

Runners raved about the scenery, their breathing got heavy as they struggled over The Hump.

Runners, balloons, copters provide color for dedication

By NEIL BROWN
Herald Staff Writer

Many runners who raced across the new Seven Mile Bridge before Saturday's dedication

agreed on two things.

First, it was worth running because from now on, cars and trucks, not runners, will rule the bridge.

"This was a once-in-a-life time run," said race director Diane Chaplin. She said 1,288 runners started across the new bridge in the celebration race.

Second, The Hump was horrible.

That's what the runners dubbed the highest point in the 6.79 mile span, a point about four miles from the Sunshine Key side of the bridge.

"You could hear a lot of heavy breathing when we were going up The Hump," said Pat Bonner of Key West.

The race began at about 7:30 a.m. as the runners began pleading across the massive span. Motorists on the old Seven Mile Bridge traveled slowly to catch a glimpse of the runners clad in a colorful running gear. The motorists, however, couldn't glance too long or they may have found themselves scraping the guard rail of the narrow old bridge.

Drivers also were distracted by helicopters carrying news photographers over the area and colorful helium balloons that marked the finish line of the 10 kilometer course.

The stately old bridge, which has weathered hurricanes and survived explosions, seemingly ignored the fanfare. It continued to do its job carrying motorists across the channel.

Jim Kinney, 27, of Indian Rocks Beach, finished first in the race with a time of 33 minutes 16 seconds. That bested Barry Dusch, 31, of Fort Lauderdale by 38 seconds. The first woman to finish was Sharon Beal, 35, of



Majorie Allen, wife of Rep. Joe Allen, left, breaks champagne bottle over section of new pipeline.

MARY LOU FOY / Miami Herald Staff



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A weary nine-year-old Jessica Mitchell of Miami was the last runner to cross the finish line.

Fort Lauderdale with a time of 42 minutes, two seconds.

"The course was fantastic," Kinney said. "But your hump was beat after you got over The Hump."

Carl Roy of Key Largo said the course was fun, but "a little demoralizing to see that long white straight shot. It seemed like it was never going to end."

Roy, a disabled Vietnam veteran, says he runs races "cold turkey" in memory of friends killed in Vietnam.

The last runner to finish was nine-year-old Jessica Mitchell, finishing in one hour, 47 minutes. Mitchell, of Miami, said her third grade teacher dared her to run the race.

"She said I couldn't do it, but I

thought I could," said Mitchell.

Race and State Department of Transportation officials said they may consider making the race an annual event. Many runners raved about the scenery as they hustled along the mammoth bridge.

"You could see fish jumping out of the water," Roy said. "It was beautiful."

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