

Running Partners

A unique feline's pastime turns into worldwide attention on rescue cats.

WHEN MICHAEL GREENBLATT went for his morning run one day in November 2008, he didn't expect a new best friend and running partner to show up in his life. The traveling fitness trainer from Ocean County, N.J., also didn't expect his new best friend to become as high-profile as the celebrities and athletes he's trained for the past 25 years.

When he stepped out of his home that day he noticed a kitten across the street staring at him. "She was beautiful," he says of the black kitten who stole his heart. "She just kept staring at me." He found out from the woman who owned the house and had been feeding her, that the kitten had been abandoned there in a shoebox.

The next morning when Greenblatt went for his run, the kitten was on his doorstep and began to run with him. She began meeting him every morning at his usual 5:30 running time to join him on his runs over street, sidewalk, beach, jetty and boardwalk. Thinking this was highly unusual, he asked veterinarians and local SPCA staff if they had ever heard of cats who do distance running with humans. They never had.

A lifelong cat lover, Greenblatt fell in love with the kitten. "I love black cats," he says. "All I knew growing up was black cats." This little black kitten reminded Greenblatt of two he had when he was a boy and made him think of his mother, who also loved black cats.

He convinced his neighbor that he was going to keep the kitten and brought her to the SPCA to get spayed. The staff there estimated that she was born on April 30, 2008, a significant date on Greenblatt's calendar. "I got chills going through me," he says. "April 30, 1999, is when my mom passed. My sister said, 'See, Mom sent you the best present.' It cheers me up on the saddest day of the year for me." Wanting to come up with a unique name for his unique present, Greenblatt began calling her Roadrunner.



Roadrunner soaks up the sun on the trophy stand in the winner's circle at Monmouth Park Race Track in Oceanport, N.J.

COURTESY OF MICHAEL LERMAN

Safety First

Together Greenblatt and Roadrunner have run more than 20 different courses over the past five years. "We do all different types of workouts," he says. "We have easy and long runs; some days we run in the sand. She runs on the boardwalk and the beach. She leads the way." Roadrunner also gets days off. "Being a fitness trainer, you have to monitor your athletes. You can just tell when she's tired." With two sets of stairs and a big corridor in his home, Greenblatt set up an indoor course for days when the weather doesn't permit outdoor activity. "There's a lot of good workouts we can do inside."

Greenblatt's top priority is safety. "My eyes are always open," he says. "From Day One, Roadrunner's safety and health come first. We go very early in the morning.

We're out running before the garbage trucks, school buses, before everything. On the rare occasion, the second I see anything — a car, a bike — I scoop her up in my arms. I'm always aware, and we haven't even had one close call."

After Hurricane Sandy, Greenblatt and Roadrunner were displaced for 100 days and had to relocate. During this time, Roadrunner ran daily on a big backyard deck at the house where they stayed. The boardwalk has been rebuilt since the hurricane and the pair were able to resume their usual routes. "It's so quiet when we go out at that time of the morning," he says. "It's very peaceful down there."

The Road to Fame

Greenblatt had a website created for Roadrunner. In February 2011, a writer

called to write a story for *People* magazine. Then on March 1, 2011, Roadrunner appeared on AOL's newsfeed as one of the top 10 news stories in the world. That same night, Roadrunner's YouTube video received more than 150,000 hits and Greenblatt received more than 500 positive messages from people all over the world.

Several rescue organizations posted Roadrunner's story on their websites, because the feline sensation has brought worldwide attention to rescue cats. A Facebook fan page followed. The Associated Press contacted him, which led to stories that were published in Taiwan and China. In September 2011, Animal Planet featured Roadrunner on *Must Love Cats*. Two months later, the St. Louis-based Nestlé Purina PetCare Company made its own Roadrunner video, Greenblatt's favorite to date. Recently Roadrunner landed an advertising gig for a cat supplements company and she also has a literary agent. A children's book is in the works.

"This all is very flattering," Greenblatt says. "Even though she's become an international star, more importantly, Roadrunner is my best friend and she's my companion whom I love with all my heart. Roadrunner's safety and health come first. I love her like family. I'd protect her with my life."

Personality Plus

What does she do besides running? "Her most favorite thing to do is sleeping on my chest," Greenblatt says. She flies into the room at bedtime and Greenblatt better not be late, because when he is, she lets him have it. "If it's bedtime she starts meowing like there's no tomorrow."

Roadrunner also loves the car and Greenblatt has driven to 15 different states with her. "I've never seen a cat like the car this much," he says.

"What makes Roadrunner so unique is that many people have cats who follow them; however, Roadrunner leads the way and I follow her," he says. "She's the boss." 🐾

Susan Logan-McCracken has been the editor of CAT FANCY for 10 years.

Roadrunner runs on the beach with fitness trainer Michael Greenblatt.



Roadrunner rests in Greenblatt's arms.



Roadrunner navigates the jetty.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit Roadrunner's website at www.roadrunnerthecat.com. You can also find her on Facebook at RoadRunner the Cat.

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