

# No loneliness for this long-distance runner

**Peter Scott**

ONE often hears about the loneliness of the long-distance runner. Books have dealt with the subject and there was even a hit movie of the same name some 30 years ago.

Sydney lawyer Richard Shakenovsky is not your average jogger or reclusive fitness fanatic, however. He is one who shares the aches, the pain and the triumph of loping through the traffic, up highways and byways. He is the founder of a unique fraternity of runners — the Achilles Club.

Achilles made its competitive Aussie debut in last month's City to

describes its progress as "amazing, thrilling, unbelievable. It will become bigger than in South Africa."

So, what is so special about the Achilles Club? In many ways nothing; its membership is open to all runners, regardless of age, sex, denomination or ability. However, in one distinctive respect it is very special, indeed — its involvement with runners of various disabilities.

"Anyone can be one of us and run with us, but there is one requirement — when called upon, members must make themselves available to run with and assist disabled athletes," Shakenovsky said.

He was the founder of Achilles — the idea originating from the USA — in his native South Africa and spent nine years training and running with blind athletes.

He and long-time running partner and friend Johnny Demas first entered the world-famous 90-kilometre Comrades Marathon as a team in 1988 — Shakenovsky's third appearance in the classic race — finishing in 10 hours, 30 minutes, comfortably inside the cutoff time of 11 hours.

Demas and Shakenovsky have since completed the race together another seven times, their partnership ending only after the Shakenovskys immigrated to Australia.

Four years ago, Shakenovsky met the president of the Achilles Club of New York, Vick Traum, who was on a visit to South Africa to enter a team of American blind runners in local races.

Soon enough, Achilles was up and running in South Africa and Shakenovsky with Demas proudly carried the club's colours in a 161-km race in 1994, which they completed in 22 hours, 58 minutes. They ran holding a strap between them, maintaining an identical pace and stride.

The feat by the young attorney and the blind clothes cutter, who lost his sight in a panga attack 21 years ago when he was 27, raised



Achilles Club founder Richard Shakenovsky (left) with South African President Nelson Mandela (centre) and Shakenovsky's blind friend and running partner, Johnny Demas, just before the Golden Reef 161km race in Pretoria, South Africa.

6000 rands for a sanctuary for abused and abandoned children in Johannesburg.

It took no time at all to start up the Aussie version of Achilles this year, with half of the foundation members coming from the Jewish community, as do 30 percent of the members. Former South African friend Ellis Janks, David Grossman, Leonard Greis and Rodney Muller are just a few of them.

Achilles is constantly recruiting members; they can be runners or walkers, with disabilities or volun-

teers willing to share in the challenges and joys of helping others.

Achilles is also arranging for the entry of three Australian runners with disabilities to participate in the New York Marathon later this year.

Club members meet for training outside the Centennial Park coffee shop at 8am on Sundays. Anyone interested in this very different and outstanding athletic enterprise should contact Wendy Downes on 9959 4269 (hus) or 9449 4093 (home). 94-4