STRONG Family show resilience

After fighting MND for 4 yrs, Rob's marathon was a challenge I really wanted to complete

Dad defies odds and inspires over 26.2 miles

EXCLUSIVE
BY **ALI GRAVES**

For all runners taking part in the Rob Burrow Leeds Marathon at the weekend, the feat was one of remarkable endurance. For Andy Tate, it was a run like no other.

Four years ago, Andy was diagnosed with motor neurone disease and told the condition had an average life expectancy of two years.

But there he was, completing a marathon named in honour of the rugby league star who captured the nation's heart before his death aged 41 last June from the same disease.

Now Andy, 47, is proudly following that example of resilience.

He managed to run the 26.2-mile course in 5 hours and 40 minutes to fundraise for the MyName'5 Doddie Foundation, named after the late Scottish rugby union star Doddie Weir.

Andy says: "I'm feeling relief and elation. I was worried that I wouldn't be able to get around... it was a challenge that I really wanted to complete.

"It is an amazing feeling and a great sense of achievement."

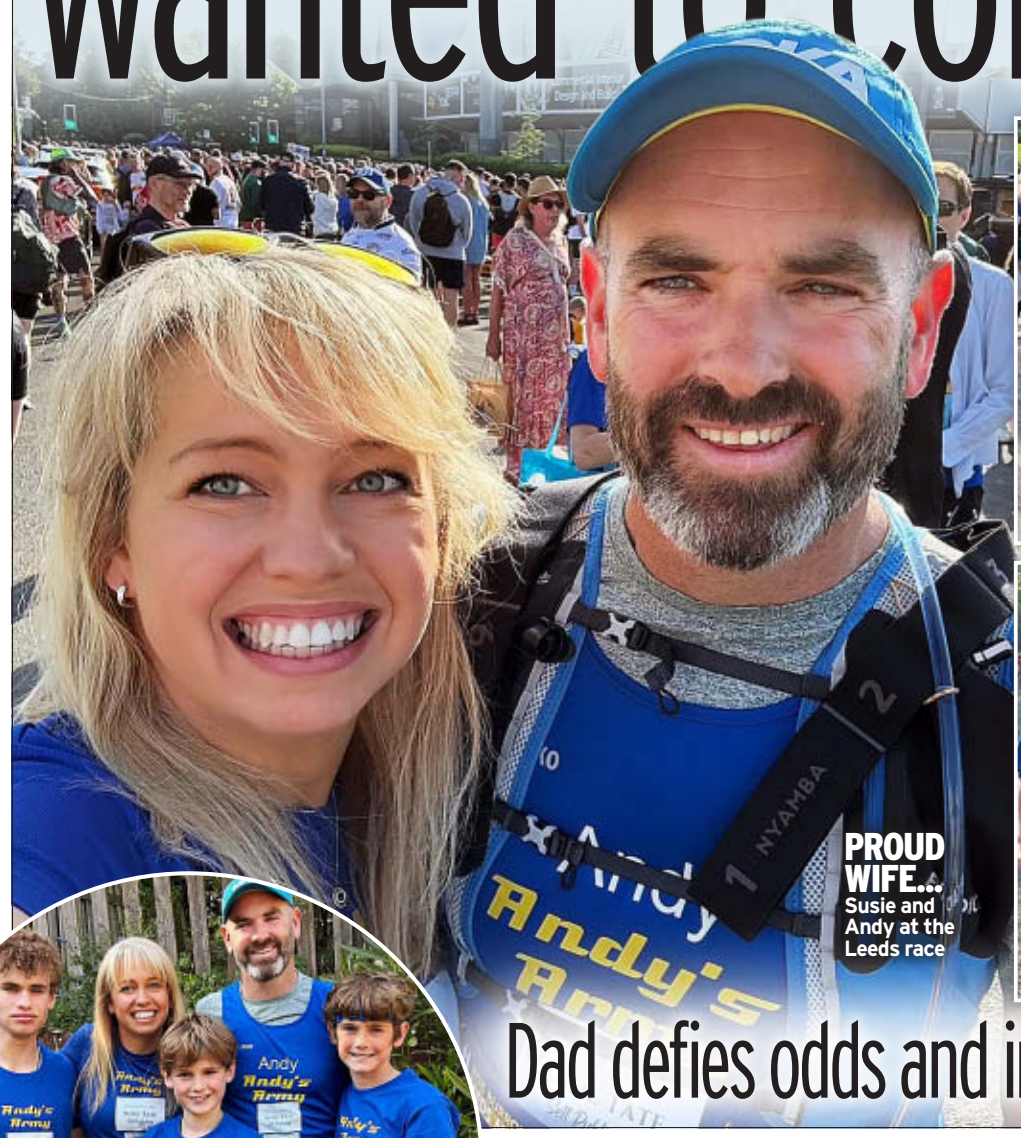
He ran with the support of 30 friends and family, dubbed "Andy's Army". Andy, from Dorset, says: "They were such a great support, helping me get around.

"The fundraising has also been amazing so I want to thank everyone for their generosity.

"It means a huge amount to me and the MND community. It's a very underfunded disease."

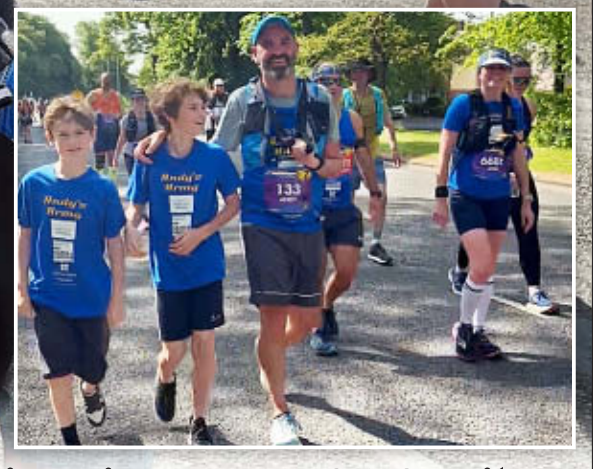
Andy's proud wife Susie adds: "He's diagnosed with the ALS type, which is the fastest-progressing, worst type.

"We were lucky in one way – the average life expectancy is two years after diagnosis, yet here we are."



PROUD WIFE... Susie and Andy at the Leeds race

STRIDE OUT Andy and his 'army' during Sunday's marathon



The pair know what they are talking about, too. Andy and Susie, 46, met at medical school and married 25 years ago. Susie is a GP and Andy was an anaesthetist at a Bournemouth hospital until he was diagnosed with MND in 2021.

When he realised the tremors in his hands were not just nerve problems, the pair were acutely aware what a diagnosis would mean for them and their three sons – Charlie, now 15, Sam, 13 and Jack, 12.

TEAM TATE Charlie, Susie, Jack, Andy & Sam help raise awareness for MND

Susie recalls: "We were completely and utterly devastated by it. For weeks we didn't tell [the kids].

"They love their dad, they want to support him and they're great boys. You don't realise how resilient they can be. They have a lot more to deal with than their friends."

Andy's upper body has lost a lot of functional movement and strength, and he has had to give up a lot of his favourite sports but against the odds – and predictions – he can still run.

"His arms have become weaker, but his legs are still strong," says Susie. "He loves rugby, tennis, golf and windsurfing but MND tends to target people who are more active.

> "I was worried I wouldn't be able to get around, so it is a great sense of achievement"
>
> **ANDY TATE** ON HIS PRIDE AT COMPLETING ICONIC MARATHON

"It gradually strips you of everything. One by one he had to stop all the sports he enjoyed."

MND kills six people every day in the UK – a third within 12 months of diagnosis and more than half within two years. There is no cure.

Susie says Andy still coaches his son's rugby team, and in 2022, a year after his diagnosis, he even took part in a Guinness World Record attempt, raising more than £100,000.

"He played with his rugby team as they tried for the longest game of touch rugby on Bournemouth beach. He managed the 34 hours with a squad of 22 – he did that! It supported the Motor Neurone Disease Association and the MyName'5 Doddie Foundation."

Reflecting on the first signs of the condition in 2019, Susie revealed it was a comical moment they still laugh about now.

"He lost an arm wrestle that he believed he shouldn't have lost," she says.

"He said to me, 'Listen, I'm at the pub, I lost an arm wrestle to James and I should not have lost'."

Andy believes it was the first pathological sign – and he was not wrong.

LEGEND Rugby star Rob Burrow

Susie adds: "He started having fasciculations – muscle twitches – widespread through his arms and his shoulders. We learn about some scary conditions at medical school, and if I'm honest, MND is the most scary."

Susie has taken time off work to focus on Andy and write romance novels, releasing her third book, Outlier, this summer.

"We take it month by month and try to live in the moment," she says.

"I do think we're really blessed. We've had a lovely life together."

mirrornews@mirror.co.uk
@DailyMirror