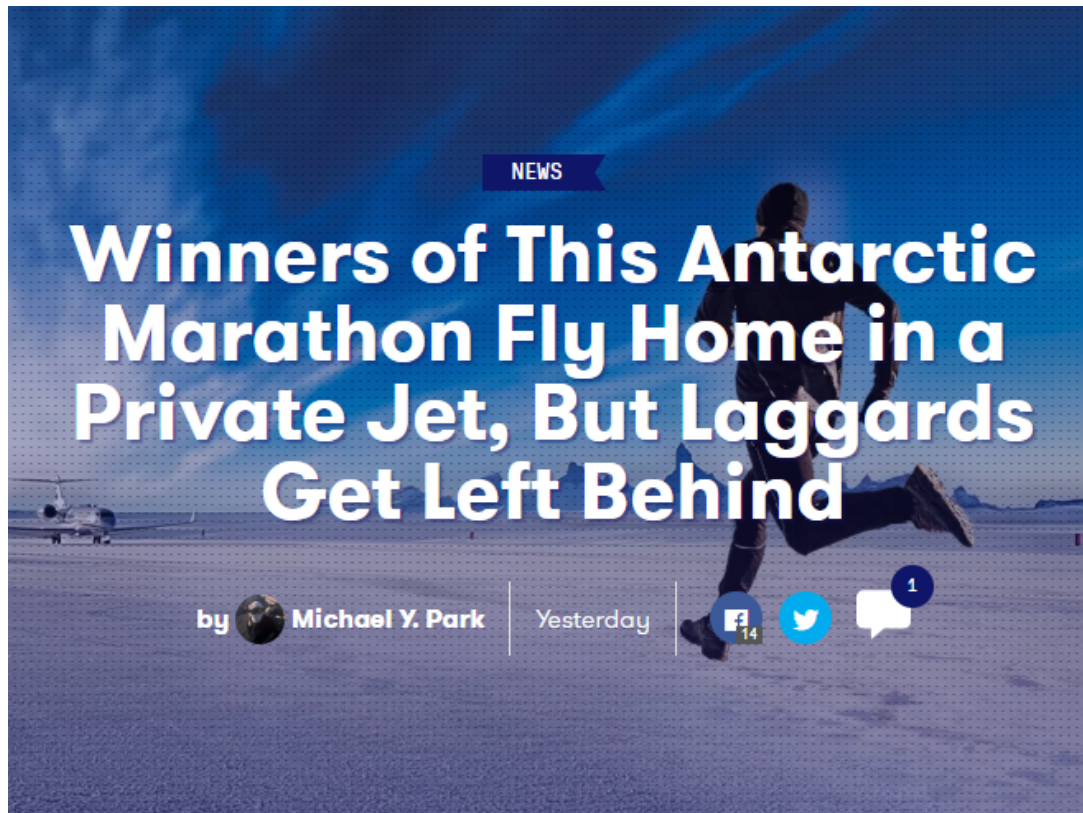


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**Y**ou really, really don't want to come in last in this upcoming race.

That's because, while the winners get flown home in style on a [Gulfstream G550](#), the losers have to stay behind.

In Antarctica.

“On the one hand, you get to ride in a \$50 million jet brimming with everything you need,” said Patrick Woodhead, CEO of [White Desert Antarctica](#). “On the other, you have to stay at the camp in Antarctica overnight at minus 10 to 12 degrees centigrade.”

Consider it a uniquely compelling incentive for what the company's dubbing the Race the Jet: The Ultimate Marathon. From Feb. 2 to Feb. 4 next year, 24 runners flown in from Cape Town, South Africa, will vie for the finish line in what's often called the “dark side” of Antarctica in freezing temperatures, running the 26.2-mile race on the Wolfs Fang runway, a desolate stretch of flattened ice and snow 2,610 miles from civilization.

“It's a hell of a long way,” Woodhead said.

The catch — that those who don't make it back in five hours are stranded at the small runway base overnight — isn't so much a punishment as it is a necessity. The flight from [Cape Town](#) to Antarctica takes five hours, and regulations dictate a hard limit on the number of hours the pilots can spend in the air in a single rotation. If the pilots of the Gulfstream don't take off around five hours after landing, they can't legally take off at all without spending the night to sleep and rest.

“I guess they'll be spending their five hours on the ground telling the clients to hurry up and trying to herd them into the back of the plane before the five hours is up,” Woodhead said.



The track itself will be stunning, running along the snow-packed runway (marked, groomed to be nice and grippy and carefully checked for crevasses, of course), then peeling off past massive ice falls that ascend 300 feet and alongside the foot of a mountain thrusting skyward through the ice cap, one of the last on Earth never to have been climbed. Runners may be accompanied by flying snow petrels, one of a handful of birds to breed on the frozen continent.

Lest the scenery convince runners to miss the five-hour cutoff to spend an extra night at the base, Woodhead noted that, though they'll be comfortable and safe, laggards will miss out on the luxurious perks on the Gulfstream, like Lagavulin whisky poured over cubes of 10,000-year-old Antarctic ice. At the base, the participants left behind will be drinking warmed-up energy drinks before their flight home on an Ilyushin Il-76 cargo plane full of the base's garbage and scientific specimens.



“It’s really going to be full of trash and core samples of ice to assess substrate health,” Woodhead said. “You won’t get the whisky on the Ilyushin.”

Founded by polar explorers, White Desert has hosted well-known personalities including Prince Harry, Bear Grylls and Buzz Aldrin, and maintains a strict zero-impact philosophy.

Race the Jet is accepting candidates now, but is capping the number of runners at 24. Applicants will have to be cleared as being healthy enough to participate, as well as forking over \$24,000 each.

*Images courtesy of White Desert Antarctica.*