

Speedy Cheetahs

A captive-bred cheetah clocked 52 mph (83.7 kph) by radar at a fund-raising event called “Run for Survival” in favour of the Cheetah Conservation Fund on 23-24 May 1999.

Dawn Simas, Director of Wild About Cats and owner of the cheetah, Shaka, said the event, held in “Silicon Valley” between Los Gatos and Los Altos, California, may have raised US\$75,000, which would go towards building a laboratory and staff housing at the CCF project in Namibia <<http://www.cheetah.org>>. She said videos of the cat running had been posted on the web site <<http://www.wildaboutcats.org/cheetah.htm>>. She warned that the big files take about 10-15 minutes to download at 28.8 baud, but adds that they are worth it.

In Kenya in 1965, a 35kg female cheetah achieved a mean time of 64 mph (102.4 kph) in three runs over a 220 yard (201.2m) course. She had 30 minutes rest between each run.

N.C.C. Sharp, then an athletics coach used to hand timing, describes the test in the *Journal of Zoology* (Sharp 1997). The cheetah had been orphaned as a cub and raised on a farm. The course was firm, level ground with a slight covering of murram dust. There was no wind. An analogue stopwatch was calibrated with others from the Kenya Amateur Athletics Association and Voice of Kenya radio.

The cheetah had a running start of 18m and when it broke a taut piece of white wool, the stopwatch was started by the timer standing in an open Landrover 75m down the course with a piece of meat in his hand. When the cheetah broke the second wool tape with its anterior thorax, the watch was stopped and the meat thrown down.

The recorded times were 7, 6.9 and 7.2 seconds, giving a mean time of 7 seconds – a speed of 64 mph (102.4 kph).

Sharp compared the speed with those of other mammals, including horses and dogs, and declared that the cheetah had “by far the highest reliably-reported running speed for any animal”.

He said that a widely-quoted speed of 71 mph (114.3 kph) had been discredited as it involved a tame animal said to have run 80 yards (73m) in 2.25 seconds, but the track was later shown to be only 65 yards (59m) long. He declared that M Hildebrand’s estimate (1961) of 56 mph (90.1 kph) was not from a timed run, but was calculated by analysing film, taking the scale of distance from an estimated length of the cheetah’s body.

References

- Hildebrand, M. 1961. *Further studies on locomotion of the cheetah*. J. Mammal. 42 (84-91).
Sharp, N.C.C. 1997. *Timed running speed of a cheetah* (*Acinonyx jubatus*). J. Zool, London 241 (493-494).