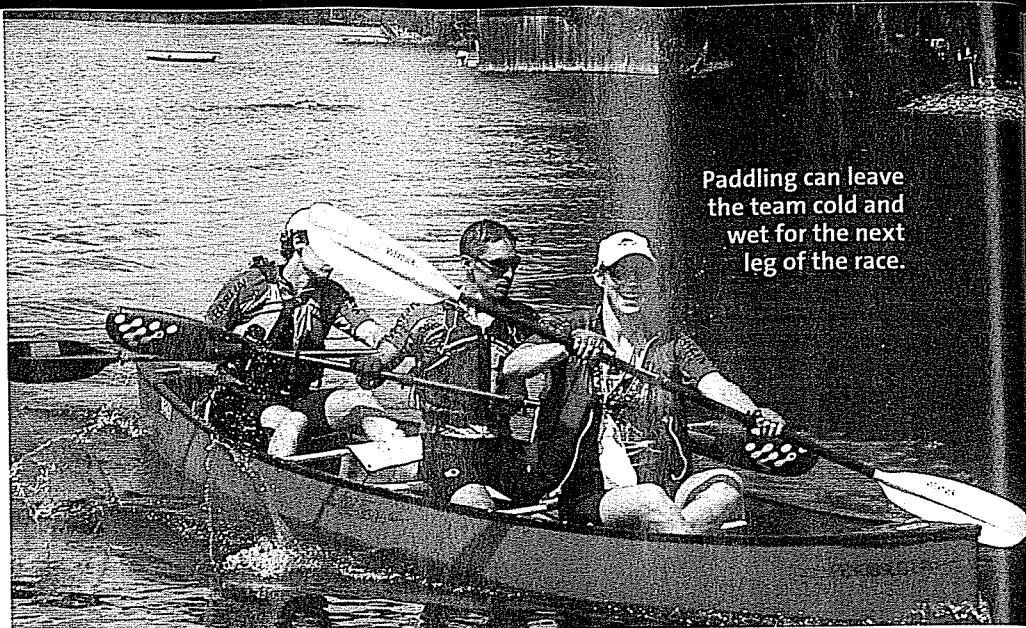
and slowly catching teams in front of us."

At the last checkpoint before the finish, Berlin Bike members learned that they were in contention for third place with the New York Adventure Racing Team (NYARA).

"Despite injuries and the fatigue of racing for three days without rest, we caught and passed NYARA to secure the third place spot. The race organizer issued a time credit in their favor for assisting another team

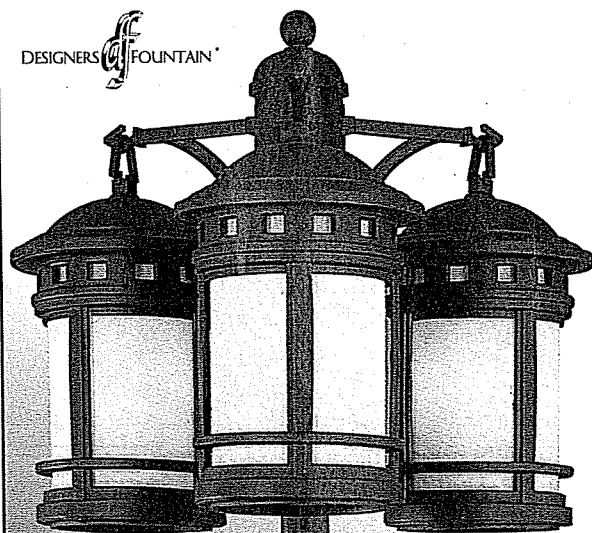
on the course, which resulted in a tie and both teams qualifying for the world championship," Pameijer said.

For the past few months, the team members have been training almost every day, includ-

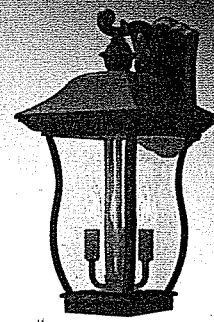
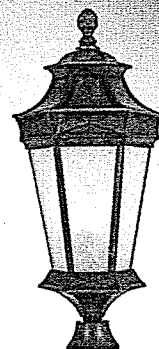
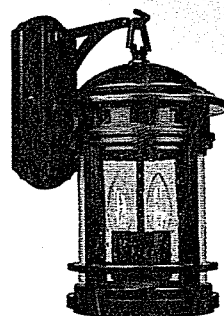


Paddling can leave the team cold and wet for the next leg of the race.

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ing weekends, putting in countless hours of running, kayaking, paddling and hiking to prepare for the Portugal event.

In addition to being in a foreign country with a language barrier, they will be in unfamiliar terrain: Lawas said while they always try to determine what a particular race route will be like using Google maps and video footage from previous years, in fact, it's anyone's guess.

"The race organizers enjoy keeping the race course secret until the day of the race," explained Pameijer. **"It's the famous mantra of, 'Expect the unexpected.'"**

The biggest hurdle for the team, however, will be coping with five days of continuous racing.

"This will be the longest race that we as a team or as individuals have ever done," said Lawas.

"I think the approach in these longer races is certainly different than 24-hour or 3-day races. Because of the level of effort and the distance to be covered, the idea of pushing yourself as long as possible without sleep is not the goal; the idea is trying to find that sweet spot – the minimal you can get while still being functional and moving as fast as possible."

In the upcoming race – or any race longer than three days – **"it's about finding a rhythm you can settle into and finding that pace, the output, that you can sustain for that number**

of days," he said.

Pameijer said in the course of trekking, kayaking, mountain biking, snorkeling, inline skating, rappelling down cliffs and ascending vertical inclines, they'll need to carry all of the gear required for the day's activities, along with several pounds of food and eight to nine pounds of water. "We'll see our gear once every 24 hours, give or take, and within 24 hours we'll see at least three [different types of activities]."

"As long as we stay on our sleep and nutrition plan, we shouldn't have any problems," said Moore, although the timing of the event means the temperatures will be variable, requiring the team members to carry more clothes.

Asked what they dislike most about adventure racing, the team members cited packing to get ready and lugging home the smelly clothes and gear afterwards.

Two said they dread the combination of being cold and wet. "I've been hypothermic in races, shivering uncontrollably so you can't eat. That is not fun; none of us have a whole lot of insulation [extra body weight] left," said Lawas.

And then there's the lack of sleep. "Literally, there have been studies proving that every 24-hour period without sleep makes your brain function at the equivalent of having a blood alcohol content of 0.1 – your motor skills and

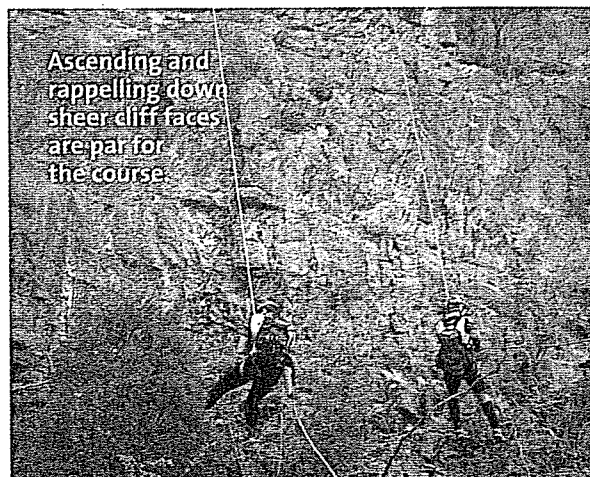
your mental capacity decrease." After New Hampshire, he said, "it was almost two weeks before I fully recovered from just the sleep deprivation, and was able to start training again."

So why do they do it?

"I like the areas that they provide for you to go to see, that you otherwise wouldn't see on your own," said Moore.

It's like testing yourself to see how much further, and faster and longer you can go, and pushing that envelope. That's what appealed to me, and we're still finding out."

Each of them has a different personal goal for the 70-team race. Lawas wants the team simply to finish the full course. Moore would like Berlin Bike to finish in



"In the middle of the night you can watch the moon rise over the middle of nowhere. It's pretty amazing."

Pameijer said he's always enjoyed being out in the woods and mountains, and spending weekends hiking around by himself. "And I love pushing myself."

As for Lawas, "I've always loved endurance sports. I started with the triathlon and built up to iron man events. And as an engineer, I like the problem-solving aspect; you have to figure out how to get your team through a racecourse in the fastest way possible.

the top 15.

Said Pameijer, "I would like to finish in the middle of the pack. Anything above that would be gravy. In every regard, we are weekend warriors. We're going up against professional teams that are paid to do this. I said the same thing in Untamed. But we ended up doing extraordinarily well."

The team's sponsors are Largay Travel, Horst Engineering, Cycling Concepts, Hammer Nutrition and Berlin Bike. Fans can follow the Portugal race in progress by visiting arwc2009.com.

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