

Instead of running Reading, I thought I'd check out some of the local competition, and I joined a work colleague in running the ASICS Pre London Fleet Half Marathon. The race has a very good reputation, and sells out its allocation of places within a couple of weeks. I made sure I arrived early, just in case there were any parking issues, but found myself in the closest, free car park, just a couple of minutes walk from the start....Bonus! Even more of a bonus is the race start time of 11.30am, so not that early a start.

The run is centred in the towns main park, with the usual facilities available (bag storage, massage, food etc), but still close enough for the local supermarket to be a couple of minutes walk for those last minute, emergency banana purchases. The race is organised by the Fleet and Crookham Athletic Club, and definitely has that 'By Runners, For Runners' feel about it. There were plenty of charity runner vest visible along with a myriad of differing run club vests. Thankfully the tutu / superhero / smurf count was exceptionally low.

My race plan for the day, was to finish uninjured (as some of my recent long runs have left my calves feeling a little tender) and with the hope that I'd finish in under 2 hours. The race starts in one of the residential roads, before looping round the park one and a half times, before heading off down the main high street. All started well, didn't get held up in to much ill positioned starter traffic, and I was moving up through the field (as I'd opted to start closer to the back), but then just as I was finishing the loops and hitting the high street at 2 miles, I got a very sharp stabbing pain in thigh and hoped this wasn't a sign of things to come. Thankfully it didn't last long, and I started to settle into the race.

I was trying not to look at my Garmin, and just run to how I felt rather than worry about actual pace and time, so I was pleasantly surprised when the first water stop at 3 miles came up in a shade over 24 minutes, though it did then start to niggle in the back of my mind as to when the wheels may come off.

The route was well thought out, taking runners out onto the local quiet country roads, whilst testing them with a whole host of hills. I was amazed that the slopes just appeared to melt away and I was making good pace of all of them. The waterstops came up at roughly 2.5-3 mile intervals, and I was amazed that my pace wasn't dropping too much which just spurred me. I did of course start peeking more often at my time and pace, particularly in the last 2 miles.

I was happy to see the finish line, and used a final burst of energy to snatch an extra couple of places and finish in 1:45:19, which is 10 minutes quicker than my last on road half marathon, so I was well chuffed. And the Fleet Half is definitely a race I'd do again as its well organised and the support of the marshals and the watching crowd was second to none, and highly recommend to anyone else.