

In overseas swim . . .

# Marathon man sets two swim records

By BILL DZUGAN  
Mississauga's marathon swimmer Mike Hassaan conquered the ice-cold, wind-whipped waters between Denmark and Sweden, last week, for the second time in his life.

The 49-year-old Hassaan returned to swim the Sound, a strait linking the Baltic and North Seas, to recreate his highly successful, record-setting crossing 26 years ago. At that

time, the Egyptian-born Hassaan swam from Helsingborg, Sweden, to Hamlet's Elsinore Castle in Denmark and back again in 3 hours 13 minutes, setting what has been considered the world's longest-standing record for an international swim.

This time, Hassaan became the oldest person to complete the crossing, while establishing a new record for the longest amount of time spent in

the chilling waters. In total, the recent swim took 5 hours, 46 minutes and 55 seconds.

Before thousands of spectators, Hassaan battled the elements for 2 hours, 23 minutes and 55 seconds in a westerly direction. The return trip took an hour longer because of high waves, strong current and two large slow-moving ships.

Hassaan's feat has renewed interest in marathon swimming in

the Helsingborg area. In 1985, the city intends a marathon competition to highlight their 900th birthday celebrations.

Meanwhile, at home, Mississauga city council raved about Hassaan's accomplishment. For about 10 years, Hassaan has actively promoted physical fitness at the Malton Fitness Centre where he's employed. After training in his 60-foot condominium pool for the past year and following a rigid diet, Hassaan was determined to complete the swim as an inspiration for other athletes beyond their prime to continue training and practising.

For most of his adult

life, Hassaan has been devoted to marathon swimming. At 19 years of age he was the youngest swimmer ever to represent Egypt in an international swimming event. In 1953, he was a member of the Egyptian relay team that swam the English Channel from Dover to Calais in a record 10 hours and 53 minutes. In 1955, Hassaan earned Egypt's National Sportsman Award, personally presented to him by the late President Gamal Abdel Nasser.

His athletic achievements also earned him a scholarship to study physical education at Sweden's Royal Central Institute where

his classmates included Princess Birgitta, sister of the present King of Sweden, and Tumba Johansson, a world-renowned hockey player. In 1980, he headed the North American team competing at the annual Nile Marathon in Egypt, where teammates Bill Heiss and Tina Bischof placed first in the male and

female categories of the swim.

Hassaan's wife and former Swedish marathoner, Birgit, joined Leis Gelberg as the coaches for the Helsingborg-to-Elsinore crossing. Hassaan fuelled himself throughout the swim with a combination of honey, orange juice and particularly chocolate bars.

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HASSAAN, Mike