

August 29, 2006



Dear LLBean,

On my way out to Los Angeles for an exhibition of my paintings last year, I stopped in Alamogordo, NM for some rest and relaxation. Knowing White Sands National Monument is located there, I decided to look for something smart to wear while visiting the dunes. This is when I discovered your Ridge Runner vest on the company website. Being a visual artist with a professional interest in color, I was initially drawn to the vest for its ability to complement the deep blues I had heard would appear at sunset in White Sands. I also thought it and I would look striking as the last moments of light bounced off the bright orange body and reflective safety piping. When my vest arrived and I first put it on I was quite satisfied that my hopes would be realized, but something bothered me about the article of clothing; why call it the Ridge Runner vest? The name was especially troubling to me, because I really don't like to run that much. I find it kind of boring. On the other hand, I do like to look down upon things, so I wasn't totally opposed to the first word in the vest's compound moniker. But who chooses to run specifically on ridges? Why? And where are these ridges? My suspicion was that no one at your company had given this any thought. Regardless, when I arrived at the national monument with my new Ridge Runner vest, I experienced something astonishing, which I would like to share with you.

Upon entering the park one drives through the desert for miles and miles to an area called the "Heart of the Sands." It is here that I parked my rental car, put on the Ridge Runner vest, and proceeded hurriedly to the peak of a great powdery dune as sunset was fast approaching. When I reached the top and looked out I was struck by how the gigantic deposits of sand looked like hills of wind-blown sugar. While their geo-physical logic was lost on me, their surface qualities, individually and collectively, were perhaps the most seductive thing I had ever seen.

Standing there motionless I began to notice a pronounced change in the color around me. The shadows in the parallel surface ripples beneath my feet quickly progressed from a slight gray to cyan, as did the other areas of sand protected from the setting sun. Simultaneously, my bright orange Ridge Runner vest began to take on a reflective glow more intense than I had expected. Being both slightly startled and exhilarated, I decided to strike out for the peak of the dune adjacent to my own. As I descended from my elevated vantage point the wind picked up and began to blow at my nylon back. This combination of rear pressure and downward travel increased my pace from a walk to a jog to a run, which as I mentioned before I usually do not like to do. Picking up speed, I decided to maintain my surprising movement, as I wanted to reach the next dune before sunset.

After running from the base of the first dune up the slope of the second, an unexpected thing occurred to me; why stop running? Jogging in place on the second sandy ridge, I decided to test the limits of my own endurance and my new Ridge Runner vest. I continued running to the third dune . . . and to the fourth dune . . . and to the fifth dune! When I reached the top of the ninth dune I realized the dunes were like beautiful mini-mountains, each with a ridge that I could run over or along. I ran, yes, but I also skipped and flipped as well. With the sun nearly set I collapsed from



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exhaustion - both from the physical activity and my joyous laughter. I knew that I must be some sight, running over and along the dune ridges, with my bright orange vest ablaze. I was hot, I was tired, but I was content. And I wanted everyone to know what I had become . . . a ridge runner.

Now I know that you, as the purveyor of this vest, may not have seriously considered the prophetic nature of the “Ridge Runner” name. Even if it was a shrug-of-the-shoulders idea eventually cleared by some higher-up with a glassy-eyed nod of approval, I see an opportunity to bring purpose, or at least a conclusion, to this small artifact from your company (the artifact being your fine vest, the purpose being ridge running).

You see, I want to truly become a ridge runner, and I want the fabric of my soul and vest to become altered by this activity. In order to realize my wish, I have etched my Ridge Runner vest with the Ridge Runner name. I did this by blasting it with sand, and by burning it with calcium hypochlorite (nylon does not etch easily). The back of the vest now carries the Ridge Runner name, although the etched area disintegrates when it is subjected to heat (such as the increased body temperature that accompanies running). But I don’t mind this . . . it shows everyone that I am training hard and achieving results. What am I training for (you may ask)? That is a good question, and the reason I have composed this letter.

I would like your company to sponsor my run through the western portion of the White Sands dune field. Now, admittedly, the dune field is big, around 16 miles wide, and I am not in very good shape. Well, I wasn’t in good shape, but as I said, I am training hard. I run in the city. I run at the beach. I lift weights. I do things that are hard to explain. I am determined to execute this run through the desert. I will start at sunset, and continue running into the night. Or I may start running late at night, and exit the dune field at sunrise. Either way, I need your help . . .

*- David Duncan*