

Luxembourg Marathon

15th May 2010

Prologue

This marathon was a first for me. First in that it started in the evening. I've done afternoon races before, such as Stockholm and Oslo and of course marathons as part of Ironman triathlons; each an all-day event even for the top athletics, but never the evening. This marathon would start at 6pm on a Saturday; so unless you were an elite runner then you would most likely be finishing in the dark. I arrived Friday with the intention of sorting out registration with sightseeing Saturday morning, then the race and then further sightseeing on the Sunday. This was different from my normal schedule of arriving on the Friday and returning home on the Monday.

Registration

There is a direct bus link between the airport and the main train station. The latter being near where my hotel was. What was really convenient though was the fact that on the same bus route was the site for the marathon registration and Expo, which was also the location for the race start and finish. So on arriving at the airport I went straight to the Expo before continuing to the train station.

The event web site had some information about the race but didn't answer my main question that was how could I get to the start and get back to my hotel after the finish as the normal city buses would not be operating as the main roads would be closed for the race. There was an information desk at the Expo that had literature on the event, but most of that was either in French or German. Thankfully, Luxembourg is one of those countries where everyone seems to be born multilingual, so there were plenty of helpful English speaking officials to answer my queries. The answer incidentally was that buses would be specially laid on by the event organiser to get people to and from the Expo, pre and post race to a number of areas in the city including the main train station. Result!

Race Day

I decided to do some sightseeing in the morning with the aim of not doing anything too strenuous to ensure my legs weren't worn out before the race! I also popped back to the hotel after lunch for an afternoon nap. Around 4:30pm, I set off to the train station and board one of the special buses that took me to the start. The bus took about 30 minutes to get there, just as predicted by the helpful information staff I spoke to on the Friday.

The Expo, finish and start areas were hives of activity as people got ready. I dumped my gear at the official drop off area and via the toilets went to the start. Despite being really busy, people were generally entering the starting pens in an orderly fashion; very few climbing over the barriers. One of the reasons for things being so busy was the fact that along with the marathon there was a half marathon and a 4-person team relay all starting at the same time. A nice touch was the fact that the half marathon runners had a '21km' bib on their back and the team relay runners had a 'Team Relay' bib also on their back. Personally though, I would have had something far more demeaning written on their backs to underline us marathoners' worthy superiority!

The weather was overcast, though later in the race the sun would make the odd appearance before eventually disappearing for the day. The course started off slightly undulating, but with more downs

and ups and despite a bit of people traffic for the first few kilometres, at 10km I clocked 46 minutes. Around 10km would also be the part of the course that took in most of the city sights, with more than the odd sharp corner as well as a few cobble stones. But then it was in the residential areas of the city and by 15km the half marathon runner headed back to the Expo for the finish while the rest of us ploughed on around the city suburbs. More undulating territory here, but nothing too serious though the trend was leaning towards more ups and downs. The other noticeable thing was the thin crowd support, a complete contrast to the loud, packed and enthusiastic crowds in the tourist areas. However, there were people about willing runners on, and thanks to the fact that all the runners had their names on their bibs meant many in the crowd were able and quite happy to shout out runners names in encouragement. Just past the 17km mark the 3:29 pace setters pass me with their entourage of running faithful.

I thought they were a little bit ahead of the game since I approached the half-way mark at around 1:42, but now had something of more concern on my mind. I had some minor stomach cramp in the morning and shrugged it off as it wasn't that noticeable or uncomfortable, but now the cramps had returned and were now quite discomfiting and occurring a bit more regularly. I had been drinking cola as well as isotonic drinks at each drink station, so decided to now leave off the cola in case my stomach issues were gas related. Every few kilometres the cramp would return and only by easing my pace would the discomfort soon past, but at 30km I had to stop completely for few moments.

I got going again, and by now we were back in the main city area for the return back to the Expo. As the start of the course was predominantly down, this of course meant the return would be predominantly up! Another noticeable thing was it was now getting dark with both cars and streets lighting up. In the closing kilometres it was most definitely dark, but my main concerns were would I finish under 3:45 and would my stomach behave until the finish.

The finish was inside the building housing the Expo. It was dark but lit up with disco style lights. It reminded me of the Frankfurt marathon, which has a similar style finish, except that whereas at Frankfurt you went from daylight to darkness, here it was already dark outside, so on entering the finishing area you didn't really notice the difference! I went for a final push and on crossing the finishing line, slip and near fall over on the falling silver confetti which was making the floor quite slippery.

Well, the stomach behaved, but a sub 3:45 wasn't achieved. After collecting my medal and belongings I board the first available bus back to the train station. Back to my hotel, a quick shower and then to bed; not long before midnight.

Stats and Postscript

My official personal finishing time was 3:45:57, yes it was close! Though my gun time was 3:47:03 and this was used to determine my finishing position. That was 374th of the 1056 marathon finishers. I was also 85th in my age group and the 364th male home. I was also the 10th Brit home of 48.

On Sunday, My girlfriend; Jayne texts me to warn me that Iceland's ash cloud was causing havoc with UK airspace again. Most of Scotland was closed and the ash was heading south. My return flight to Gatwick wasn't until the evening so there wasn't much I could do except sightseeing. In the evening I board my flight without any problems. Incidentally, super veteran marathoner, 99 year old, Fauja Singh was on the same flight! On arriving home I check the news to discover Birmingham

airport had closed and I would find out the following morning that overnight the London airports had closed as well. So a close thing, though in payment for my good fortune I did pick up a stinker of a head cold, so don't be too envious of my luck!



Towards the finish line



View inside Bock Casemates



View of Munster Church from Bock Casemates vista point