

Queenstown Marathon, New Zealand 22 November 2014

The Race

I signed up for this one 11 months in advance. At that time it was a pig in a poke. It was the first running of this Marathon. The organisers spoke vaguely about 30% off road, there was no map or route and about all that seemed fixed was the need to pay a steep entrance fee up front. However by 4 months from race day there was talk of the route being "fairly flat" with 50% off road. In fact from then on the organization was excellent and the 42 km route was through stunning scenery with 70% off road on good firm trails and superbly signed and marshalled. I am sure this race will have a strong following among keen marathon runners. It is unusual in being quite fast and reasonably flat. Being mostly on trails the terrain is much more forgiving than other races at this distance.

And the scenery really was absolutely stunning.



Preparation

From Manchester I flew into Wellington to stay for some days with my brother who lives there. A week before race day the forecast was for snow and strong wind in Queenstown but Wellington was beautifully sunny so I paid little attention but made sure I had kit for any weather. My brother's family were coming to Queenstown in support so after sightseeing, shopping (in Dunedin) and the like we eventually arrived there about 6pm the day before the race. After checking in to an apartment there was just time to register and to walk the last 100 yards or so of the course. Not perhaps the best marathon preparation.

Race Day

Race day morning was an early start (wake up 5.00am sharp), porridge for breakfast, walk in to Queenstown and then bus uphill and out to the start point near Arrowtown. The bus driver ended up at the mid-way point by mistake and then had to reroute but rain was pouring down and the entire bus load of us assured him he had helped by saving us from an extra half an hour in the rain.

There was still about an hour hanging around with 1700 other runners waiting for race start. This gave plenty of time to decide to keep my rain proof anorak on with warm top and shorts. Also to have a second breakfast of an energy bar.

Racing

The race itself was very well organized. I started from the "4 hour 30 +" pen at the back of the field and the runners soon spread out. I started conversations with a young man (well they all look young now) from Houston, Texas who was now based in Sydney but with a Pan Asian Corporate role involving lots of travel. This was his fifth marathon but he planned to do lots more for an MND charity. When he moved on ahead I chatted with an Australian who was about my speed but much more experienced at this distance. In fact though 90% of the runners were New Zealanders and with a good mix of ages and ability.

The first part of the route was on road and took us right through Arrowtown centre. The main street looks a bit like a street from a cowboy western with a saloon and 10 cent stores. (I came back next day to take the picture). After about 10K we got onto a trail running right around Lake Hawes. Really pretty scenery and surrounded by some rather lush wine growing areas (mostly Pinot Noir).

I was still – to my surprise - running OK by the time we got to the halfway point (back on road again) and recognized where the bus had taken us. During all of this I was accompanied by the boring lady voice who lives in my phone and tells me how fast I have been going km by km. For the first 10k I was averaging about 5min 30 sec per km. By the mid point my pace was down to about 5.50 or so but I had not taken my usual 'walking' breaks and was still feeling good and clocking very consistent kms.

The route now went off again onto trail, down beside the Shotover River (legendary for panning during the New Zealand Gold Rush) and then along the Kawarau river. The trail was still pretty good – but my legs were getting tired and sore. The last 10K was from Franklin along Lake Wakatipu into Queenstown. It was still raining but even so I was glad of it. After all 80% of my training had been in that sort of weather so probably I would have been rather unprepared for sun.

I kept going by promising myself 20 paces walking at each kilometer but by this time I was barely able to count. Even so I was pacing about 6.10 per km. With 3 km to go the crowds were thicker. My race number had the text "Dave from UK" and I was getting more crowd cheers than my fellow runners "Donna" from Australia, and a local Queenstown man "Pete". They and other runners close to me must have been sick of it but the cheers helped me to keep up the 6.10 pace right through to the end. The funnel crowd gave us all a great cheer as we came in quite strongly. Then we all went through to pick up a goody bag and a medal.

After the Race

The worst part of such a long event as always is at the end when reaction sets in. It took a while to get my bag back, change into dry clothes, find my brother and walk to the car and finally begin to relax in a lovely hot shower.



Rather to my surprise I was up early next morning for a 10K before breakfast. Even more to my surprise it was a lovely morning, sunny, warm and dry. The route along the lake looked far more inviting than it had the day before and I took some pictures.



I did not get the results until a full 24 hours later. You could see people limping around town the next day – a sure sign they had also done the marathon the day before. In a pub a NZ lady from Taupo and her husband told me my time and position - 6th in class with a time of 4hrs 15mins. The race winner had achieved 2.33 and the first runner in the V60 class did 3.24 so I was well pleased with my results. The nice NZ lady had come 4th in the WV60 class so we both had a drink to celebrate.

Now I have to choose where to run in 2015. Glad to take advice from anybody with suggestions....