

## Running replaces smoking for Ronnie Fellers



There are many amazing things about Ronnie Fellers, a lithe 56-year-old from Stephenville. For one thing, Fellers, 5-6, 120 pounds, often wins his 5K age division with envious times in the low 20s or high 19s. For another thing, he didn't start running until relatively late at age 36. And then there's the smoking thing. He's addicted. Been smoking since he was 13. However, as long as he keeps running, he doesn't light up. But in two layoffs, he was back puffing away. So, he's like the bunny that keeps on going...he can't afford to stop.

Ronnie started running when after his insurance agent talked about running all the time and finally coaxed him to take up the sport when he lived in Waco. After about three months of running, Ronnie entered his first race, ran a 21:04, won his age division and "I was hooked."

He ran for about a year and a half and had quit smoking. Then he decided to hang up his running shoes for awhile. When he quit the roads, he started smoking again. He puffed away until he began running again when he was 46.

"I ran for two years after that," he said, but a stress fracture caused him to quit again and "I went back to smoking."

In 2003, a recovered Ronnie returned to the roads and hasn't lit up again while becoming one of the top runners in his age division. He said it took him only three months after his return before he had raised his mileage to 30 a week and was maintaining an 8-minute-a-mile pace.

He said the layoffs and smoking never detracted from his stamina or speed. His slowest 5K has been a 21:52.

In the hopes of staving off injuries and prolonging his running career (so he can snub the cigarette craving), Ronnie said he sticks mostly to 5K distances. He has run a few 10Ks and only one half marathon. He has crossed off any thoughts of running a marathon.

"It takes too long to recover after running long distances," said Ronnie, who likes to run and compete as much as possible. He said he ran 44 races in 2008.

Ronnie, who refinishes furniture, runs about 30 miles a week. His normal week includes a 5-6-mile "pretty easy" run on Mondays, speed work (quarters and/or 800 meters or tempo runs) on Tuesday, 5 miles at about 7:30 pace on Wednesdays, and if he's running the upcoming Saturday, he takes off Thursdays, and then will run about three miles, including 300-meter strides, on Fridays.

He said his diet is fairly strict and includes lots of vegetables, fish and fruit. "I haven't eaten a hamburger or hot dog in about a year," he said. And, of course, there is no tobacco.

Ronnie tries to maintain his conditioning. He will do probably a thousand crunches of different types and several push-ups each day. He has this little roll around his tummy he'd like to get rid of, but

concedes it's probably caused by advancing age and that he won't have the six-pack abs that some younger runners might possess.

But it's all about staying healthy and avoiding injuries so he can do what he loves to do – run and compete. His fear is that when can't compete, he'll go back to his love-hate affair with cigarettes.