



Lucky Guys (and Gals) take on the Tahoe Relay!

By Shirley Fee

Team Lucky Guys decided for a second year to take on the challenge of the Tahoe Relay with a mixed bag of runners. I think we hold the title of being the most age diverse. We covered all age groups from 70 to 31. The morning of the race, Jon (thermo) Hermstad, Jen Ortlinghouse and I, Shirley Fee crawled out of bed as the sun was coming up. It was clear, cold and beautiful. We had a 45 min drive to the start line. We took off about 6 am, the sun was shining on the snow topped mountains across the lake, what a beautiful view. The rest of the team got to sleep in since they didn't have to start running until later. Leg 1 runner, Jon (Thermo) Hermstad was like a thoroughbred at the gate, I swear, when we got behind a slow car I thought he was going to jump out of the car and run to the start line. We got there with some minutes to spare but Thermo bailed out of the car almost before it was stopped. Jen and I were not quite as enthusiastic. We saw Team Bubba and Team Skirt for a brief moment, all of us trying to decide who is going to beat who. Since Lucky Guys were in the open mixed we figured we would be hard put to get close to any kind of win. So we decided to just have fun, enjoy the weather, views and experience. But, as it goes, we have to compete against somebody. So we wanted to stay somewhat close to Team Bubba. The gun goes off, Thermo took off like his life depended on it, Jen and I decided we would have to hurry if we were to be at our agreed upon water stop. As we passed him he was running up with the front runners looking smooth. He took water at 4 miles and said that was enough. Jen and I rushed to Leg 2 where Thermo would hand off to her. Jen was just getting over a hamstring injury, and she was running up THE HILL, just what the doc ordered I'm sure. Jen must have forgotten how long the leg 2 hill is, it is one tough hill, much less doing it without oxygen, but she held her own and didn't give up, she came in strong and happy to be done. Leg 3. I'm ready and feeling pretty good, having run the course last year I knew enough to not be fooled about going downhill. It's a very long downhill and can do serious damage if you don't pay attention. I also knew if I didn't have enough lead time Shell Bell of Team Skirt was going to blast by me. No pressure. I still took a little time to enjoy the beauty of Lake Tahoe on a sunny day with snow capped mountains and a crystal clear lake. At one point you are looking down into the lake. The water is Turquoise blue and so clear you can see every rock. It did look inviting. Finally I hit a little flat land and a few small hills with a hill up to Leg 4 where Mel (Mini Mel) Belluomini was waiting. I knew I had to hurry but the tank was running dry. My legs and lungs were not happy campers, my left calf was threatening to cramp, and it did at the very end. This year I could hear Larry's voice in my head. Don't walk!! You cannot walk!!! So, Larry, I did not walk, and I beat my time of last year. Mini Mel was waiting, hand outstretched ready to tag. Mel took off like the Road Runner and covered her 12.3 miles in record time, I'll bet there are burn marks on the pavement. I did not get to see her but I heard she was going so fast that she was just a blur. I know she did not notice the scenery. When she finished and handed off to Leg 5 runner, Kevin Teuscher, her words were "that was a little harder than I thought". According to Kevin, Leg 5, is mis-named Cedar **Flats**. Kevin said it is not flat. As we drove along cheering our team mates on we could see Kevin was running relaxed and strong at a good pace with a big smile the whole way, he actually looked like he was having fun, finishing strong on an uphill he handed off to Leg 6 runner Karen Frindell Teuscher, another little power house of a runner. Leg 6 has ups and downs with a long steep climb at the end of 10.5 miles. It is brutal. Karen looked good as she powered up the hills with her eyes focused on the end result. While we were following and cheering Karen on we saw Larry powering up the Leg 6 hill. He ran with a look of determination and fire in his eyes. Their competition was toast. Karen pushed it to the max and handed off to our leg 7 runner, Will Ortlinghaus. Will said he was going to run easy and conservative, Jen and I knew better. I think Leg 7 is the least attractive of all legs. No shoulder, narrow road, lots of traffic, a lot of ups and steep downs. The views are very beautiful but I'm not sure the runners get to enjoy it. They are just trying to get the job done and not get run over doing it. Will held a good steady pace. It was getting a little warm, but there are a line of beautiful aspen trees providing shade for the runners. About two miles from the finish, Will kicks it into afterburner. He starts picking off runners one after another, many of which had a pretty good head start. He finished strong and fast. It was a good day for the Empire Runner teams. We gave the other teams a good run for their money and Team Bubba and Team Skirt brought home 3rd place each. I think everybody should try this just once, or maybe twice.