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Two Adventurers, One Subway System, and a Challenge to Break a Riding Record



Richard Perry/The New York Times

Matt Green, center, an engineer, and Donald Badaczewski, right, a law student, said their goal is to traverse the subway system, passing through more than 400 stations. They planned to start Wednesday in Queens.

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Why?

“We are gluttons for punishment,” said Matt Green, a transportation engineer. “Somebody had to do it,” offered Donald Badaczewski, a law student and college friend of Mr. Green.

Such were the rationales behind an unusual subway ride that was to begin at 6 a.m. today, with both men boarding the S line at the Rockaway Park-Beach 116th Street station in Queens. Their goal is to traverse the entire system, passing through more than 400 stations, before arriving at the Pelham Bay Park station in the Bronx on the 6 line in less than 25 hours, 11 minutes and 8 seconds.

That, according to their research, would set a speed record.

“We tend to enjoy ridiculous tasks that other people wouldn’t consider,” said Mr. Green, 26, whose history of exploits with Mr. Badaczewski, 24, includes a 2002 taco-eating contest, which ended in a tie at 18, when they were undergraduates at the [University of Virginia](#).

This time, they have done their homework.

After studying the considerable literature on similar subway speed runs, Mr. Green and Mr. Badaczewski have detailed their itinerary in a posting online at blog.myspace.com/subwaychallenge.

Those who want to track the progress of Mr. Green and Mr. Badaczewski can call 718-407-4697 and gain access to voicemail messages that the two men plan to leave frequently by cellphone.

Published reports detail several similar subway endurance tests dating to the 1950's. They include one in 1966 by Peter Samson, a student at [Massachusetts Institute of Technology](#), who used computers to chart a course, and one in 1998, in which Mike Falsetta and Salvatore Babones set the record that is being challenged.

Tests of passenger speed and endurance have never been recorded or recognized by [New York City Transit](#), the division of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority that runs the subways. And because riders have no influence over how fast the subway trains travel, elapsed time is determined more by serendipity than well-laid plans. There is no way to account for mechanical breakdowns, sick passengers who can cause trains to be brought to a halt, or train operators who shut the doors just as people race for a connection.

"In the end, it comes down to luck," said Mr. Badaczewski, a law student at the [University of Michigan](#) who is completing an internship at a Manhattan law firm.

But to prepare, he said, both men have spent dozens of hours riding the system and mapping out transfer points in stations. Mr. Green, whose job involves planning roads for a Manhattan transportation engineering firm, said the idea is to position themselves on each train to be closest to the stairway, corridor or section of the platform that provides the fastest connection to the next train.

Following guidelines provided by Mr. Samson, Mr. Green and Mr. Badaczewski said they would write logs of each station they pass and the identification number of each train they ride.

But unlike riders on some previous endurance runs, they said they will not try to travel every mile of subway track or ride every line. Instead, their criteria is to pass each station in the system at least once, even if the station serves several lines.

There are 468 stations within the subway system, according to New York City Transit. But Mr. Badaczewski said that they did not intend to pass every one, because they would count two stations as one if they are connected by passageways.

One inflexible rule is that both men must stay in the subway system until the ride is complete. So they each plan to use a single-ride Metro Card.

The difficulties will be obvious to any straphanger.

Although they will carry a cellphone, Mr. Green said they will forgo their iPods as "too cushy," and spend their time completing the voluminous logs of their trip.

He said that they would eat as little as possible, subsisting mostly on beef jerky and bottled water. But one of the biggest challenges, both riders said yesterday, may be enduring a ride of more than 24 hours with access only to the subway system's limited number of public bathrooms.

New York City Transit said yesterday that it has 77 men's rooms and 70 women's rooms in service when it conducted an inventory in April, but it was unclear how many would be open today and tomorrow because of vandalism and station construction.

"We may have to hold it," Mr. Badaczewski said yesterday. "It will be part of the fun."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/23/nyregion/23subway.html>