



The 20-year-old Los Angeles Marathon, fourth biggest in the country, gave them what they need this year, rolling out a new “Spa on Wheels” shuttle; thanks to Whole Life Consultants, a virtual spa consulting and management company based in Hermosa Beach, California. Los Angeles was the first to offer a pre-marathon bike ride as part of Marathon-day events; it is also the first with the challenge of transporting more than 100 duathletes between the events, a process made even more complex during a triathlon.

Those who started their morning with the 11th annual Acura L.A. Bike Tour – a 22.7-mile leisure ride through the traffic-free streets of Los Angeles – had the opportunity to use the Spa On Wheels shuttle, which provided transport from the finish line to the marathon start line and spa services along the way. While any shuttle could have addressed the problem of getting from one event to the next on time without having to traverse several additional miles on bike or on foot, the L.A. Marathon unveiled a special Metropolitan Transit Authority bus whose interior had been given a serene spa-like environment. Although the distance between the events was only three miles, the trip took about 20 minutes by bus because of the traffic, and as cyclists crossed the finish line, yoga, chair and sports massage, and green tea were offered to keep the duathletes flexible and physically and mentally prepared for the marathon ahead. During the ride, neck, arm, shoulder, leg and foot massages, yoga stretches and aromatherapy with Ayurvedic elements were made available to riders, as well as soothing music and re-energizing drinks and snacks.

Serendipity was at work here, according to Carrie Reinagel, founder and CEO of Whole Life Consultants. “We found out later that the Marathon planners had considered a spa for athletes, but the people they approached were not interested in working with them,” she said. “At the same time, we decided that we would like to be involved and had something to offer, so we approached them.”

Whole Life Consultants operates the Checkers Spa at the Hilton Checkers Hotel, spa services at the Good Samaritan Hospital in downtown Los Angeles, and the Beach House Spa at the Beach House Hotel in Hermosa Beach. “The duathletes are delighted about the addition of spa services this year. The mental focus and emotional peace necessary for these races is tremendous and massage and yoga are great tools for centering, relaxing, and harnessing personal power,” Reinagel said.

“L.A. Marathon biathletes require special consideration, not only logistically, but physically because of the additional impact to their bodies,” said John Howard, three-time Olympic cyclist, world-record holder and cycling coach for the Acura L.A.

Bike Tour. "I can't think of a nicer thing to do between events for these special athletes than this new shuttle concept."

A true spa on wheels is a rare bird. Most such operations transport therapists and products to the client and offer services in the client's home or at other venues. But offering spa services in transit seems likely to expand in the near future as airlines, luxury buses, and those catering to performers and athletes look into alliances with spa providers.

spoonwheels2 Vickie Fairchild and Dana Pilolli of Cincinnati, consultants in various areas of physical well being and integration, feel that there is a very broad scope of services and educational tools that could be used to benefit athletes and the general public while in transit. Fairchild, a physical therapist with a holistic focus for 15 years, is a specialist in pain and manual therapy. She is an affiliated Anusara Yoga teacher, a certified Laban Movement analyst, a Pilates-trained instructor and Body-Mind Centering practitioner, with post graduate work including advanced studies in Cranial Sacral Therapy, Visceral Manipulation and Energy Healing.

Fairchild points out that even on city buses in Cincinnati, yoga and breathwork have been taught to people on their way to and from work. On luxury coaches such as those used by professional athletes, she says that, with space for a treatment table, extensive services would be possible. "For athletes - from a sports medicine point of view - it would be great to have portable cold lasers on board for injuries, along with ultrasound, (and) transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation units," she said.

She suggests that reflexology could be offered on buses, adding that the Monroe Institute and others have developed tapes and CDs that can be used with headphones to coordinate the halves of the brain. "This has been used for people under stress before, during and after surgery," she said. "It prepares the mind and helps alleviate nervousness and stress; the same things occur in taxing athletic events." she said. Essential oils and breathing imagery are among her other suggestions for a mobile spa.

Pilolli, a massage therapist with 20 years' experience, is also a certified Pilates instructor for rehabilitation, a Feldenkreis practitioner, and is currently adding acupuncture to his resources. He has also been a personal trainer in Los Angeles and Cincinnati and is a marathon runner himself. He says amateur athletes in particular are unlikely to have extensive experience with the benefits of massage and other body treatments and disciplines, and often don't even stretch properly; in fact a significant percentage don't stretch at all. "They may just stretch a few areas they consider challenges: hamstrings, calves, whatever," he says. "But they don't put the whole body together in a stretch, and they have the full resources of their bodies to draw on."

Athletes can get stuck in a pattern and this is particularly true for runners," Pilolli adds. "They have to have a reason to accept changes. Most runners have rituals:

wearing the same clothing, arranging their hair a particular way, and adding new elements that increase performance and aid recovery requires integration over time. "But if you show an athlete that something changes a performance level, that athlete will listen," Pilolli says, "In my world it's not about that particular race, but the next race and performance in general."

The benefits of massage for athletic performance are very well established, with elite teams and performers bringing their own therapists to events. There are byproducts in the muscles, even from a hard workout," he stated. "Lactic acid forms and massage helps to push it out of the muscles and into the bloodstream so it can be expelled from the body."

Pilloli said that one of the most valuable aspects of conditioning sought by athletes from people like himself is core support and there are many elements in this that can be begun on a bus. "They can mimic pelvic exercises on a massage table and they can do visualization, which has become a mainstream aspect of athletic training," he added. Pilloli also favors pulsed magnetic fields, used for some time in Europe and now becoming very popular in the U.S. to assist in dealing with problems from chronic pain to Parkinson's Disease. He uses magnetic pads to balance energy. "That technology is really exploding," he said. "If you sit on a pad and use a Monroe tape, it integrates the body and brain and helps the recovery process. The technology is out there and some of it is backed very well by research."

He stresses that the passengers should be given simple handouts to support the work they do on board so they can get lasting results. "When people do things for the first time it takes a long time for them to get the full benefits," he says. "What the short sessions can do is create awareness of the body, and being aware of your body will certainly make you a better athlete."