

The weather forecast was for glorious sunshine. Thankfully, weather forecasters are in the main hopeless creatures, so it was actually overcast and cool. Blue skies were pretty much non-existent until later in the day.

I took the metro from my hotel to the start which was at the same park as registration the day before. As the race started at 9am, I left the hotel around 7:30am when it was still dark! The route would snake through part of the city before heading south out of the city, then east to some stately home and gardens which housed the Brussels African museum before returning back to the city passing through the start line, finishing a few kilometres later in Brussels' main market square; the "Grand Palace" or "Grote Markt".

There was also a half marathon race that started later but which mainly followed the marathon route, but missing out on the 'trip' to the African museum stately home and thus also the additional 21km.

Things started well, partly because straight after the start it was downhill, which suits me fine, though there were a few cobblestoned roads to negotiate. However, my watch was showing good split times at the Km markers, but by 5Km the roads started to get a bit undulating thanks to a few underpasses, which although are great for running into, aren't so great when you have to run uphill to emerge from the other side and so my pace was slower as a result, but still going strong.

By 10km things settled down as we pass through a park and onto a stretch of road that was for most part straight but reasonably flat. I was aiming for a 1:40 for the halfway allowing me a good 2 hours for the second half. By 15km it looked that I could actually get to 21km in under 1:40, but by 18km the road started to climb up significantly, not a hill as such but a gradient that started to take its toll, especially as it was straight and so you could see for quite a distance on where you were going. By 19km I had slowed considerably and as such I got to the halfway marker in just over 1:43.

I felt quite disappointed by this, especially as I was looking good earlier on and it would seem that realistically I was looking for a 3:43 finish at best. But by now I was at the stately home and garden with its pleasant surroundings that managed to lift my spirits a little. I also know that the very roads that I had run up to get here would be the same roads I would run back down on my way back to the city.

So by 32km I was looking at perhaps getting under 3:43 as I made the most of the downhill sections, by 34km I was back in the city and with my fellow marathoners was now joined by the tail end of the half marathoners as together we heaved ourselves up a hill towards the start line for the last 3km. Again, the hill wasn't particularly steep, but it was long and it was a major relief to see the start line again as that meant one thing; downhill!

Despite the earlier uphill, I was sure that I was now looking at possibly a 3:41. Yes, I know I said I was happy with just finishing under 3:45! So anyway, it was now time to maximise that downhill section. 40km came and past so did 41km, but by now I was on the cobblestones and having to barge my way past slower runners! It was going to be close, but a final surge managed to get me over the finish line in 3:39:43. Job done and even the sun came out to congratulate me!

In all a generally well organised event, except that it was a very long walk from the finish to the baggage retrieval area. Crowd support was sporadic and outside the city was rather muted, except at the various drink stations.