

Dashers Ready To Party

Final preparations are now well underway for the party of the year – The Dashers 25th Anniversary Party at The York Club in Windsor Great Park. It's sure to be a great night with members old and new, and a chance get in some early practice for those Christmas parties. See you there 😊



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Dates For Your Diary

25th Anniversary Party	Saturday 9 th September
Jim Banks Memorial Handicap	Thurs 14 th September
Windsor Half Marathon	Sunday 24 th September
Great North Run	Sunday 1 st October
Kingston Running Festival	Sunday 8 th October
Henley Half Marathon	Sunday 8 th October
Cabbage Patch 10	Sunday 15 th October
Great South Run	Sunday 22 nd October
Marlow Half Marathon	Sunday 5 th November

Diary Dates

Jim Banks Memorial Handicap – Thursday 14th September 2006

A chance for the mere mortals to put one over the fast boys and girls?

The Jim Banks Memorial is a handicapped 5k race run over our regular time trial route, with runners going off at timed intervals with the fastest starting last. Of course if we get the handicapping spot on then we have a blanket sprint finish and you all get to keep the trophy for a week each. Fortunately someone always runs a blinder ☺

The race is followed by a free fish and chip supper upstairs in the Cricket Club, and as the bar is open there's always the possibility of a few light ales being sunk.

Please fill out the sign-up sheet in the clubhouse, or let the committee know if you can't get down to the club beforehand.

Windsor Half Marathon – 24th September 2006

One of the highlights of the year for many Dashers, and a race where the Dashers have traditionally done well. In fact the men's team are defending champions. Entries filled up months ago, but keep an eye open as there are often spare places available through the club prior to the event. Let's just hope it's a little cooler this year, and that the car park doesn't take longer to get of than it took to run the race. I'm going to take the bike this year!

<http://www.runwindsor.com/>

Cabbage Patch 10 – Sunday 15th October 2006

The final club championship event for the season, a flat 10 mile romp along the banks of The Thames from Twickenham to Kingston and back. According to the web site the race is nearly full, but you can enter on-line.

<http://www.cabbagepatch10.co.uk>

Flora London Marathon 2007

A reminder that entries for the 2007 Flora London Marathon are now open. Entry forms should be available from the following locations:

Farnham Common

Apex Sports

Windsor

JD Sports

Swim Bike Run

Slough

Malik Sports

Staines

JD Sports

JJB Sports

Sportsworld

<http://www.london-marathon.com>

Club Championship

After strong showings by both Mandy Ramsey & Tony Curtin in the Virginia Water Paddle, things are looking good for both of them with just two events to go. The battle for the minor places is somewhat closer however with people now dropping scores having completed the number of qualifying races.

Ladies Championship

NAME	Reading XC	Tadley XC	Wokingham Half	Shinfield 10k	Burnham 5k	Wargrave 10k	Handy Cross 5K	Woodland 5	Yateley 10k	Best 6
Amanda Ramsay	98	100	98		96		96	100		588
Melanie Golding		94		90	70	92	80	98	94	548
Caroline Briggs	92		92		74	98		96	92	544
Kathryn Black				88	68	94	82	94	90	516
Sian Huntley-James			84	86	66		78	92	88	494
Isabelle Huxted	96		90	92		96	90			464
Lesley Wege	94			96	84		88		96	458
Jacqueline Lewis				80	60		74	90	86	390
Salome Godwin	100	98			90	100				388
Lucy Buckby				98	98				100	296
Katie Wraight					94		94		98	286
Gervase Foley		92			82		86			260
Sharon Helsby					100		100			200
Julie LeBourg		96	96							192
Claire Hessey			94		92					186
Sunita Dawett				94	80					174
Amy Mayer				84			84			168
Yvonne Olny			88		72					160
Julie Brooks				78	56					134
Jean Hayton					58		76			134
Jo Logie				100						100
Denisa Polcerova			100							100
Maxine McNulty							98			98
Sue Tansey							92			92
Olivia Feek					88					88
Rebecca Franklin					86					86
Helen Shephard			86							86
Charlotte Hill				82						82
Gaynor Benson					78					78
Philippa Cockbain				76						76
Jac Aldous					76					76
Caroline Bolton					64					64
Saffron Sabine					62					62
Lorraine Durrell					54					54

Men's Championship

NAME	Reading XC	Tadley XC	Wokingham Half	Shinfield 10K	Burnham 5k	Wargrave 10k	Handy Cross 5K	Woodland 5	Yateley 10k	Best 8
Tony Curtin	98	96		100	100	100	100	100	100	794
Mike May	86	84	84	90	76	94	90	92	82	702
Richard Golding	84	82	80	88	74	90	86	90	88	688
James Street			98	96	94	96	96	98	96	674
Colin Adams	80		76	86		92	88	86	86	594
Jim Butcher	76	78		84	66		82	82	78	546
Alan Gray	88	86	88	92	86				80	520
Dave Glazier	82	80	78		84			94	90	508
Ross McDonough	94	98	96					96	94	478
Tom Emmett	78	76			64		84	84		386
Martin Kelsey	90	88	82		80					340
Jonathon Davies		94	100	98						292
Simon Black				94	92	98			98	382
Dave Priddy			86		78		92		84	340
Andrew Ogierman					62	88	78		76	304
Chris Hunt	100	100								200
Glen Helsby					96		98			194
Ryan Worth	96				98					194
Paul Tomlinson	92	90								182
Steve Coleshill			92		88					180
Lee O'Flaherty		92			82				92	266
Daryl Van Blerk	74		90							164
Tony Emmot					68		80			148
Navtej Bisla			72		70					142
Julian Howard							94			94
Ian Spencer			94							94
Stephen Jennings					90					90
Brent Curless								88		88
Stuart Armour			74							74
Criag Sharrat					72					72
Richard Prasad					70					70

The final two events are The Windsor Half Marathon on September 24th and The Cabbage Patch 10 on October 15th. Windsor is full but The Cabbage Patch still has a few places left, although I doubt there'll be many left for long. If you missed out then keep an eye open for spare places being made available via the club.

Confessions of an Eco Warrior

by Ian Robinson

Those Dashers that actually live in Windsor don't know how lucky you are. What with the Great Park, Thames Path and recent addition of the Jubilee River, Windsor must be one of the best trail running locations in the South East. Living on the wrong side of the M25 it took me a good few years to discover this fact, but I now regularly make the trek to Home Park simply to run these routes.

My introduction to trail running took place in suburban west London and I suspect it was very different from the average Dasher's experience. Literally forced off-road by traffic I stumbled headlong into a maze of unkempt footpaths, bridle ways and lanes favoured by joy riders, "travellers" and fly tippers. Negotiating the occasional obstacle may be part and parcel of trail running, but I draw the line at piles of builder's rubble, rusting fridges and anonymous black bags. Many is the time I wished I could confront just one of the wretches capable of such antisocial behaviour, but fly tippers thrive on the cover of darkness, making encounters few and far between.

I thought I'd made my first sighting not long after I started heading off road. I can still recall working my way around the banks of a small fishery, bathed in early morning sunlight with the call of wildfowl echoing across the water. However the tranquillity was interrupted by the not so distant hum of traffic and the sofa, broken toilet bowl and collection of old mattresses semi-submerged in the water. As I emerged from a patch of undergrowth I came face to face with an ugly looking brute loitering next to a pick-up loaded with black sacks.

Seized by eco-indignation I pulled up and confronted my quarry. Heedless to his protests, I let go both barrels, lecturing him on the consequences of illegal dumping, before pursuing the *how would he like it if I did the same in his garden* approach. He was visibly taken aback and it was only when I started wittering on self righteously about undermining the very foundations of society, that he reacted. Pinning me against the side of his van with an arm the size of my thigh, he silenced my ranting and patiently explained he was the Water Bailiff - I had interrupted the poor man in the perfectly lawful act of emptying the litter bins. I helped pull a supermarket trolley out of the water to make amends, but gave the area a wide berth from then on.

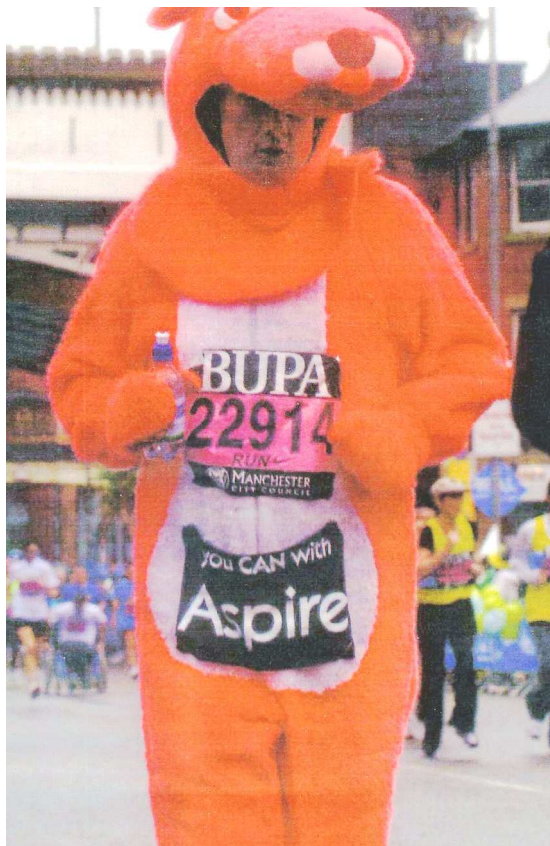
My first genuine sighting of a fly tipper came about a year later. I caught him red handed on a secluded cycle path mid way through the act of dumping a washing machine from a battered white van. It was dusk and he didn't see me until I was almost on top of him, but by then I'd already memorised his registration number. This time I didn't stop but high tailed it for the bushes. Eco Warrior or not, there was no way I was going to risk a second physical encounter, this guy was as big as an Ox, covered in tattoos and seriously into body piercing - definitely not the type to mess with in a dark alley.

My subsequent phone call to the police started a chain reaction. To cut a long story short, within 30 minutes the boys in blue raced to my house, took a statement, traced the owner of the vehicle and paid him a visit. Seized with remorse when confronted with his transgression he owned up on the spot. Given the option of criminal proceedings with me as reluctant witness, or simply clearing up the mess, he chose the latter - much to my relief. But it was to prove a hollow victory for the environment.

Just days later I used the same path to cycle home from my old running club. It had been an easy session on the road but a demanding one at the bar, with several PB's being set. Ever so slightly fuddled and with only a feeble cycle lamp to guide me, I was relying more on memory than sight as I reached the unlit section so favoured by fly tippers. Unfortunately my mental map didn't include a mound of assorted detritus slap-bang in the middle of the pathway. I bounced off the obstacle and ended up in a pile of something soft but suspiciously smelly.

As I groped for my scattered belongings in the dark I spied a familiar white van pull up not 50 metres away and rapidly eject several kitchen units and a gas cooker before driving off at high speed. And people ask me why I joined the Dashers!

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Andrew Ogieman recently competed in the BUPA Great Manchester Run. Not content with running 10k in the normal manner, Andrew decided to raise money for Aspire by running the event in a Pink Panther suit. He completed the event in 1:10:49 and also scored an interview on prime time BBC TV during the event.

Well done Andrew – officially the fastest Dasher in a Pink Panther suit.

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From our Foreign Correspondent

Happy news from our Dasher-abroad, Bill Elvey. Quite apart from his running going from strength to strength, he's even taken time out from his busy training schedule to find himself a fiancé. Congratulations to Bill and Amy – may all your miles together all be personal bests ☺.



As for the running, well in May he ran a new PB of 1:52:09 in the 25k Grand Rapids River Bank Run, and followed this up with another PB of 3:35:17 in a marathon in South Bend, Indiana (home of Notre Dame University).

Well done Bill.

A Libyan Excursion

by Mary Wang

Although I am not running with the club at the moment, I dutifully trained for the Marathon. So when my holiday in Libya came along in February I need to plan my week's training in a Moslem country. Advice received was to run in tracksuit bottoms, so they were packed, and I happily envisaged running at sunrise, feeling the warmth of the day washing over me.

Not so. On the first morning I overslept and anyway it was still pitch dark at 7.30 a.m. We spent the morning admiring Roman remains in a bitter cold wind and then we drove into the crescent of mountains that surround Tripolitania. By this time it was really thick fog as well. Lodging for the night was in a house carved into rock. All we had to warm ourselves was a couple of braziers each about 30cm high and 30cm across. 16 people crowded round these, still in their fleeces. "Aha," I thought, "the way to get warm is to run", so I went out in the fog and ran three times round the Berber village, looming up on the odd villager and waking up the sheep in their brushwood pen each time. I ended up nicely warm, but it's the first time I've run 4 miles in a fleece and not boiled.

Next run was only 3 miles, so when we got into Benghazi I thought it was ideal - flat, low housing except for a few particularly unattractive hotels on the seafront, one of which was ours. So at 6.30 a.m. off I went, all quiet on the roads. My antenna alerted slightly when a young man who was walking towards me moved slightly in my direction, but I ran past. 100m later and running footsteps came up behind. My arm was grabbed. It was the young man again. I can't think why he grabbed me; I was in tracksuit bottoms and anorak and looked entirely shapeless. I glanced up and down the road, no-one, don't panic, don't panic. The grip was strong but not vice-like so I shook my arm vigorously saying "I must run, I must run!" He let go and when I ran off he didn't follow me, thank heavens, but for the rest of the run, I was very spooked.

This influenced my last run which had to be in Tripoli; no way was I going to run in the dark so it had to be mid afternoon on the first warm and sunny day of the trip. This time the hazard was to cross two dual carriageways to get to the seaside path - I hid behind a group of Muslim ladies who had the hang of just walking across and assuming the car drivers didn't want to kill them. The run was fortunately uneventful except for the odd comment - many men have nothing to do except sit around and watch the world go by, and to them I was certainly an object of curiosity.

Colonel Ghadaffi is apparently training up one of his sons, Hannibal, to take over his mantle so Libya may have along wait before the people have liberty and the normal freedoms that we accept in the UK.

The Comrades Marathon: History and Race 2006

by Chris Hunt

'I will never run a marathon'. I distinctly remember uttering these words to a friend about ten years ago. So how did I find myself on 16th June 2006 at the start line of a 54 mile ultra marathon on a different continent with 12,000 other expectant and excited runners? This is how.

The Race

My interest in the Comrades Marathon began 4 years ago after reading about the race's uncompromising course and history. The route runs between Durban and Pietermaritzburg in the Kwazulu Natal region of South Africa. The 2006 race was 87.5 km (54 miles) in length. The route varies slightly from year to year so the distance is not constant. The direction is also reversed each year so that a race away from the coast at Durban, with an overall climb of over 3,000 feet, is called an 'Up run'. The reverse direction is naturally called a 'Down run', and whilst quicker is harder on the legs. The race originally had a cut-off of 11 hours which was recently increased to 12 hours. The cut off time is strictly enforced. The official who fires the finishing gun turns his back so that he cannot see the desperate runners struggling for the line. There are normally around 10,000 finishers making Comrades the largest ultra marathon in the world.

History

The race was first run in 1921 to commemorate soldiers killed during the First World War. Each era has produced some great runner's. During the 1920s Arthur Newton, an Englishman, won five of the six races he entered. Arthur popularised many of the training methods that are still in common use including year round training, periodisation and tapering before a race (see Tim Noake's 'Law of Running'). The formidable Bruce Fordyce won 9 races in the period 1981-1988 and 1990.

Arguably one of the best known runners in Comrade's history despite only running 7 races was Wallace Henry Hayward. Wally Hayward's running career began around 1926 when he earned £5 for pegging out claims on behalf of prospectors in the Diamond rush. In 1930 Wally entered his first Comrades at the age of 21 and won in a time of 07:27:26. A return to shorter distances and active service during World War II kept him out of ultras for 20 years.

In 1950 Wally returned to win in a time of 6 hours 46 minutes. In 1953 he became the first athlete to break the 6 hour mark finishing in a time of 05:29:40. In 1988 at the age of 79 Wally beat over half the field in 9 hours and 44 minutes. Using an age handicapped system Wally was calculated to beat every one, including that year's winner Bruce Fordyce by over an hour. One year later in his final Comrades the whole country cheered as the octogenarian crossed the line in 10:58:03 just beating the 11 hour cut off. Sadly Wally passed away at the age of 97 years on 28th April 2006 after 70 years in athletics.



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My Race

My initial enquiries about the race were made to a South African colleague at work, Caren Ade. Her father John had completed 3 Comrades and was kind enough to send me a training schedule. However it was not until 2005 that I decided to bite the bullet and enter.

My training began in January of 2006. I based it on my marathon schedule but with some much longer runs and lots of hill intervals. My longest training run was 35 miles. I ran another 30 miler by running to the Maidenhead 10, completed the race and then ran home. I also ran the hilly Neolithic Marathon in May to practice my race pace.

The 2006 race started outside Durban City Hall, at 0530 in the dark. Traditionally the race starts with a recording of a cock crow and a canon but there were so many runners imitating the fowl that I never knew which the real one was.

The first kilometre of the race is flat after which there is a steady climb up to Tollgate. The first hour or so is run in the dark and as the sun climbed over the horizon I reached for my sunglasses to discover that one lens had fallen out. I later handed the redundant glasses to a boy at the side of the road.

The first 9 miles of the race is relentless ascent and after which one encounters the first of the five major hills, Cowie's Hill. It rises 450 feet over a distance of a mile. Following the descent there is a flat easy section through Pinetown and on to the next major hill. Field's Hill rises 700 feet over 2 miles giving a taste of what is to come. I remember passing some stunning vistas and through the lovely leafy suburbs of the village of Hillcrest on the way to the third major. Botha's Hill climbs 500 feet over 1.5 miles and has some sharp bends and a wicked camber.

From the summit of Botha's comes an easy 4 mile run to the halfway point at Drumond. By now 4.5 hours had elapsed and although I still felt OK a sub-9 hour finishing time was looking increasingly unlikely.

Inchanga, the fourth major hill winds aggressively for 1.5 miles and the climb of almost 500 feet felt like the hardest so far. Harrison Flats (euphemism for not quite so hilly) provide a long tedious run up to Cato Ridge and mentally was one of the hardest parts of the course. It was here that I also began to feel nauseous, running became more difficult and the periods of walking progressively longer

The villages of Camperdown and Cato Ridge lie close to the N3 freeway and thus have large crowds of support. I could no longer face the energy drink but some salted potatoes and bananas slipped down very nicely. Much needed support was also provided by the pupils of the Ethembeni School for Handicapped Children. It was impossible to pass without greeting a few of the small outstretched hands.

Umlaas Road marks the highest point on the course at 2,800 feet but is unremarkable as for once there is no noticeable hill to climb. It was around here, with 20km left, that one wag yelled out "Come on Chris it's only a half marathon to go"!!!!

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Eventually the hills known as the two Pollys came into sight. Polly Shortts or "Big Mama" as Bruce Fordyce calls it is the ultimate heartbreak hill. Situated 50 miles from Durban and having almost completed two back to back marathons the runner is faced with a climb of 1 mile and a rise of 430 feet. It is here that the Up race is often won or lost and this year proved no exception. The race leader South African Brian Zondi made the classic novices error of mistaking the gentler Little Polly for Polly Shortts. He therefore made his break too early and was overhauled by the eventual winner Oleg Karitonov on the "Big Mama".

It was a relief to reach the top of Polly Shortts but by now reduced to walking the final 8km took me the best part of an hour. I began running again just before entering the stadium and final lap. This was just as well because it was at this point that I appeared on the television coverage for about 3 seconds.

The final few hundred meters were on grass and the sudden change of surface was almost enough to bring one to a halt. Even the elite succumbed, the sixth lady finisher South African Farwa Mentoor collapsed in the final straight but still managed a dramatic crawl to the finish without loss of position.

And just to prove that running can change your life, Caren is now my partner and both her and her father were cheering me from the international runners' enclosure as I finally staggered across the line in a time of 10:31:45. I cannot honestly recommend the Comrades Marathon as the easiest method to meet your future spouse; however it is an experience that will completely alter your perception of running and that will live with you for the rest of your life.



Comrades 2006 Statistics

12066 entrants

11039 starters

8821 finishers

Top man

Oleg Kharitonev (Russia) 5:39:19

Top woman

Elena Nurgalieva (Russia) 6:09:24

Novices

2046 novice entrants

1801 starters

1601 finishers.

The Plan

by David Priddy

The plan was fairly straightforward – arrive in Florida on September 1st then drive across America to arrive in California in time to compete in the Chevy's Fresh Mex 12k race in Sacramento on the 18th, throwing in regular training runs along the way. Well it was a nice idea!

The first thing we were told on landing in Orlando was that we should leave immediately because Hurricane Frances was on the way. Having seen the results of the previous week's Hurricane Charley as we flew in to the airport we weren't going to argue. There's nothing like the sight of houses reduced to piles of firewood and hundreds of fallen trees to bring home the fact that you don't want to be there during a hurricane.



A tree destroyed by the hurricane – the rest of it was 50 yards down the road!

So next morning we were on the road early for our attempt to flee Florida. Unfortunately so were what seemed like half the local population, so it was very slow going. Two long days driving with an overnight in the Florida Panhandle (in a small town later partially flattened by a Hurricane Ivan induced tornado), passing through Biloxi & Gulfport which were both to be inundated by Hurricane Katrina last year, and we were in New Orleans and the first chance to catch our breath.

New Orleans

Phew, was it hot and humid! Two days in an air conditioned car did not really prepare you for the reality of late summer in the rather smelly French Quarter of New Orleans, particularly over a Labor Day weekend and with the huge Southern Decadence gay festival going on at the same time. The whole place was packed with leather boys and partying youngsters.

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The second morning in New Orleans I decided it was time for a run. On the map I'd found a route along the Mississippi that looked like it gave me an 8 mile round trip of clear running, so I was up at 6am to try and beat the heat. I soon discovered however that you don't beat the heat in New Orleans. Even at that time in the morning it was in the 80's and the humidity just made it worse. It was lovely running the Moonwalk alongside the Mississippi as the sun rose, past the silent paddle steamers and a few attendees of the gay festival sleeping it off on the benches, but within a few minutes I was already overheating.



New Orleans Moonwalk

I pressed on, but soon discovered that my planned route went through a secure area of the port, so I had to branch off inland. After another mile or so the sidewalk was starting to get overgrown and the neighbourhood decidedly dodgier. It was also getting rapidly hotter now the sun was above the horizon and I was really struggling, so I persuaded myself there was no shame in turning back. As I ran past one hotel the elderly black doorman tipped his hat and greeted me with 'Good morning God'. I had to smile because this out-of-breath red-faced sweating overweight middle-aged white man felt anything like a god at the time. After 40 minutes and 5 miles in that heat I was finished and was very relieved when I got back to the air-conditioned luxury of my hotel room, a cold shower and a very large cold drink.



Priddy, Datchet reaches Priddy, Texas

My next attempt at running was 3 days later. We'd spent another day in New Orleans and then driven along the Louisiana coastline through Bayou country to Texas (much of what we drove through was flooded a week later by the Hurricane Ivan storm surge, and again by Hurricane Katrina last year). We turned north near Houston and ended up in a small town near Waco called Hamilton, where the only hotel was owned by a gentleman who proceeded to tell me about all his children who lived in England and about how many houses he owned in London – we were practically related by the time he'd finished. I woke early and discovered that it was actually quite cool outside – perfect for a morning run. Sadly after a couple of miles something triggered an asthma attack and of course I'd forgotten to pick up my inhaler on the way out. I wheezed back to the hotel but that was it for running that day.

Two days later we were in Moriarty near Albuquerque, New Mexico, having followed old Route 66 most of the way from Texas (fabulous scenery). Another nice cool morning, just right for running I thought. After 20 minutes however I absolutely knackered. In dragging myself back to the hotel I passed the city limit sign and found the answer – "Elevation 6127 feet". I resolved to pay more attention to the city signs!

The next three days were at similar heights in Flagstaff & Grand Canyon so I didn't even try running. At least Las Vegas is only at 2000 feet so I should be able to fit in a final run before the race during the 3 days we were going to be there. Wrong - 96 degrees temperatures soon put paid to that idea. Finally I convince myself it's OK not to run because it's now only 2 days from the race.

Next day we were down below sea level and 126 degrees in Death Valley (Death Valley Marathon anyone?), then back up to 7800 feet for an overnight in Mammoth Lake. 9956 feet over Tioga Pass into Yosemite the next morning before a dash down the hill into the California Central Valley and Sacramento at just 20 feet, an elevation I know I can cope with. But the temperature in Sacramento? A mere 92 degrees! What the heck have I let myself in for tomorrow with the Chevy's Fresh Mex 12k?



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The Race

Race morning I was up early because I needed to register for the race by 8am. I was delighted to find that a cold front had swept in overnight and that temperatures had dropped by over 20 degrees. If the clouds stayed then the race temperature could be below 70 and I can cope with that I thought. If they cleared then it could be a different matter of course so I decided to carry a drink bottle just in case. The start was about a mile from the hotel in Discovery Park and a gentle jog got me there in plenty of time.

Registration was a breeze, and the entry forms were machine-readable which I've never seen before. Of course they couldn't cope with a non-US address, but I paid my money and got my number without any problems. I strolled down to the start and got my first chance to look at the opposition. Several things struck me straight away, the first being that there were practically no club vests on display. There were lots of people wearing event commemorative t-shirts but practically nobody wearing specific running club vests. I don't think I saw more than 1 or 2 from a local triathlon club, yet there were nearly 1700 runners running the 5 & 12k races. The next things I noticed were the number of women and the ages of the runners. Most races I've been to in the UK have always had more men than women yet here it seemed the other way round, and there seemed to be a lot more vets that you would see in the UK. Another thing that struck me was that there didn't seem to be as many 'serious' runners as there would be in the UK. There were a few doing vigorous warm-ups near the start but it seemed an altogether more casual affair than you would expect at home.

At 8:15 they called the 5K runners to the start, and this seemed to be around half the competitors. Once they were gone we 12K runners started to line up for our 8:30 start, but the organisers announced that it would be delayed by 20 minutes in order to let the bulk of the 5K runners finish before the 12K runners started coming through. This was taken with remarkably little grumbling. I waited a few minutes then set off for a short warm-up jog and a few stretches. I started back as they called 10 minutes, but as I reached the back of the field they called 30 seconds – several minutes had gone missing from their countdown somewhere along the line! A bit of a mad scramble ensued as people got themselves inside the ropes but now I was starting near the back with probably 600 ahead of me. Still, I wasn't too worried as I wasn't expecting a lot from myself.

The horn sounded at 8:45 and off we went. The course was fairly narrow and up a small hill as we went out of the park onto the roads and as a result the field was slow to get going. It took 30 seconds to reach the start line and start running, but for once I actually remembered to start my watch. The first half mile was very slow as the number of runners and the narrow course meant you couldn't really overtake. The runners pulling a dog sled full of beer were a particular obstacle, although they claimed they'd get faster as the race went on and the sled got lighter. Once the field started to spread out I was able to accelerate and pass people, and to my surprise I settled into a 7:40 pace. The course was fairly flat as we went away from the park, passing through a residential area and out into the country. There were a good number of spectators along the course, and plenty of police out closing the roads for the runners. After a couple of miles we re-entered Discovery Park via a different entrance and ran under the trees alongside the American River – very pleasant. At 5.5 miles we went past the start line again and back out of the park up the small climb. This time we turned left at the top and started heading for the Chevy's Fresh Mex Restaurant which is where the finish was located.

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At just beyond 6 miles we could see the finish and a few people started to speed up. It was a con! We got within 30 yards then had to do a 180 turn round the Chevy's promotional bus and then do a mile loop round the business park (watch out for the sprinklers!). With 300 yards to go there was a rather nasty short sharp climb back onto the main road which was on the river levee, and then a straight run in through the cheering crowd. The finish was well organised and I was pleased to find I'd finished with a watch-time of 57:56 – 2 minutes better than my target.

Outside the funnel area I collected my goodie bag and then there were all sorts of freebies for the runners – Chevy's Mexican food, Starbucks coffee, Sobe fruit juices, all sorts of fruit including deliciously cool watermelon slices (excellent after a run!) and a bunch of other business stuff I was too knackered to walk down to. All in all it was a well-run event and very enjoyable.



Why do I never look like a proper runner?

When I looked at the official results I was surprised to discover that I finished 140th out of 828, and I think this confirms my observation that there weren't many 'serious' runners. The winning time was 41:06, but if you ran under 7 minutes per mile you were in the top 40. The 5k race was similar – a winning time of 16:28 but a run under 20 minutes got you top 20 out of 842. For the ladies, less than 7 minutes per mile got you top 5 in either race. I was also right about the high number of women and the older average age. The 5K race was 66% ladies and 51% veterans, whilst the 12K race was 55% ladies and 54% vets. Compare that to the Windsor Half where just 38% were women and 34% were vets or the Dash where 39% were women and 47% vets.

I ran another American race in May this year – The Andronico's Devil Mountain Run, a 10k in a small town just northeast of San Francisco called Danville. Again it was rather warm despite an 8am start, but once again it was a well organised and very friendly event, and thankfully the Devil Mountain reference refers to Mt Diablo, a large hill that dominates the surrounding landscape, and not to the course of the race! Again I finished high up considering the rather ordinary time I put in - 169th of 748 for a time of 48:43. And oh yes, I was the palest-skinned person in both events.

So if you're on holiday in the USA why not check before you go to see if there are any races in the area – you'll enjoy the atmosphere and get an ego boost from your finishing position ☺

Amsterdam Damloop 10m

By Andy Cooney

I'd never heard of this race until one of my Dutch colleagues mailed the rest of us and said Redwood was entering a team. Naturally my interest was aroused as despite being unable to sell their software for love nor money (they stipulate that money is favourite to be honest) I do run a bit. Kudos to me too as I was the only volunteer from the UK. Another colleague who decided to give up the pies and the fags and enter the shorter 7K run as his pinnacle of healthy living achievement, barely lasted the first day of his new diet out.

Redwood's largesse knew no bounds and they had a t-shirt specially printed up. Unfortunately, despite being a 'small' in every running vest I've ever tried on, it appears the Dutch idea of small is intended to fit your pet perhaps as it practically cut off all circulation. So that was out.

The whole day had a slightly surreal air to it as I'd decided to fly in and out on the same day for starters and despite planning on meeting up with the team beforehand, didn't see a single one of them. This basically because there were 10,000 runners and every company seemed to have gone for the black logo on white shirt look and had obviously left the office on the Friday with the cheerfully optimistic 'let's meet up by the station' ringing in their ears. It was like trying to identify specific individuals amongst a vast colony of penguins.

Anyway – to the race! There were several on the day of varying length and starting points but the main two were the open 10 miler and the businessloop 10 miler for the company teams. The open race attracts a very high quality field and I watched both the men and women tear off in turn, noting with the usual pang of envy the Kenyans effortlessly reach escape velocity wearing the most ridiculously flimsy footwear.

The business race is organised into pens by some black art or other – certainly not by ability it turned out and set off at 10 minute intervals by none other than our own Paula fulfilling yet another contractual obligation in return for a continued supply of custom-made Nike Air Streak Spectrum Plusses.

She'd clearly done her homework and put considerable time into writing her speech. "Good luck!" she said, waving. They were the only words I understood all day and were special for that!

Amsterdam is pretty flat and apart from the underwater tunnel it was like an ironing board. The route runs North West of the Central Station ending up in Zaandam and passes through some picturesque villages en route. Most of these seem to be entirely populated by bungalows separated from the narrow main road by a stream. It was obviously quite an event for the locals as they were out en masse, bunting festooned, crayoned placards brandished and entertained by a huge number of bands.

If you're going for a time though, it's the open race you want. I ran into the back (literally) of the pen-full that had set off before me and from that point on there was no way through so I resigned myself to using it as a training run and decided to soak up the atmosphere instead.

Datchet DASHERS

The Dasher

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I finished in 1:03, took one of the especially laid-on buses back to Amsterdam, partook of the obligatory liquid refreshment and headed back to the airport, wondering vaguely how the rest of the team had fared. It turned out we were 81st out of over 500 teams which goes to show how popular the race is especially as there are a minimum of 10 runners per team.

Occasionally, if you stroll up to the airline check-in desk be-suited and looking like you are heir to some tracts of land hereabouts, you can be rewarded with an upgrade. As I wasn't staying overnight and there was no baggage store I'd gone over in what could be described at best as 'sports casual'. I must have looked as though I'd found the ticket going through the bins. Thanks to the EU however there's free movement of people, goods and money, so they let me come home.

Maybe we should be sending a Dashers team one year?

www.damloop.nl



Tallinn Half Marathon

By Andy Cooney

I've got a simple policy when it comes to training for a marathon. For the warm-up races pick somewhere with some decent scenery, a cheap flight away and, most importantly, somewhere that prides itself on its brewing heritage. That really doesn't explain why I entered the Stevenage Half, but Tallinn is something of an unspoilt gem and I found this race more by luck than judgement and decided to go for it.

There was some difficulty entering as despite the entry fee being the equivalent of about tuppence, the website wanted a bank transfer in either Kroons or Euros. You've got as much chance of trading in Top Trumps as Kroons and First Direct helpfully suggested I might like to boost their turnover by £30 to transfer the Euros. So I rang the race director instead and somehow despite the fact that neither of us had a word of each other's language I registered to pay on the day.

The old town is a fabulous medieval, cobbled street, living museum of a place and was basking in an Indian Summer of 20 degree warmth for the entire 4 days I was there.



Tallinn



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I'll not give you chapter and verse about the trip – this is a running newsletter after all! – except to give you a small piece of advice should you go (and you should). There's a museum in the centre of the old town, staffed it would seem solely the very oldest residents of the city. Beware! On the top floor is an exhibit dedicated to how they gained independence from Russia – something of which they are justly proud. There's a rolling video covering the events that led up to this and, although it's brilliant that the revolution was a peaceful one, it doesn't make for good telly. I was all in by the time I reached that part of the place having walked miles, slumped into one of the chairs and started watching from half-way through almost out of self-defence. Years of Politburo meeting footage swam before me interspersed with Estonians singing (they do a lot of that) and eventually, and not before time, their flag was shown being raised over the town in a driving blizzard, with yet more singing. At that point one of the centenarians saw me watching and said 'oh this is very interesting, but much better if you see how it started'. To my horror she proceeded to rewind the whole tape and stood proudly right behind me while I watched the whole thing again! All 45 minutes of it.

The race itself isn't through the town but out towards the coastline you can see at the top of the shot. Singing even rears its head here too as the kick-off is at the National Song Grounds, with the finish in an open-air velodrome – a first for me! I say 'race' but despite the relatively small field, there were more races than you could shake a stick at. Everything from a whole set of junior races, to a bizarre collection of walkers with ski poles who clattered off down the road like they were protesting about something. A lack of snow perhaps. In the senior category there was a 5K, a 9K, a 10K(!) and the half marathon.

I wore my trusty Dashers vest with the Union Jack daubed all over the back. It always brings the UK runners out of the woodwork and sure enough I met a group from Yorkshire and then none other than the British Ambassador himself – a very friendly chap called Roger from Falmouth with one of the cushiest jobs in the diplomatic service.

The Estonian language is unique to the 1.3million of them in the country and as I recognised not a solitary word was lucky to even start the right race. I was a bit slow off the mark though and ended up right at the back of the field on the start line.

I had hoped this was going to be as flat as the Amsterdam race the previous week but that was soon dismissed as it was undulating from the start. At one point they had even dug up the road and we gingerly had to negotiate what was more like a lunar landscape. I'm sure this will be fixed by next year! As it's out of town there weren't many spectators and it was tough in the warmth to push on but I eventually finished 23rd in 1:20 and change with a mini stadium finish in the velodrome. The Estonians are a very welcoming lot and I have to say I was quite taken with the place. It's well worth the trip out there and this race (and a much larger one I'm told 3 weeks before it) provide the perfect excuse to go!

<http://www.marathon.ee/>



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Note from the Editor

Thank you once again to everybody who contributed to this newsletter. I can only apologise for its somewhat tardy appearance.

If you've done any races or have any interesting or amusing incidents you wish to share then please do - forward them to me at david@priddy.enta.net along with any pictures you may have. Also if you have any suggestions regarding additions or changes you'd like to see then please let me know – it's your newsletter.

Regards

David Priddy