A20 Paths N Downs Marathon – Maidstone – 16 Nov 2014

I had actually entered this event last year, but a torn calf muscle meant that I couldn’t take part. They very kindly offered me a place this year and as I was in London on the Saturday , I thought I would take them up on the offer.

This is a road race taking place a few miles to the west of Maidstone, using the Mercure hotel as its base.

There were almost 150 in each of the marathon and half marathon which started an hour later, at 10am.

Registration was very simple with no queuing and as soon as I was given my number and chip, I was able to get changed. I was pleasantly surprised at their being a chip as it didn’t seem as necessary in a one loop event as a lapped one, but it makes life easier for the organisers.

As I was getting changed, I was greeted by a number of people that I know. I hadn’t really expected that, so far from home, which just demonstrates what a friendly business distance running can be.

Shortly before 9, we left the hotel and crossed the A20 to a tarmac footpath at the side, where we were treated to a briefing rendered largely inaudible by passing traffic.

It was a very narrow start, pretty much single file, but most of us seemed happy with this as we were not chasing times.

Following the A20, after a couple of miles we turned away through the rather pretty village of Harrietsham and then to the fist of three real hills.

It wasn’t too steep but went on for quite a long way and proved to be a good place for a first walk for quite a lot of us.

Most of the rest of the course was along quiet country lanes and through lovely little villages, until retracing our steps for the last mile or so alongside the A20 to the finish.

Drinks stations were at three mile intervals and all were manned by friendly and encouraging volunteers.

The drinks stations in the first half had water, but from twelve miles onwards there was also flat coke, some gels, various Haribo confectionery and similar products. There were also marshmallows at most of them, which was a new one on me!

On completion we were given a fairly standard, catalogue type medal and a printout of our individual result.

Back to the hotel and we were able to use the leisure club for a shower. After that it was the very long journey home by a selection of trains.

This was a very well organised and thoroughly enjoyable event, even if my 4:21 might indicate otherwise.

If I find myself in the area next year, I would certainly do it again.

Ian Richardson

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