

LIMASSOL MARATHON, CYPRUS March 16th 2014

After 3 frustrating months without any form of exercise, I finally got the letter from the surgeon on March 5th containing the magic words “Mr Manford can now resume his marathon running.” Great! There was a marathon in Paphos on March 9th but that had a 5 hour time limit. The one on the next weekend in Limassol seemed more reasonable; it gave us 6 hours to get round. I was sure I could manage that; even without any training whatsoever. Friends Danny Kay and Andy Glen from the 100 Club were doing both so off I went to join them and enjoy a week’s holiday in Paphos to boot.

I’d last been to Limassol over 20 years ago and had memories of a sprawling, crowded, dusty city. It hadn’t changed. Confusion on the buses meant we were dropped off more than 3km from where we’d intended and not a single person we asked seemed to have heard of the The Evagoras Lanitis Centre, where the Registration was being held. We finally arrived to a big disappointment: the computers were down, there was no Exhibition, no written information, no Start List, very few people and no maps of the course on display. On requesting one, (I wanted to know where Mo could see me en route in case I was forced to pull out), the guy printed out a copy of the 10km route when the computers came back on. The goody bag contained 500g of spaghetti and a gel. So far, no good. I was assured that it hadn’t been like this at Paphos last weekend.

Still, I wasn’t complaining. I was just happy to be back on the Start Line of a marathon again at 9am the next morning, despite the rustiness of a three month lay-off. I was full of apprehension, having no idea of how the body would perform. At least I’d be functioning on two working kidneys this time around. In the few days before flying out I’d managed to go from a 2, to a 4, to a 6 mile shuffle. On that basis I’d adopted a worse-case scenario of running the first 6 miles within the hour and then, if necessary, walking the next 20 in the 5 hours remaining at what would have been a fast-walk 15 minute per mile pace. I was sure I could manage that. DNF was not an option.

With Andy Glen at the Start



On what was a warm, sunny morning, the organisers lined the 200 marathoners up first with the 325 half-marathoners behind us and the 450 in the 10km at the rear. I’m not sure that was a good idea as it meant that the faster, shorter distance runners soon had to negotiate their way between us. There was also a 5km race on the day that apparently turned into a bit of a disaster. From the Old Port the route took us 14km eastwards along a closed coastal dual-carriageway to the first of three turns at what was left of the ancient royal city of Amathus. This stretch was what constituted the resort’s tourist strip; replete with tacky bars, fast-food outlets and every type of tourist accommodation. I guess most of the tourists were still eating their breakfasts as the place was deserted for most of the early miles. We then crossed over to the other side of the carriageway and retraced our steps all the way back to where we’d

started from. There was bottled water and isotonic drink in cups every 2.5km. Without turns, corners or inclines and only more of the same on a long straight road ahead of us into the distance, most of us found this monotonous and uninspiring. The literature encouraged us to “Run with a Smile” and “Run along the Waves” The former was impossible; the latter difficult given the number of rather large buildings between us and the seafront.

The course then continued westwards for a further 3 km to a large roundabout at the New Port area before heading back past the start again to the 38km mark. We turned yet again for the final 4km back along the same road yet again to the finish on the promenade. There we were handed our medal and a bottle of water. There were no T-shirts; despite the 50 euro entry fee these had to be purchased separately at 9.90 euro for a plain white cotton affair or 19.90 for a more colourful, light blue, technical running vest. I saw a number of the vests but very few T-shirts being worn.

From what I’ve said it might seem that I didn’t enjoy it. I did. It was great to be back in the saddle so to speak. I even surprised myself with my finishing time, going well past the planned 6 miles of running to over half way in 2 hour 7 minutes before having to succumb to a walk/run strategy. Even then I managed to get round in 4 hour 40 without any form of discomfort. I guess, as marathon runners, we must retain a residue of fitness for longer than expected. It says something about my state of mind that I took greater satisfaction from my time here than I did from achieving my PB over a quarter of a century ago.

This was the 8th edition of the Limassol Marathon that started with a field of a mere 70 runners first time out. It now styles itself an “International” marathon and has pretensions to be recognised as such. I’m afraid it has quite a bit of work to do to convince. For a start there were no km markers apart from at the drink stations. The marshals were mainly teenagers and though plentiful, appeared distracted and disinterested at times. The roads were meant to be closed to traffic but that didn’t seem to stop whole pelotons of death-by-lycra cyclists from taking advantage and using them for training runs. As the day progressed these were joined by roller skaters and skateboarders – an accident waiting to happen! Would I do it again? Of course I would. Next time as a double-header with Paphos. Unlike Limassol, this is a little gem of a town.

One for next year! Paphos with Danny Kay



Jim Manford
March 20th 2014