



▲ Ross Spoonland, Park River, N.D., takes a trail break during an early February snowmobile excursion near Sioux Lookout, Ont. A couple of weeks later, Spoonland and two friends from Winnipeg completed a one-day, 1,000-plus-kilometer snowmobile ride that started and ended at Falcon Lake in Manitoba. Spoonland said they completed the marathon trip in slightly more than 17 hours.

Adventures by trail

■ Park River, N.D., rider and two Manitoba companions complete marathon 1,000-kilometer snowmobile ride in a single day

Ross Spoonland didn't get into snowmobiling until about 1997, but he's made up for lost time since then.



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Spoonland, 56, Park River, N.D., took his longest one-day ride yet Feb. 26, when he and two friends from Winnipeg, Casey Turczak and Paul Robinson, completed a 658-mile marathon that began at Falcon Lake in Manitoba and ended back at Falcon Lake 17 hours and four minutes later.

They hit the trails at 6 a.m. and were off the sleds shortly after 10 p.m. Along the way, they rode across some of the most scenic terrain the Northland has to offer, including the Ontario and Minnesota sides of Lake of the Woods, the Northwest Angle, Shoal Lake and forested areas of southeastern Manitoba.

Spoonland said the goal was to ride 1,000 kilometers in a day, and they beat that by 59 kilometers — or 36.5 miles for metric system-challenged Americans.

"It's just something a guy did, and it was fun," he said.

According to Spoonland, the idea for the marathon hatched a couple of weeks earlier after a 440-mile ride. He'd gotten to know Turczak and Robinson on a snowmobiling Web site, and they decided to tackle the 1,000-kilometer trek.

"We put a little plan together and did it," Spoonland said.

A farmer by trade, Spoonland says he has lots of time for snowmobiling in the winter and was familiar with the trails on the Ontario side of Lake of the Woods. So, he put together that portion of the trek. Turczak and Robinson, meanwhile, were most familiar with the eastern Manitoba trails so

Route of marathon snowmobile ride



they lined up that part of the adventure.

Turczak is a mental health and crisis clinician for the Interlake Regional Health Authority and Robinson is a captain with the Winnipeg Fire Department.

They picked Falcon Lake, which is west of Kenora, Ont., along the Trans-Canada Highway, as the starting and ending points because it's located at the intersection of two major trail systems and was approximately at the midpoint of the route.

Faster than average

Factoring in the stops, they averaged 38.5 mph, and their average moving speed was 48.5 mph, Spoonland said. They stopped only long enough to refuel, call into Customs when entering the U.S. or Canada and have a quick bowl of chili at the Northwest Angle.

The trip, Spoonland said, "was run significantly faster than a guy normally drives. Mainly, you didn't want to do a lot of twisty trails through the woods because your speed would be reduced significantly."

The day also was bright and sunny, which helped them make better time. Everything looks the

same on overcast days, Spoonland said, and that reduces travel speeds.

Spoonland, who drives an Arctic Cat four-stroke with an 1,100-cc engine, said he averaged about 13.5 miles per gallon on the trip. They made their seventh and final gas stop about 8 p.m. in Lac du Bonnet, Man., and were back at Falcon Lake shortly after 10, about two hours earlier than they'd anticipated.

"Everything went good," he said. "Our only concern we had was gas stations."

Spoonland said he's been putting 4,500 to 5,000 miles a year on his snowmobiles since he started riding in the late '90s. He bought his new snowmobile in late November and as of Monday, already had logged 6,835 miles.

"This is going to be a high-mileage year," he said.

Most of those miles, Spoonland said, have come in areas such as the Pembina Hills, portions of eastern and southern Manitoba and northwestern Ontario. North Dakota doesn't require trail permits for snowmobiles registered in the state, but Spoonland said the Ontario permit costs \$250, the Manitoba permit is \$135 and the Min-

BY THE NUMBERS

Here's a look at Park River, N.D., snowmobiler Ross Spoonland's winter riding stats as of Monday:

■ **Rides:** 30 (Some two-day rides were combined to count as one ride).

■ **Miles:** 6,835.

■ **Average:** 228 miles per ride.

■ **Longest single-day ride:** 658 miles.

■ **Trip meter:** 208.3 hours, average speed of 32.8 mph.

■ **Gear:** Spoonland has a GPS and a SPOT (Personal Satellite Tracker) mounted on his sled for guidance and safety. The SPOT allows people to follow his rides live on Google Maps and has features to summon help if needed.

■ **Trail permits:** North Dakota, Minnesota, Manitoba and Ontario.

nesota state trail sticker is \$16.

He trailed his snowmobile to Falcon Lake, as he does for most of his excursions.

"I get a lot of miles on the pickup," he admits.

Late start

Growing up, Spoonland said his dad had snowmobiles but they never rode them very far.

"They had pretty stiff suspensions, and there weren't any established groomed trail systems or anything like that, so you're kind of bouncing on all the hard drifts and stuff," Spoonland said. "It always seemed they weren't very reliable."

Still, riding seemed like a natural attraction once he got started. Especially with a winter schedule that gave him the time to hit the trails.

"I guess I like recreational vehicles," Spoonland said. "I've got a

RIDE: See Page C5



▲ Paul Robinson and Casey Turczak of Winnipeg get ready to leave Falcon Lake, Man., on a daylong marathon snowmobile ride Feb. 26. Ross Spoonland of Park River, N.D., an avid snowmobiler, accompanied the two men on the ride, which covered 658 miles through parts of southeastern Manitoba, northwestern Ontario and the Northwest Angle. The riders left Falcon Lake at 6 a.m. and were back at the resort shortly after 10 p.m.

RIDE/

Continued from Page C6

motorcycle and ATV and jet ski and I kind of figured, 'Well, you've got to do something during the winter,' and the only way to get around is on a snowmobile."

Spoonland, who rides two to three times a week throughout the winter, says he's logged enough miles that the recent marathon wasn't too tough physically. Nonriders might think snowmobiling is a lazy person's sport, but controlling a machine requires plenty of stamina. Especially when you're traveling more than 600 miles in a day.

"After the first couple of weekends, a guy's body is kind of used to the rigors of riding," Spoonland said.

What's next

As for the remainder of this winter, Spoonland says it depends on conditions. Friday, he made what could be his last ride of the season, taking a

route that began in Warroad, Minn., and continued to the Northwest Angle and west into southeastern Manitoba.

"This weather has done a number on the snow, and I'm afraid the season is about over," he said.

Spoonland says anyone planning to duplicate his recent marathon ride, which probably won't be an option until next winter, should choose a route with enough gas stations and try to pick a clear day with good snow definition.

It's hard to pick a highlight of the trip, he said.

"I don't know — just the idea of an adventure to try and accomplish a 1,000-kilometer ride," Spoonland said. "It was a good feeling to get back early and accomplish the feat without any problems."

And who knows? Next year, they might shoot for 1,500 kilometers in a day.

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