Race Report - Milton Keynes Marathon 2nd May 2016

For those who like their marathons to be ‘low key and local’, Milton Keynes is probably not for you.

For a start, Milton Keynes is a long way away. Only 50 miles north of London, and a good 4 hour drive from the north east if you don’t stop. The venue is easy to find however, just head for the MK Dons football stadium which is pretty hard to miss!

So why go all this way to run 26.2 miles? Good question. It was all based on a conversation with my wife which started: ‘what do you want to do for your birthday?’ Obviously I said ‘run a marathon’. What else?

It’s a big running event with 8000 runners taking part in a variety of events during the day but only about 2000 doing the marathon. A bit of a surprise as the MK Marathon is a week after London and might seem an obvious choice for those who missed out on an entry for that.

Despite the numbers taking part and the fact that the marathon, marathon relay and half marathon start together in one mass start, I still found myself standing next to another runner from the North East! A young runner from Heaton Harriers, Thomas Bell, had also made the journey south looking to get a qualifying time for London next year.

As a first visit to Milton Keynes I have to say I was pleasantly surprised at how nice it was. We stayed in the MK Dons stadium hotel (I think it’s actually a hotel with a football ground attached!) which is pretty impressive. It also made the pre-race preparation ideal, stepping out of the hotel onto the start line is about as good as it gets.

There was a good atmosphere around the stadium on the morning of the race and the organisation was excellent. And so it was for the rest of the day with loads of marshals giving great support all the way around the course and in the stadium at the finish. It really had the feel of a big city marathon without the annoying crowds of London and with some great roads and paths to run on.

I particularly enjoyed the first 7 miles up to the point the half marathon runners split off, which was on big, wide roads through the commercial area of MK. After 7 miles the field thinned out considerably and the route changed to minor roads, pavement, cycle paths etc. through a variety of surroundings including parks, residential housing areas and passing well known land marks such as the famous concrete cows.

The course is about as flat as it gets, 580 feet of gain according to the GPS, and most of this is getting out of pedestrian underpasses. Weather conditions were good, sunny and bright with the only slight downside being the wind which seemed to gain in intensity during the last 6 miles and slowed everyone down, according to the comments on Strava (I just thought it was my old legs giving up).

Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed the experience – a great birthday present from my wonderful wife who provided support and encouragement throughout the whole adventure.

I was also pleased with my time (3:02:59) which secured 32nd place overall from 1954 finishers and 1st in my new MV60 age category. The prize includes a free entry to next years’ event, but I’m going to have to think about that….

Ian Brown

9th May 2016