

The race start was at 8:30am. Since Moroccan time zone is GMT, then this indeed meant 8:30am, but I was up for breakfast for 6:30am to ensure I had time to find the start! Thankfully my backup plan of following other runners to the start proved prudent and successful, as I found the start and arrived in good time. Even though en route, some of my fellow runners did ask me where the start was! The weather was cool, partly sunny with a tiny bit of cloud; certainly requiring a bin bag to keep warm whilst waiting for the start gun. During registration I didn't find out if there were any areas to leave baggage, so as another first for me, I had turned up ready to run. I also brought along additional energy drinks and other provisions since I read somewhere that only water would be available at the drink stations.

The start was delayed for some reason before finally we were allowed to go. Along with the marathon there was a half-marathon starting at the same time in the same place, so initially the race looked bigger and busier than perhaps it really was. It was nice to be on the roads without any cars or scooters as the police were doing a sterling job in keeping these at bay. The other noticeable thing was the course was completely flat, in fact I don't think I've been on a flatter course; not even a humped bridge to get across. Distance markers were present every 2.5km, with drink stations at every 5km and sponges every 2.5km after each drink station.

Having not done much long distance running over the winter due to the snow and ice that gripped the UK, I was cautious not to over do it early on, so I wasn't too concerned getting to 10km in around 48 minutes; slight down on what I normally do. Soon after, the half and full marathoners split and a chance to get a truer picture of the number of runners for the full marathon. However, the marathon route would rejoin the half marathon route a few kilometres later before the final split where the half marathons headed to the finish and the marathoners would continue north towards the Palm Groves and greener region of the city.

Up to 15km, I was feeling strong but then towards the halfway mark I was beginning to tire. As there wasn't a marker at halfway, I checked my time at the 22.5km and estimated that I had done the first half in around 1:45 and perhaps looking for a 3:45 finish, but then I was getting a second wind. A few runners who had passed me a few kilometres earlier were now no longer getting away from me. The fact I was feeling strong again or maybe perhaps the road felt it was slight downhill gave me the mental lift to target a group of about 8 runners ahead of me and see if I could pull back the deficit and perhaps hang on to the back of them.

It took a few kilometres, but the fact I achieved it and was still feeling strong motivated me to push on and overtake them. One or two of them tried to put up some resistance, but it was clear I was on a roll, as I passed all of them, never to see them again. This was probably for me the best part of the race; hardly any traffic, orange and palm groves aplenty and the odd camel with its owner looking on in bewilderment at the side of the road.

By 30km though, I was beginning to tire again and for me the part of the course I was dreading the most. I had seen at registration a map of the course and it showed the last 10km as a straight road back into the city. They weren't joking. The road was straight and just seemed to go for ever. Occasionally we would cross over a roundabout. I kept thinking that this was the last one before the final turn to the finish; which incidentally was at the start, but at each roundabout all I got was disappointment in seeing that there was at least one more to go. I soon lost count of the roundabouts I had passed, and I was beginning to tire mentally as well as physically. I wasn't alone, as some of my fellow marathoners were

clearly having the same torturous mind games with even a few opting to now walk.

We pass a building that had one of those temperature information towers outside it. It read 22 degrees C, not really what I wanted to see, but to be honest I already worked out earlier that it was hot as the sun shone and the surrounding buildings gave little or no shade. Also, the police who had controlled the traffic well up to now were now struggling to contain the odd impatient car and scooter, as a couple came rather too close to me and other runners for comfort.

Eventually though I reach the 40km marker, which offered some respite, but with two kilometres to go. I still had to hang in there. As we pass the final corner I could see the finish in sight and upped the pace as best I could. I cross the line, stop my watch and on receiving my medal sat down to get my breath back and reflect on the moment.

With the race over I headed back to the hotel for a shower and well-earned siesta. In the evening I head for the Djemaa El Fna Square to not just mingle with the hustle and bustle of the crowds, but to enjoy the general spectacle of it all, sit amongst it and savour an outside meal as the sun set. You had to be there to appreciate it.