

DUBLIN MARATHON October 27th 2014

I'd hardly got off one plane from the long flight back from Australia before I was boarding another one to Ireland, hoping to shake-off the jet-lag and run my fifth Dublin Marathon. Friend Dave Goodwin had been chosen to act as one of the 4 hour 20 pace-makers for the race and the original plan was to run it alongside him as far as possible. Dave is a 2hour 55 minute runner these days so he was going to have to rein himself in a bit to achieve the target. I reckoned on accompanying him at my usual 10 minute/mile pace and help slow him down. Being a pace-maker in a big city marathon is not a bad little number if you can get it. As well as receiving free food and hotel accommodation, Dave was given a full race kit of vest and shorts as well as a tidy cash sum for his efforts. Mind you, the job comes with responsibilities with the organisers insisting that each mile is run at an even pace throughout and that the finish must be within 30 seconds of the advertised time. No pressure there then.

This was to be the 35th edition of the event and, as usual, there was a group of 23 runners who'd done each one among the record-breaking field of 15,000. Having had all these years in which to practice, the organisation of virtually every aspect of the event was faultless: from the Expo, to the arrangements at the Start, the on-course marshalling of over 1,000 volunteers and the efficient handling of the congested Finish area. As usual the race Expo took place in the Royal Dublin Showground building in Ballsbridge some three miles out of town. This was no mere marketing trap; instead it contained a number of interesting exhibits like the Dublin Marathon Museum. There were talks from past winners, nutrition experts as well as hot food on offer. We were given our number/chip, towel and official Marathon bag containing assorted goodies, (like energy bars, drinks and spaghetti!)

Outside the entrance to the Expo



Race morning saw us separated into three separate time zones according to the colour of our bibs. Each zone started 10 minutes apart with the Orange for the sub 3:50 leaving at 9 am. Then followed Green for 3:50 to 4:15 and finally Blue for 4:15 plus. Dave and I were in the latter as we were shepherded to the start line in Fitzwilliam Square. The route has changed a few times since I first did this event 20 years ago but has recently settled on the familiar course that I last ran in 2007. The only change this year, forced on the organisers due to road works in O'Connell Street, the city's main thoroughfare, meant following the south bank of River Liffey towards the entrance to the giant Phoenix Park. Arriving in the park after 3 mile we took a slightly uphill gradient through the centre before emerging at 6 mile and losing the height we'd gained down College and Tower Roads. 8 mile brought us back into the park for a short loop to the 10 mile mark and back across the Liffey to start climbing again.

This pattern of gaining and losing height continued throughout the race. Though none of the gradients were particularly steep it did affect the ability to maintain an even pace. Dublin

is certainly not a PB course because of the ups and downs and things were not helped on the day by strong swirling winds and unseasonably muggy conditions. At 13 miles we crossed the Grand Canal just before the half-way mark. Reaching this in exactly 2:10 meant that Dave had got his pacing spot-on. I'd had enough though. I don't enjoy running in a group and by this stage, though the mind was willing, the legs appeared to have been left behind on an aeroplane somewhere east of Dublin and west of Dubai. Somewhat reluctantly I opted to plough a lone furrow back to the finish and struggled through increasingly uninspiring and unscenic urban stretches, punctuated only by a pleasant section in Bushy Park at 17 mile and a skirt around the grounds of University College at 22 to 23 mile. The final 2 miles along the dead-straight Merrion and Shelbourne Roads got me going again and it was a relief to turn into Mount Street to see the finish gantry 800 metres away in the distance. A good proportion of this was run over a blue carpet alongside thousands of cheering spectators. In fact, spectator support was one of the highlights of the event. There were numerous places on the course where large crowds had gathered to offer very vocal encouragement; in many ways reminiscent of the early days of the Great North Run.

I finished in a disappointing 4 hours 41 while Dave did what it said on the tin and got his followers home in 4:19:48. This was despite his pace-making partner throwing in the towel, unable to go any further after 20 miles. Our reward was a really nice medal and, in the tradition of the Dublin Marathon, a long-sleeved T-shirt – a much more sensible and useful gift than yet another of the ubiquitous short-sleeved ones. It was a generous goody bag too, containing chocolate, drinks and crisps among other treats.

I thought this was a brilliant event. It's one of the few big city marathons I've done recently that is just that: a marathon with no half, 10k, 5k or fun run getting in the way. Dublin too is an exciting city to visit. There's virtually not one, but two, pubs on every corner and in every one of them you bet there's someone playing live music. That night the city was awash in a sea of lime green Dublin Marathon long-sleeved T-shirts as runners celebrated a great day out.

Jim Manford
October 28th 2014

Celebrating Dublin- style with Dave & Martin

