

London Marathon 25th April

I was lucky enough to get a place in the ballot for the first Virgin London Marathon, that took place on Sunday 25th April. 2010 was also the thirtieth anniversary of the first running of the race, when only 6500 people took part. This year over 37000 people made their way to the Excel centre in the preceding 4 days to register for the 2010 event.

I stayed on the outskirts of London, the evening before the race, and hopped onto a train at Surbiton to make my way to my assigned start area on Blackheath. The train was packed, with people trying to push their way on the already full train at its stops before Waterloo. A quick change to the Waterloo East station was required to catch the special 'Marathon' service out to Blackheath. No ticket was required for runners, as a valid race number guaranteed free travel.

Once at Blackheath station, runners were directed up the hill to the open common where the start was. It certainly wasn't easy to miss, with large screens and an array of hot air balloons marking the spot. The actual start area was athletes only, which wasn't so good for spectators, as they had to stay the other side of the high fences. Not too many queues were present for the baggage check in nor the toilets. The only problem was, that when a heavy rain shower came at about 9am, there wasn't much cover available. Still that only lasted about 30 mins, and that was the last I saw of the rain all day.

Athletes were called to the holding pens from about 9.15 onwards for a 9.45 start, however by 9.30 the tape segregating the pens was removed, and it was very much everyone for themselves re positioning. I tried to hang back a bit, but that wasn't really possible with over 15000 runners surging forward.

The gun went off promptly at 9.45, and the huge pack of runners started to make their way around the streets of London. The crowd was fairly thin in the first 5 or so miles, but this changed on the run into Greenwich. At first it started as a solid line of supporters, and this stayed as a fairly consistent minimum for the next 20 miles, but this swelled at the more popular points along the course to anything up to 6 deep at around Tower Bridge and Canary Wharf.

The early miles disappeared fairly rapidly, and the halfway mark came up in 1:53, which was good and put me on a sub 4 hour race. However this run is definitely an event of 2 halves. The first half had been fairly warm, even though the sun had not been out. The second half was decidedly warmer as the sun came out from behind the clouds. At about 16 miles, I regretted having gone track cycling earlier in the week as my legs were getting heavier by the mile, and I ended up dipping below the pace that I managed to hold in most of my training runs.

My spirits were definitely lifted at about mile 24 as the houses of parliament came into view, and I knew I was on the way home. The home straight was a very welcome sight and I used my last burst of energy to ensure that I finished ahead of a man dressed as a banana.....:-) My finishing time was 4:04:37, just outside my intended 4 hour target but overall I was pleased as it was my first ever on road marathon, and therefore a PB.

I would definitely do the race again in the future, as the organisation is amazing, as is the support of the crowd.