

## **I am Buying a Pacer!**

*By: Craig M. Miller*

Back in the seventies there was a car manufactured that did not last long on the market, it was called a Pacer. The automobile was kind of bubble shaped with large windows. You rarely see one anymore, but I am not talking about that kind of pacer. In many larger marathons there exists what is called pacing groups. They offer to run a certain tempo and pace those that want to run with them with the goal to finish in a certain time. I tend to be the independent type and so have never sought to use the service in the past. I have since changed my tune. Let me explain why the change of heart.

There may be several reasons to avoid the pacer group. One obvious one is speed. While elite runners pace off their competition, a watch or have a great internal clock, the need for a pacer is less warranted. When you are a "back in the pack runner", and can not easily break three or even four hours for a marathon, seeking out a time appropriate pacing group makes good sense. Another reason that a pacer is ignored is pride. I had managed to run many marathons in the past and reach goal times that were desired. A person might say to himself or herself, "So why do I need a pacer when I can do it myself". Remember that independent attitude? But for the last several years, I had not reached my goal times, but just thought more miles, different training or a flatter course would do the trick. It did not. It may be just hard for some of us to except help from another person. There may be a couple of other reasons that a pace group is ignored. They range from not knowing they are available in your race, to fear or embarrassment of starting with one and then not being able to keep up with the group.

While runners have reasons for not using a pace group, there are also some great reasons to use a pace group. First, the encouragement and fun of what takes place on a Saturday morning group run is transferred into the marathon you are preparing to do. You have a group of other runners with the same goal time in mind uniting together to reach their target finish time. Second, the pace leader is a person that has ran a marathon faster than your goal time and can then slow his pace to maintain the needed mile splits to reach your finish goal. He is able to not only physically pace you as you run, but also verbally keep you motivated, encouraged and aware of what is going on. Third, a pace group helps you not to start too fast. How many runners catch the wave of energy at the beginning of a marathon, start fast because they feel good, only to fall apart at the end of the race? Far too many of us. The pace group helps to keep you from starting to fast, your energy is conserved and you able to make it through "hitting the wall" much easier. Lastly, when you run with a group for 26 miles, you can meet some interesting folks. The pacer for Shamrock this year was from Cincinnati, so now the Flying Pig Marathon is on my "want to do" list. There were folks from Chicago, Minnesota and even one from Denmark. We all know runners are a group of cool folks, so it was nice to meet some more of them.

What changed my mind? I started with a pace group in Shamrock Marathon this year with a pace goal of 3 hours and 30 minutes. I hadn't seen that time for quite a few years. We clicked off mile after mile just under an eight minute pace. That was right on for the pace time. Our group even lost our pace leader (he had a bathroom break) for a few miles. He eventually caught us; we hung together through the "wall" miles of 20-24, and even had some energy to pick up the pace a bit at the end. We finished happily in the 3 hour 26 minute range. Needless to say, I am hooked on trying a pace group again. So, like little Mickey in the old cereal commercial, "Try it, you'll like it" Happy running. One last item, just because you pick out a pace group to run a marathon in 3 hours and 15 minutes, if you have not put in the mileage, tempo runs and mile repeats to expect that kind of time you won't probably make it. Pick out a pace group in keeping with your training schedule and speed work and you will have a great chance to buy a pacer and enjoy the ride!