

London Marathon 25th April 2010

I'd done the training, was injury free and looking for a gentle taper down to my first marathon on 25th April....but overlooked the effects of volcanic ash (silly me) which led to a four day overland journey from Spain, with a ferry deadline in Amsterdam, with only 6 days to go before the big day. I therefore went down to London without a support party (who were understandably absolutely sick of travelling anywhere) and still feeling the effects of probably the least relaxing holiday ever.

Sunday actually started pretty cold and by the time I arrived off the packed train to Blackheath, it was raining. I got into the start pens with loads of time to spare and we were moved up pretty close to the start so despite the huge numbers, it only took around 5 mins to get over the start.

From the start, the support along the way was absolutely amazing. There were literally thousands of people, from young kids with sweets to old folks in purple wigs, all ages and nationalities lining the whole route. There were different bands and music (steel bands, bagpipes, brass bands etc) and hundreds of charity supporters.

I felt pretty comfortable over the first half, averaging around 9.30 miles. The run over Tower Bridge at 12.5 miles was fantastic with banks of people screaming and shouting and the first real London attraction. After this the route turned off into Docklands and for about a mile or so the faster runners were coming along the route on the other side of the road. I consoled myself in the fact that the people going the other way looked "really fast" and there were no novelty outfits, neatly avoiding the thought that they were actually about 7 miles ahead of me!

I started to feel pretty low around 20 miles, knowing this was the furthest I had run in training and feeling a few doubts coming in. I had kept my secret caffeine energy gel for "just this moment" and after a couple of minutes walk got going again. By this time I was back on the two way stretch and could see the streams of people still coming over Tower Bridge who were now 7 miles behind me.

The last 4 or 5 miles, from the Tower of London, along the Embankment and past Big Ben etc were by far the best and most memorable. The noise of the supporters was incredible; it was like running into a stadium of screaming fans; people on the roadsides, on bridges, in buildings etc. It's hard to describe the emotion of it, but well worth the effort and pain to go through this experience. The last mile to Buckingham Palace and along the Mall was really iconic and I managed to finish in 4 h 20 mins which I was really happy with for my first marathon, with the simple aim of holding it together and getting round in one piece.

I absolutely recommend the London Marathon – a really flat course, fantastic organisation, loads of drinks stations, and above all the brilliant atmosphere of the race!

Claire Collinson