



John on North Ave. beach in the early AM, the Chicago skyline to the south. Photo: Matt Taplinger
by John Huston

The start of the North Pole '09 expedition is still over 7 months away, but Tyler and I have been training since the end of last winter's expedition season in April. Our workouts are custom-designed by our expedition physical trainer, Piotr Bednarski, Director of Athlete Development for the U.S. Biathlon Association. Piotr has worked with us to design a workout regime specifically geared toward readying our bodies for the twisting, torquing and stamina necessary to pull 260 pound loads through the ice rubble of the Arctic Ocean. Workouts consist of weight training, biking, running and most importantly pulling 45 pound truck tires to simulate pulling a sled while skiing.

Pulling tires is an unique experience that elicits all sorts of fun (mostly) reactions from on lookers.

Traffic slows down, heads turn, mouths drop, eyes widen and silly comments bubble up in the back of people's throats. I plod by at 3 miles an hour pulling my heavy rubber tire doughnuts behind me. On hot sunny afternoons in Chicago thousands of people team up and down the lakefront, biking, running, walking, roller-blading and swimming. Sometimes it seems like half of these people are magnetically drawn to the lone guy pulling tires while walking with funny looking ski poles. Some people just stop and ask me about the reason for this sort of training. Others stop and spout out a random comedic remark.

At this point I've heard a lot of these remarks. Some are funnier than others. Themes often repeat. I wish I could say that I receive all the remarks happily, but I'm human just like everyone

else. My reaction varies greatly depending on my mood, energy level and how hungry I am. Here is a list of the top ten comments (with my reaction).....what would you say to me, or if you were me, what would your reaction be?

10. "Hey, can I sit on there?" (Reaction: unfunny to me, the first time and the 50th time. Normally I counter by asking if they want to pull the tires, so far no one has taken me up on the offer :)).
9. "Wouldn't it be easier to roll the tires instead of dragging them?" (Reaction: I respond to this common quip by saying that I don't want it to be easy).
8. "Hey, dude, where's your car?" (Reaction: funny the first time, but not as nearly as much the 50th time; car references are perhaps the most popular theme).
7. "Did you get those off my car?" (Reaction: 'Yes' :)).
6. "Do you know that you have two tires behind you?" (Reaction: 'No' :)).
5. "Did you lose a bet?" (Reaction: I find this one to be quite funny, I like a good practical joke).
4. "Are you being punished for something?" (Reaction: Also quite clever, I like creative consequences).
3. "Respect!" accompanied by a fist pump or head nod (Reaction: fist pump or head nod back; this positive support is always a bit of a pickup. Funny how a few positive words can go a long way).
2. "What did you do to your wife?" from an elderly man with as big smile (Reaction: A creative exclamation from another generation).
1. "What DID you DO?!?" from a little, very astonished looking, middle-aged man (Reaction: I thought this one was hilarious).