

Yesterday I travelled over to Salisbury with Hannah to run the Downton Half Marathon. This was run by www.racenewforest.co.uk so I was expecting the usual good standard of organisation, friendly crowd and good briefing. I wasn't disappointed. Once again, well run with 4 water stops and mile markers on every mile. They were accurate too as confirmed by my garmin.

351 people lined up at the start in the freezing wind to take on this hilly, undulating course. I went off a bit to fast as usual so kept reigning myself in as I knew I would regret it around the 8 mile point otherwise. I was going to try and do my usual tactic of reverse split. Run the 2nd half faster than the first. This was the only option really as the first 6 miles was pretty much all uphill. Very tough with a lot of shuffling going on, I did realise I was pretty much amongst runners when not a single person chose to walk up any of the hills.

There wasn't a single TuTu insite, just a lot of shirts denoting which running club they belonged to. After letting Hannah go off at her natural pace for a while, I seem to be catching her up slowly around the halfway point. Then we hit some down hills and long flats. She told me to go on if I had it in me. We ran for a while together then I edged forward. We got hailed on and it stung my head and eyes big time. Then we had streams of water covering the roads on a lot of the course. It was almost a mini HellRunner at times.

By the time I got to the 8 mile point I was starting to take my time a bit more seriously as I felt quite strong and had been averaging 9min/miles. I knew that to go sub 2hours I needed to keep them under 9:10's, this was actually gonna be possible at this point. I couldn't believe it as my last Half at Reading in March was a 2:15 finish. I thought there was no way I could take 15 minutes off was there? Especially as it was so hilly. But I forged on and did my reverse split as planned and sped up bit by bit. If I felt myself losing form I would hold back a tiny bit again to regain it, then start accelerating again once in a good rhythm.

From the 8 mile point I overtook what seemed like real runners one by one and kept them at bay. It felt quite amazing. For the first time since I have been training with the club I actually felt like a runner and not someone who stomps around however he can just to finish. I wanted to finish in sub 2hours, finish strong, and have more left in me. This is what I did. With only 2 miles to go I was on about 1hr 38 so I knew only an injury could stop me now. I sped up again and overtook some more people. I glided into the finish with a time of 1hr 56mins 44secs and came 232nd out of 351. I am over the moon to say the least. That's 19 minutes faster than the flatter Reading course.

I did however get 2 major casualties for my labours again. Yes, the bleeding nipples were back to haunt me. I had 2 blood stains that stretched all the way down my Andover Triathlon running vest that looked like I had been attacked by a mad knife man somewhere out on the course. I even vass'd up this time. It's that damn vest, it never happens in my other running kit. I am going to start running in my tri-suit and although I am very lumpy in it, I don't get involved in any self-harming whilst wearing it.

When I finished I ran back around the corner to encourage Hannah to the finish, she wasn't far behind me and was smiling all the way. She certainly was better presented than me and it was great to watch her come home. We went to the lovely warm school hall where there were plenty of rooms to change in, and then had free hot tea, hot cross buns, biscuits and a chit chat with others about how wet and hilly the course was.