



GUNG-HO, GUTSY DAVE NORONA TAKES ON LIFE AND SPORT AT FULL SPEED

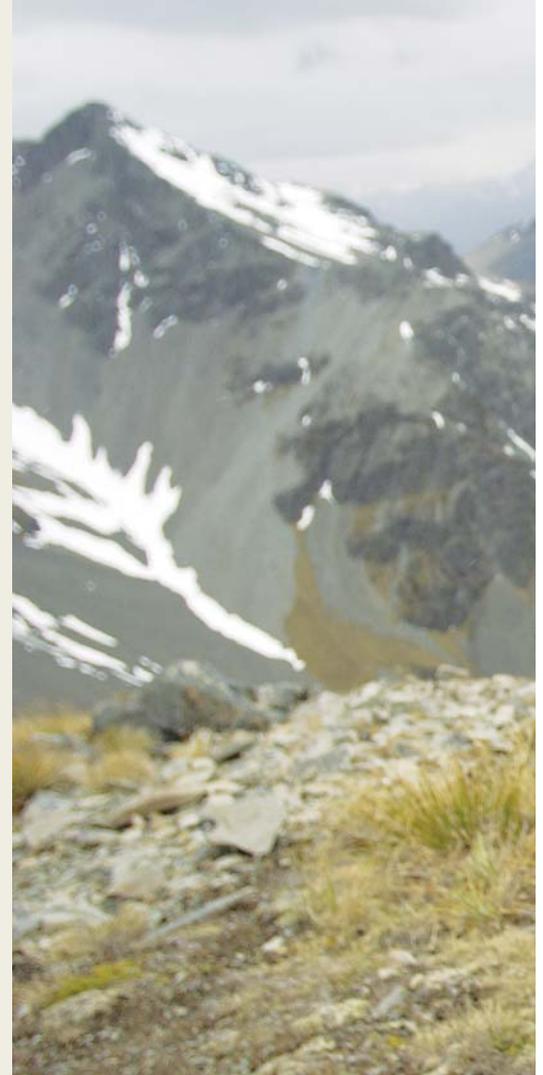
On April 3, 2000, Dave Norona, Kevin Vallely and Andy Stern skate-skied into Nome, Alaska, a city of 3,500 just south of the Arctic Circle on the Bering Strait, a 56-mile-wide band of water and ice separating northwestern Alaska from the easternmost tip of Siberian Russia. Reaching Nome marked the culmination of the Iditasport Impossible, an 1,100-mile human-powered ultra-distance race that follows the famed Iditarod dogsled course beginning in Anchorage and winds through one of the most inhospitable and dangerous climates on the planet.

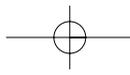
Starting with Norona, Valley and Stern in Anchorage in late February were 13 other adventurers who planned to complete the distance on skis, mountain bikes, snowshoes or by foot. Two hundred and fifty people started the race — most on bikes — but most would (only) go 130 miles, which is the length of the Iditasport course. Traveling on to 350 miles completes the Iditasport Extreme, and traveling the 1,110 miles all the way to Nome is dubbed the Iditasport Impossible.

"Of everything I've done, I'm the most proud of this," he says. "It was the hardest thing, and I learned the most about myself and what I can do.

"I thought about quitting every day," he continues, talking about the sometimes whiteout conditions and 65-degree below zero temperatures. "We wore 8,000-meter down suits to bed in the tent at night, and we stared at the white snow and sky for 15 hours a day. Sometimes you couldn't tell where the ground ended and the sky began." Norona lost nearly 40 pounds over the 33 days it took to complete the route.

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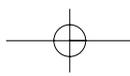




BY CAMERON ELFORD

Super-Dave

SOUNDS OFF



Super-Dave

KING OF CANADIAN ADVENTURE SPORTS

Growing up in North Vancouver on Canada's West Coast, Norona started playing soccer at age 5, then skiing in sixth grade. He says that his parents gave him downhill ski lessons at his local ski hill, Grouse Mountain, and he was hooked. "I would take an epic two-hour city bus to get there and ski all day, then take the bus back when my parent could or would not drive me," he says. "I remember standing at a bus loop in all my gear while everyone around me was wondering what I was doing in ski gear in the city." Hence, the self-driven athlete was born. Out of high school, Norona knew he wanted to be a professional athlete, so instead of college, "I worked at becoming the athlete I am today, taught myself to market myself and get new sponsors and how to train. That was more than any school could teach."

Now 35, Norona is one of the country's top adventure racers with a host of personal sponsors, permitting him to train full-time. With a diverse background as a duathlete and triathlete — combined with a stint in the early 1990s as a professional inline skater for Rollerblade — the plucky Norona, at 5-foot-6 and 132 pounds, distinguished himself in the mid-1990s as a talented athlete who pushed his limits regardless of the activity. "I was known as this hyper little guy who partied all the time then raced hard," Norona says. "One time, I partied all night at a bender in Whistler. I woke up in the morning on the floor in someone's cabin then drove back to Vancouver for a Rollerblade race and ended up smoking everyone."

A past teammate, Rob Hartvikson, calls Norona, "one of the wildest, craziest guys that I have ever raced with," and says that Norona races hard, lives hard and parties hard. "I don't know anybody else with a beer gut that is so fit."

Over the past decade, Norona has gravitated to sports that reward his ebullient, hard-charging personality and test the bottom of his near-boundless fervor and taste for adventure. When Team Salomon-Blackcomb asked Norona to join them at the 1998 Eco-Challenge in Morocco, he leapt at the chance. "I was like, 'Yeah, you bet I want to do it,'" he says. "I've never had to think about [pursuing my goals]. I've never had to check with



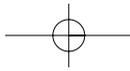
FROM MOUNTAIN BIKES TO MOTOCROSS, NORTH VANCOUVER'S DAVE NORONA ATTACKS LIFE AND SPORT AT FULL THROTTLE. HE'S BEEN A PROFESSIONAL ATHLETE SINCE JUST OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL, CREATING A LIFE FOR HIMSELF MOST CAN ONLY DREAM OF.

anyone. I've always just done it."

Norona has raced the Eco-Challenge three times, in Morocco, New Zealand and Fiji; Mild Seven Outdoor Quest four times, plus a host of other demanding events including the 2004 Subaru Primal Quest in the Pacific Northwest (where his Team Supplierpipeline finished 9th); the Adventure Racing World Championships in 2004 in Newfoundland, Canada; the Western Isles Challenge, a 200-mile race in the Hebrides Islands west of Scotland;



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the 28-day Mizone-Endurazone in New Zealand; and Costa Rica's 25-mile La Ruta de los Conquistadores mountain bike race.

But despite his impressive race résumé, the driven, dynamic Norona is most compelled by setting, then meeting, personal challenges like the Iditasport Impossible. "I just do things spontaneously," says Norona. "We always just think, 'I'll do it another time,' and you never do them. I don't think about it, I just do it. I never feel I have to top myself, but I've always enjoyed doing things like that: solo self-imposed challenges. You could get into real trouble, and people do, but I take the right precautions."

In 2001, Norona and ex-Canadian national team downriver paddler Paul

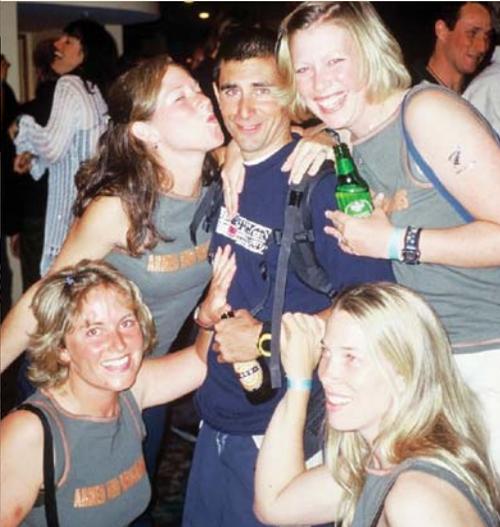
Hardy tackled a 72-mile canoe trip through the Bowran Lakes chain in northern British Columbia — usually a six- to 10-day trip — in just 13 hours. Using a lightweight K1 kayak, Norona packed minimal supplies to increase his speed both through the water and over the five miles of portaging. "I took a bit of food and that was it," says Norona, who explains that he and Hardy passed numerous people tackling the route on multi-day excursions. "It poured rain and there was lightning. People pulled in to higher ground, but we had to keep going."

"Afterward, some people wondered why we had done it and said we didn't get a chance to enjoy it. But for me, it was fun to accomplish. I liked watching people's

expressions when they saw us with no supplies and just a lightweight boat in the middle of nowhere."

Norona has also completed the 48-mile West Coast Trail, a rolling, rugged trek hacked out of dense temperate rainforest on the west coast of Vancouver Island, in a single day. Running and speed-hiking a route that takes most people up to a week to finish, Norona, carrying just food and water and wearing only shorts and a T-shirt, powered through the rain-slicked trail in 15 hours. "I ran past dozens of people hiking with 80-liter packs, 45 kilometers (28 miles) from nowhere [and I was] wearing just a CamelBak," says Norona. "They were all like, 'Where the hell did that guy come from?'"

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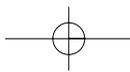


AN ACCOMPLISHED SKIER AND PADDLER WHO IS KNOWN FOR HIS PARTYING WAYS, NORONA ISN'T SHY ABOUT HITTING THE APRE-SCENE AFTER JUST ABOUT ANYTHING.

"It's not that I'm not a team player," continues Norona, "but I love making choices on my own. Plus when I do things like this and then I encounter tough sections in races it's easier to get through them. They don't seem so bad."

AN APPETITE FOR COMPETITION

Thanks largely to Norona's unyielding campaign to test the limits of his comfort zone, the Canadian has become a relentless competitor, committed to pushing both himself and his teammates. In 1996,



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"I thought about quitting [the Iditarod] every day. We wore 8,000-meter down suits to bed in the tent at night, and we stared at the white snow and sky for 15 hours a day. ... Of everything I've done, I'm the most proud of this. It was the hardest thing, and I learned the most about myself and what I can do."

— Dave Norona

at a run, ride, paddle race in Grant's Pass, Oregon — an event that helped shift Norona's focus from duathlon to adventure sports — the talented Canadian went into the 7.5-mile river-kayak section leading a field of far more experienced paddlers. "I'd never been in rapids," notes Norona. "I was so out of my league, and I was scared, but I made it by killing myself to stay at the front." He won the race.

In 1997 Norona returned to Grant's Pass, but this time took his surf ski, which he felt would give him an advantage on the final leg. Unaware that the long craft was ill-suited for the tight whitewater sections, Norona shrugged off pre-race skepticism from his competitors and again charged into the paddle section in the lead.

"It was pretty hairy in the rapids," he admits, "but I didn't know it couldn't be done, so I just did it." While he struggled to control the boat in the rapids, the sleek surf ski allowed Norona to surge ahead on the flatwater sections for a convincing win.

Then, in 2001, barely a week after Eco-Challenge New Zealand, Norona took on the 28-day Mizzone-Endurazone, which included cycling, paddling and running from the southern end of New Zealand's South Island to Cape Regina at the country's northern tip. Still depleted from Eco-Challenge, Norona struggled to find his form in the early stages and was hounded by the unrelenting Kiwi press. "They were taking the piss out of me in the papers," says Norona. "Here I was, the Canadian adventure-racing champ getting my ass kicked by everyone, including the top woman. But the level of competition was unbelievable. It was such an eye-opener." Despite his tough start, however, Norona found his form and moved through the field in the final weeks to finish 10th.

While Norona's tremendous talent and competitive energy have been fundamental to his development as an athlete, they have also, at times, spilled over into frustration and put him at odds with certain players in the sport.

"I like the team thing," he says, "but it can be frustrating. These people [pro adventure racers] would train once a week. Even with the top-five teams, you'd be surprised at how pathetic some people are. It was hard for me to find a team I was comfortable racing with. Some [teammates] were good but way too serious."

"I know the type of people I need on a team to do well, but they can be hard to find . . . when the shit hits the fan you just have to be, 'OK, here we go.' You have to have the right mentality."

These days, Norona is racing on Team Supplierpipeline/Helly Hansen (a sponsorship deal he helped secure) with teammates Bob Miller, Trish Westman, Dave Corner, Sean Lunny and Emily Miazga. The squad hopes to compete in the Raid World Championship in France in September (for which they have to qualify), the Bull of Africa, the Sea2Summit Series in British Columbia, and the AR World Championship in New Zealand in November.

Norona says that he is concerned that the sport of adventure racing, at least at the elite level, may become an unintended victim of its own success as entry fees continue to price events beyond the reach of many athletes. And he has a strong opinion about what he feels has marred the sport — the death of Australia's Nigel Aylott, 38, at the Subaru Primal Quest in Washington state's Cascade Mountains last September. Norona feels that the accident was indicative of the sport's frenetic progression to

PHOTO CREDIT:



push the limits in exchange for higher-profile coverage, he says.

"Primal Quest shows [the sport is] getting a bit too macho," says Norona. "The guy who designed the course had no idea of how much water [the Pacific Northwest] gets and how the hillside can collapse in the rain. That's what killed someone: going into terrain too much over their heads ... Everyone wants to see people fail, so it makes great TV."

Norona says that instead of escalating risk and leading competitors into situations with an ever-increasing potential for danger, he feels adventure racing should become more technical rather than longer or more extreme, forcing teams to develop their paddling or navigating skills rather than simply rewarding athletes for risk-taking behavior or pushing on with little regard for safety.

"But when a quarter-million dollars is on the line," says Norona, "teams think, 'If we don't go [into a potentially dangerous situation], someone else will.'"

Still, Norona acknowledges that it can be difficult to strike the right balance between risk and reward in a sport that is impacted as much by the elements as it is by pre-race planning and common sense.

Ultimately, for Norona, who celebrated the finish of the 1,100-mile Iditasport Impossible by hitting every bar in Nome, sport is not about gratuitously pushing extremes or taking uncalculated risks; rather, it's about becoming immersed in a place and an activity while uncovering the sublime joy of meeting personal challenges. ■

Cam Elford resides in Victoria, British Columbia, and is an editor-at-large of *Triathlete Magazine*.

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