

PASSION PLAY

RUNNING FOR LIFE

The arrival of his first daughter inspired veterinarian David Gething to get fit by cycling, swimming and running – ultimately finishing seven races on seven continents in seven days.

STORY CAMERON DUECK



Seven years ago, David Gething was a pretty average Australian expat in Hong Kong. He was finding success with his own veterinarian business and he enjoyed the good life, but boozy late nights, generous dinners and a smoking habit meant that his relatively diminutive frame was carrying 100 kilos and his weekends were more about

recovering than recreation. Then his wife, Trilby, became pregnant with the first of their two daughters (Amelia and Madeleine) and that was the wake-up call he needed.

“I had been having way too much fun for way too long, and I was not particularly healthy. My wife said to me, ‘Is that the kind of person you want your daughter to become?’

Because she’s going to look at you and become the same person.” Gething says: “You can lie to yourself for a long time, but when someone asks, ‘Do you want your kid to look like that?’ You think, not really.”

CHASING A DREAM

That was the day he stopped smoking and took up sport. He got on a bicycle and began riding.

ABOVE
David Gething with a patient at the East Island Animal Hospital in Shau Kei Wan



FROM LEFT
David Gething with his wife, Trilby, and their children, Amelia and Madeleine, in southern Germany, where Gething competed in the Challenge Roth 2014, an Ironman distance race. David Gething taking a break during the Antarctica leg of the World Marathon Challenge.

He joined a local group of riders – or rather chased them – but he didn’t give up.

“They were very gentlemanly about it, but I got dropped off the back many times. I was stupid enough to keep coming back again and again,” he says, laughing at the memory.

He added running and swimming to his regime. “I entered a few races and became pretty keen. Five kilometres became 10, became a triathlon, became an Ironman.”

The first ultra race was the 250km Gobi March. “I thought I’d scare myself straight,” he explains.

It didn’t work. By now he’s done 10 Ironman races (qualifying for both the half and full Ironman World

Championships), run the Boston Marathon, done the Escape From Alcatraz Triathlon twice, and completed the Isklar Norseman Xtreme Triathlon – considered the hardest long-distance triathlon in the world.

Gething did all these while building up a veterinarian house-call business, which eventually grew into the East Island Animal Hospital, a 24-hour facility in Shau Kei Wan. It meant turning his races into family holidays, and making them something he himself could consider a vacation from his regular workday.

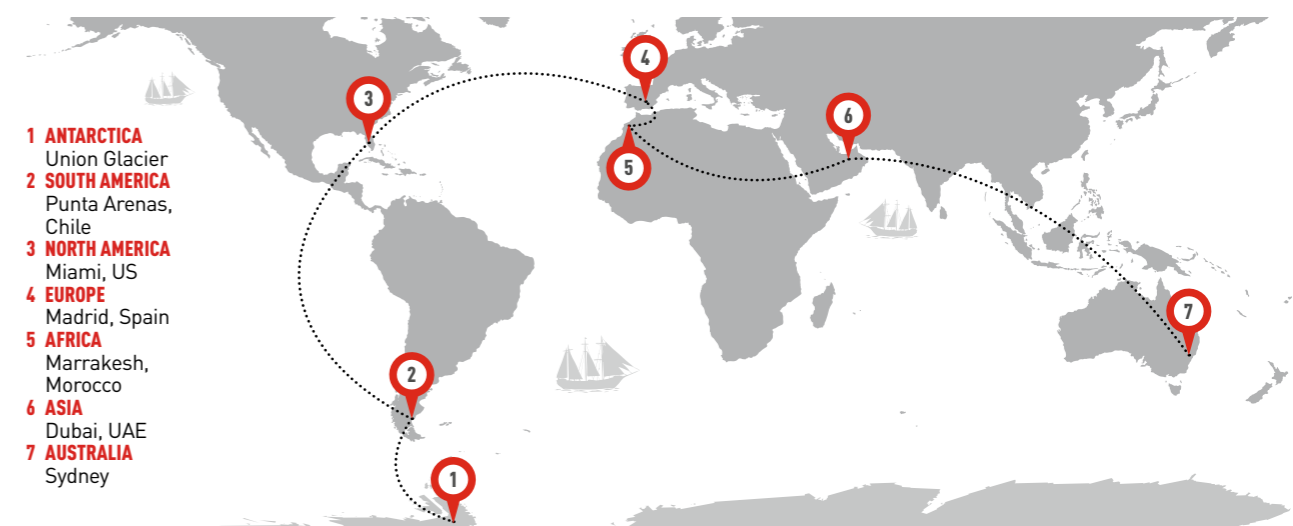
“I try to pick events that are fun and interesting so I can have a great experience while I’m there,” he says.

MAGIC SEVEN

What next? An idea to do a series of consecutive marathons evolved into a scheme to run seven 42.195km marathons in seven days on seven continents. He soon found it had been done before, and the man who had done it was turning it into a race, the World Marathon Challenge. Gething signed up, deciding it was the perfect way to celebrate turning 40.

Seven years after giving up smoking and getting his ample behind into gear, Gething beat 11 other competitors to become the world-record holder for the fastest seven marathons in seven days on seven continents, at Union Glacier in Antarctica, Punta Arenas in Chile, Miami, Madrid, Marrakesh

SEVEN MARATHONS ON SEVEN CONTINENTS IN SEVEN DAYS



PHOTOGRAPHY GARETH GAY

COURTESY DAVID GETHING

PASSION PLAY



ABOVE
David Gething
at the 2013
Standard
Chartered
Marathon in
Hong Kong

in Morocco, Dubai and Sydney. His combined time was 25 hours, 36 minutes and 3 seconds. There were 36 less kilos of him to carry now than there had once been, but still, quite a feat.

The low point, Gething says, came in Morocco. It was the fifth marathon in the challenge but his third race in 24 hours due to their flight schedule. It was midnight, 8 degrees Celsius, and raining. They were to run an entire marathon on a 3km loop in the dark – no cheering crowds for this event.

“I was broken. I had a lot of injuries coming into this one. I had frostbite and was quite sore from Antarctica, and I was just really tired. Just before the race start, my wife emailed me a photo of my five-year-old getting ready for her first day at school. I felt that as a dad I should have been there for that. I was probably also a bit emotional because of everything that was going on, but I thought, ‘Stuff this, I’m going home. I’ve ruined everything, I’m a bad dad, and it’s all not good.’”

On his way out of the door, his bag packed and over his shoulder, he encountered another competitor. He also felt lousy, and persuaded Gething to at least start the race with him. At 20km, Gething hit a pothole, causing a stress fracture in his right ankle, but he pushed on and finished the race, though he can’t remember the last half of that marathon.

“I’d like to go back to Morocco. Everyone says it’s great, but my memories are pretty mixed,” he says.

THE RIGHT PACE

Gething readily acknowledges being a touch obsessive – he doesn’t like doing things by half measures.

“I know that behaviour can be constructive or destructive, so it has to be channelled in such a way that’s beneficial,” Gething says. “I’ve learned that if you are really committed, you can’t let anything hold you back. You just have to go for it and make it happen. If we have a new idea in the business, we will try it. We’ll do our best, and if it works, then brilliant, if not, then at least we tried it.”

Turning that energy into sport has meant 4.30am starts and 8pm bed times to give him both the training time and rest he needs. And, of course, less booze and a leaner diet. Along the way, in the hours he is on solo runs or on his bike, he’s had time to connect the dots between what he does for fun and the veterinarian business he runs with his wife.

“I’ve also realised that if you put the pieces together in the right order, you can build something quite big. In both racing and business, it’s not one lightning moment. There’s a whole lot of construction and planning that accumulates to make the greater goal or good.” 🕒

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