



elete Athlete Profile: Astrid Varga, Marathon Runner



Photo Above: Long-distance runner Astrid Varga pictured receiving the 1st place medal at Beach to Peak, an 18.5 km race in Kelowna, BC, September 2007. (Photo courtesy of Astrid Varga)

Astrid Varga is living proof that some of the best things in life happen when we're older. Seventeen years ago, Astrid, then 40, ran her first 10k taking first place in the Master's category. That day, Astrid was transformed into a long-distance marathon runner. Since that first 10K race, Astrid has completed dozens of marathons both in Canada and the U.S. taking first place in her age category in many of these events. Since 1993, Astrid has qualified for and run in the Boston Marathon. Fresh off of several wins this past season, Astrid spoke with us from her home in Okanagan Valley, British Columbia about discovering her love of running and why she won't run without **elete Electrolyte Add-In™** in her water bottle.

Bio: Astrid Varga

Born: Grossenasppe, Germany
Raised: Germany; Ontario, CAN
Living: Okanagan Valley, BC
Profession: Customer Service Rep

Awards: 1st Overall Masters Female, Ontario Ultra and Trail Series, 2001-2006; 1st in age cat. BC Interior Road Race Series, 2007; 4th in cat. Okanagan Int'l Marathon 2007; 2nd in category Detroit Free Press Marathon 2006; 1st in cat. Mississauga Marathon 2006; 1st in cat. Scotiabank Waterfront Marathon 2005.

Other interests: Downhill skiing, hiking

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How did you first become involved in ultra-distance running?

"I had completed my fitness instructor training at the local YMCA in 1989-90 back in Ontario, Canada, and a few of my class participants encouraged me to run with them. I had no running background (even in high school) and felt like such a novice. Before I knew it, they talked me into entering my first 10 km race. I ran so hard, I felt sick at the end. To my surprise, I won 1st place Masters (I had just turned 40). Prizes included a pair of runners, a \$100 gift certificate, and a huge trophy. Needless to say, **I was hooked!**"

What is it about running that you particularly love?

"First of all, I love being outdoors in the fresh air! Regardless of the weather, it is great to just head outside and run. When I lived in Ontario, I ran in some cold, wintry, snowy conditions. You have to dress for the weather and no matter how hot or cold it is—when you're done with your run—you feel better, and ready for the day's challenges. Secondly, through running, I have come to know so many people and have been very fortunate to make my closest, dearest friends. I have been able to travel throughout Canada and the U.S. to run marathons and ultra marathons. In doing this, I have met people from all over the world."

When did you first begin competing, and what are some of the recent awards you've received?

"I started competing in 1990 after turning 40. I competed in my first marathon in Buffalo, NY in 1992, and qualified for the Boston Marathon 1993. Since then, I have qualified for Boston every year! I have been able to run Boston 11 times.

During my last six years in Ontario, I won 1st Overall Masters Female in the Ontario Ultra and

Trail Series for every year 2001-2006. Also, from 2003 to 2006, I placed 1st in my age category in most of my marathons in Ontario and the U.S.

Since moving to the Okanagan Valley, BC in Dec. '06, I have placed first in my category in every race I've competed in here. These eleven races have ranged from distances of 5 km to half marathons (21.1 km), and I was the overall winner in my age category in the 2007 Interior Road Race Series in BC. I also broke two age category records for the 10 mile and half marathon distances in Peachland, BC." *(Cont'd next page...)*



Photo Above: Astrid pictured during the Okanagan International Marathon this past October. (Photo courtesy of and republished with permission, Okanagan Marathon)



Photo above: Astrid pictured in a September 2006 Ontario Ultra trail race event in Haliburton, Ontario. (Photo courtesy of Astrid Varga)

What are some of the events in 2007-2008 you will be competing in?

“My 2007 race calendar is almost complete. A few weeks ago, I was part of an eight-member team in the Haney to Harrison 100 km relay. This weekend, [Thanksgiving weekend 2007] I competed in a 25 km trail race “Penticton to Trout Creek Trestle Run.” and took 1st in my category. By the end of this year, I will begin my spring marathon training for my 12th time running the Boston Marathon in April 08. That will be my 41st marathon, not even counting my ultra races. Before that, in February, I will be competing in The First Half, a half marathon in Vancouver, BC. I plan to include the BC Interior Road Race Series again in 2008, and my fall marathon plans include the Royal Victoria Marathon in

Victoria, BC. I also plan to compete in more long distance trail races.”

How do you summon the physical, mental, and emotional strength during these ultra-endurance events?

“I have discovered over the years that I am best suited for the long haul, which is amazing, considering I never knew I could run at all when I first started. Because I enjoy running so much, I am having a good time out there on the roads, or on the tough trails. I love the challenge.

My physical strength comes from my training, which includes running, weight training, and cross training on the elliptical trainer. My mental and emotional strength comes from having a positive approach and attitude. (Cont'd next page)



I can push myself because I refuse to let any negative thoughts enter my head. I get excited with every race/event and am filled with (good) nervous energy. I yearn for that tremendous sense of accomplishment after crossing the finish line. I truly amaze myself at times - that I am competing in these types of events."

What is the biggest factor in terms of winning a race? Likewise, what are the biggest obstacles?

"For me the biggest factor in terms of winning a race is my mental focus and positive attitude. I am very competitive and size up my competition at the starting line. I stay focused throughout and think positive – not negative. Of course, I have to be in top fitness condition as a result of my training up to that day. I put in the training and then I'm out there to win. I must say—I thrive on competing!

The biggest obstacles are usually things out of my control—such as the weather or illness. I have run full marathons and ultra marathons in cold, windy, pouring rain, sleet, etc., conditions. I have persevered, but those races were very difficult to say the least. Some examples of these types of obstacles include the extreme heat in Boston 2004; running Boston in 1996 thinking I had a bad chest cold and finding out afterwards that I had pneumonia. I ran Boston 2001 with a broken toe and sprained foot, which were sustained during a fall the day before the race. And I finished all of these races."

How do you prepare for a marathon? What is your typical training regimen?

"My typical training regime is actually quite simple. I believe in 'quality' versus 'quantity'. My average weekly mileage is only between 30 to 40 (50-65 km). I generally run 5 times per week. Of course, once I get into my long training runs for my marathons, the total mileage increases. I

do my long run on Sundays; rest or cross train and weights on Mondays; speed work on Tuesdays; tempo run Wednesday mornings; and recovery run Wednesday p.m.; cross train and weights on Thursday; tempo run Friday a.m.; rest day or cross train on Saturday.

For my marathons, I start a specific schedule 16-18 weeks out. I am diligent with my speed work on the track and hill training every week. I maintain a base of 16-20 km as my long run on Sundays, and then I build on that by increasing it by 2-3 km for two weeks in a row and drop back every 3rd Sunday. By three weeks out from my goal marathon, I put in a final 38 km (23-24 mi) long run. My last three weeks are spent tapering and cutting back on total mileage, so that I am ready for 42.2 km on race day. Also, during this training, I throw in some shorter distance races to keep sharp—anything from 5 km to a half marathon. That helps me stay competitive right up to race day!"

In terms of nutrition, what are the indispensable items or strategies you've found are key in giving you the edge over the other athletes?

"I have a very sensitive stomach, so I eat at least two hours prior to my event—usually a banana and a high carb bar. The night before, I make sure I eat early and include protein with my carbs. I always eat healthy—tons of fruits and veggies, but the week before my goal race, I concentrate even more on eating well. Immediately following my event, I have a high protein shake for recovery. I eat balanced meals and take a good multivitamin as well."

Interesting or little-known fact others may not know about you?

"Until I started teaching fitness classes and prior to taking up running at the age of 40, I was a very shy, quiet person who lacked self-confidence. (Cont'd next page)



2006 Detroit Free Press Marathon

Photo Above: Astrid participates in several marathons each year both in her homeland—British Columbia and the U.S. Here Astrid is pictured at the October 2006 Detroit Free Press Marathon. (Photo courtesy of Detroit Free Press/Flagstar Marathon and Astrid Varga)

I remember being involved in giant slalom downhill ski racing at my local ski club in my 20's and 30's, but participated only to be with my friends. I never had the confidence to push myself to win a race. Then somehow I came out of my shell when I started running."

What is your personal philosophy about health?

"I look at other people my age, and often they are overweight; out-of-shape and in poor health. I feel so good about being healthy and fit. This reaffirms to me how important it is to exercise in

some form every day, stay active and eat properly. It motivates me when someone says they can't believe I am 57 yrs. old and have children ages 34 and 36, and grandchildren! My children and husband are very supportive and that helps to keep me motivated to do even more. Also, my family background is riddled with heart problems, and I want to keep my heart strong and healthy."

How did you find elete Electrolyte Add-In?

"I discovered **elete** in Park City, Utah about five years ago. I was visiting my daughter and son-in-law who lived there at the time, and saw **elete** in a bike shop. I asked the salesperson about it and he said he had good reports from mountain bikers, so I decided to try it for my cramping during my long, hot runs."

Tell us a little about your experience using elete in training and competition.

"At first I used **elete** only in my long distance runs and races. Before **elete**, whenever I ran in extreme heat and long distances, I suffered with leg cramps—usually in one calf or both. With **elete** added to my water or electrolyte liquid, I had no more cramps. So I started adding it in all my runs. I perspire lots, especially in the heat, and the more I sweat, the more I know I need **elete!** Since they introduced **elete Tablytes**, I carry them in my fuel belt pouch and take them as well during my long runs. I use **elete** the day before and after a long strenuous event as well."

What are the specific benefits you've noticed using elete?

"The benefits are that I can go longer and harder and no cramps! I don't even get lactic acid buildup, and my muscles recover faster after an event. Another huge benefit is that it doesn't add sugar or sweet taste to your liquid, and it's easy on my stomach. **elete** has definitely been a key factor in my success at the races!"

(Cont'd next page...)



For the average person who may participate in mild to moderate fitness activity, what would you tell them about elete?

“You don’t have to be a hard core athlete to benefit from **elete**! It is important for everyone to have sufficient electrolytes in their system. Even the average person will sweat during a workout and lose salt and electrolytes. When there is an imbalance, the result can be cramping. I highly recommend **elete** for anyone who participates in exercise or sports (even recreational). ■