

Hamburg Marathon

25th April 2010

Prologue

For a number of years now, I enter the London marathon, get rejected and then look elsewhere for a marathon that will gladly have me; please no violins! This year was no exception and the honour on this occasion went to Hamburg. I chose Hamburg for a number of reasons; firstly it was the city's 25th hosting of a marathon, secondly I've not been there before and thirdly, the Germans generally know how to organise a good marathon. In fact if it wasn't for a long stint many years ago of competing regularly at London, Germany as a country would have easily hosted most of the marathons I've participated in. However, this marathon nearly didn't happen as it was only the Thursday before the event that I knew that my airline was resuming its flights after Iceland's volcanic ash incident, which incidentally put paid to a trip to Belgrade for a marathon there the week before.

Registration

I arrived in Hamburg Friday evening and after checking in to my hotel went straight to registration, which by the look of it was in a disused warehouse in the harbour area. A free bus shuttle was provided to ferry people to and fro between the Expo and the central train station, which was handy for me as my hotel wasn't far from the said train station. Numerous other marathon organisers were present advertising their events and I duly collected far too many information leaflets and entry forms as a result!

Pasta Party

This was on the Saturday afternoon near where the race start would be, and was where I got chatting to some Scots who like me got rejected by London and so came here. As well as pasta you got a drink. Sadly, the growing trend of serving alcoholic-free beer at these events was here as well as the choice was this, water or cola.

Race Day

The start and finish were near the infamous Reeperbahn; not exactly near where I was staying, but the organisers had thought of that as my race number allowed me free use of the city's public transport system for the day. Unfortunately, the benefit wasn't solely for me as I soon found out when trying to board a metro train that was already jam-packed with fellow runners, but I managed to squeeze on as did a few others.

The weather at the start was clear blue skies and although I was there by 8am for the 9am start time, it was already getting warm and showing all the signs that it was going to be a hot day. The marshals generally did a good job of ensuring people started in the correct starting pen based on their expected finishing time, though as always seems to be the case, some people just don't want to follow the rules, and yes, even some Germans!

Despite the Reeperbahn being a multi-lane road, the initial kilometres were clogged with people traffic. In fact it wasn't until around 4km to 5km that I felt I could dictate my own pace. As a result I was a bit down time-wise of where I wanted to be and pretty much spent the rest of the first ½ of

the marathon trying to reclaim the 'lost' time. This I did, partly thanks to a generally flat course, clocking a time of just under 1:43.

However, I would struggle in the second half a bit, in part thanks to my ambition to reclaim lost time, along with the now hot sunshine. There were also a few stretches where the flatness became more of a slight incline. Nothing serious, but the sort of inclines you could easily do without, particularly in the latter stages. But it was here that the crowd support really helped. Ok, there were a few areas where crowd support was thin, but in most places it was packed, often where you least expected it and in some cases almost 'Tour de France' like in that the crowds were on the course itself leaving you just a small narrow 'funnel' to run through as the crowds shouted and cheered you on. This was further enhanced by the fact that every race number also had the runner's forename on it, and I often had my name called out in encouragement by complete strangers.

At the drinks station around 25km, a bizarre incident happened. Although there was plenty of water and isotonic drinks available, there was a shortage of cups to serve these drinks. As a result, I failed to get a drink here, but in the scheme of things this was the only real low point of the race for me.

As I approached the final kilometres, there were a number of runners who were clearly struggling and were walking as a result. I was undeterred by this, and although I had pencilled in a finishing time around 3:45, I kept revising this downwards at every kilometre closer to the finish. Also, my girlfriend Jayne, who unfortunately, wasn't with me in Hamburg, had 'suggested' a finishing time of 3:40 would be 'appropriate'; based on her analysis of my recent performances! Obviously, keen not to disappoint (god forbid), I kept my pace going with this in mind, but as I closed in on the finish I knew, even by upping my pace further that I was going to miss the 'essential' target and consequently finished in a time of 3:41:15. Well, as I told Jayne later, it was a hot day and people traffic did hinder my start!

After collecting my medal at the finish, I was given a goody bag that contained some drinks and food stuffs and then I was given a free beer; but alas yes, alcoholic-free again.

Stats and Postscript

I find the Germans are generally good at providing this sort of thing, so here goes; my finishing position was 3597th of the 14174 finishers from 18626 entrants, 841st in my age group and 3313th of the 11233 male finishers. I was also the 30th Brit (28th male Brit) home from 116. Depending on which local Hamburg newspaper you read, there were apparently 800,000 to 850,000 people lining the streets to cheer the runners on; both figures quite believable to be honest. And of course the race was won by a... Kenyan!

The weather for most of the weekend was warm and sunny. On Monday however, it was cool and overcast with occasionally rain. If only this weather had arrived a day earlier!



Photo 1 - The city hall in the old part of town



Photo 2 - Apparently some 4-piece band from Liverpool spent a lot of their early career here