5th MBNA Chester Marathon –

A weekend away in this walled city and a marathon run a combination not to be missed. On the Friday night Janet (my better non-running half) and I had a wonderful meal at the Chiefs table (highly recommended). Saturday morning quick visit to the shops and then off to Chester Zoo lots of walking around (would this affect my run tomorrow) but we did see lots of animals as well as many empty spaces!

Sunday morning a light breakfast and off in the car, Janet driving to the racecourse starting point. We had not got more than a mile before we hit the road closers and traffic jam; it would be quicker to walk through the town and I jumped out to let Janet return to the Hotel for breakfast. Other runners had the same idea and a small procession of us runners walked towards the racecourse start.

Apparently, Runners World readers voted the MBNA its number one road marathon in both 2012 and 2013. There certainly were lots of Marshalls milling about directing cars/runners as well as charity stalls and tents for bag drop up etc. but NO changing facilities – lucky came ready to run.

Walked over to the start line and the start of the race is actually on the grass race track - one of the local runners told us that they had removed the fences. The web site talks about just under 5,000 runners but that must also include the metric marathon which was starting later on and using the second half of the marathon route.

I started in the 9min pen (really just a sign) and they had two 4 hour pace makers, but I had past them as we left the racetrack onto the road. The first part was around this historic town passing the Cathedral and the split level Middle Ages “Rows” going through the Roman Walls four times before heading out of the City across the old Dee Bridge.

The race is described as a predominantly flat route with only 101m of climb on the whole route, that’s not my memory and it’s certainly more up and down than flat. It is run on closed roads with water at every 3 miles and alternate sports drinks or gels available with chip timing with 5 intermediate splits (every 10k and halfway) all that you would expect at one of these big city marathons.

Covering 19 miles in England and 7 miles in Wales (my first time running in Wales) with scenic Cheshire and North Wales countryside and villages before returning along the banks of the River Dee for a finish again on the grass racetrack just inside the 4 hour barrier.

My last six marathons have been with NEMC with around 100 plus runners so the MBNA event was very different with so many runners around you all the time, that’s not to say that it was friendly or that they talked to you during the run which they did not, but it was a very strange experience!

I did look for the jockey room to have a shower and change for the homeward journey but could see no signs or marshals to ask - overall I enjoyed the event, (was this because of the sub 4hour?) will use the long sleeve t-shirt but unlikely to return and run the MBNA marathon again. I imagine that starting and finishing on the grass racetrack is a media marketing tool but for me the organiser’s just need to add a few meters to the road section, have a changing area and post-race wash. Mike Trant