

Moving Toward the Finish, One Small Kick at a Time

By **RON DICKER**

For the sixth straight New York City Marathon, Derrick Wilson waited for Bill Reilly at the 21st mile on the Madison Avenue Bridge yesterday and accompanied him the rest of the way. Wilson had noticed Reilly year after year among the marathon's sea of humanity because Reilly is easily noticed.

Reilly, who has severe cerebral palsy, competes in a wheelchair, riding backward and pushing with his feet. With arms that barely function and legs of diminished strength, he kicks in small increments. It is the only way he can do it, Reilly said, and it worked for him again yesterday.



Tim Baker for The New York Times

Bill Reilly, who has cerebral palsy, completed yesterday's marathon.

— Reilly, 52, of Brooklyn, completed his 15th New York City Marathon in darkness at 6:49 p.m. after beginning his five-borough, 26.2-mile odyssey at 8 a.m. at the foot of the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge.

"Every year he does better and better," Wilson said. "It's amazing."

By the 22nd mile, the friction of Reilly's feet against the pavement had nearly worn through his new sneakers. Unlike other athletes who use wheelchairs, Reilly gets no break on the downhills because he cannot elevate his legs, so they drag.

A handful of volunteers plus Wilson joined Reilly on the course, which was opened to automobile traffic after 5 p.m. Wilson moved onto the sidewalk before entering the final stretch in Central Park.

While signs were being torn down and garbage trucks rumbled by, Reilly backed over Gatorade cups on

a mostly deserted Fifth Avenue in Upper Manhattan. Police officers who had seen runners overcome all kinds of obstacles earlier stopped chatting with one another to cheer Reilly.

Reilly's words were strained as he talked and propelled himself along the course. When he was not understood, he spelled out his main points.

Asked why he did it, Reilly said: "Because I'm nuts. It's a challenge."

Reilly, an accountant for a cerebral palsy organization, said he made the going rougher by drinking at a wedding the night before. One of his helpers, Nancy Zehner, said she and Reilly talked until 4 in the morning.

Reilly said his fiancée could not make the race because she is disabled and it was too difficult for her to follow. She called him every five miles or so to check on his progress.

According to Rick Lipsey, a friend and occasional training companion, that probably was not necessary.

"What's amazing about it is that he goes the same speed, no matter what," Lipsey said.

Lipsey recalled running with Reilly in a marathon in Prospect Park in Brooklyn in driving rain, and Reilly kept ticking off consistent times on the eight loops.

Reilly gets to his training sessions with the Achilles Track Club via subway on his motorized wheelchair. A friend, Andy Ashwell, takes Reilly's specially built racing chair to practice and stores it afterward.

Reilly said that his condition had not degenerated recently and that he felt stronger than in recent years despite just one training session a week. But yesterday he lost to his much younger rival, Jason Pisano, of West Warwick, R.I., who also has cerebral palsy and propels himself backward. Every few miles, Reilly checked on Pisano's progress from race volunteers and was visibly disappointed when he was told that Pisano was ahead.

Reilly said at the finish that he was still satisfied. "I'm tired but all right," he said.

Pia Bunton, one of the volunteers, used Reilly's run as an introduction to marathoning and was so inspired that she said she planned to run it next year. Reilly said that his own inspiration came from his mother, Marie, whom he said was his best friend.

Lipsey said he had never seen Reilly unhappy.

"Considering what he goes through," Lipsey said, "it's an incredible attitude to have."