

Paris Marathon 11th April 2010

As I entered my allotted 'pink' enclosure on the Champs Élysées on a bright spring Paris morning with the magnificent Arc de Triomphe behind me, I aimed to make my way forward to meet up with my race buddy who was making his way to the back of 'grey' section in front. Except that it was impossible to move anywhere for the crush of bodies and for each few yards of progress I was rewarded with a close encounter with one of the many, well used, open air urinals that were sited conveniently among the runners. Convenient pour les hommes, obviously.

Once the race got going though, it spread out nicely and I was able to find mon amilan just as we crossed the start line at 9am. One of the great features of the race was the pace makers carrying colour coded flags with target times printed boldly across them. My goal was 4 hours 30mins, and I latched on to the pink flags from the start and managed to keep them in my sight for most of the race.

This was just my second marathon and I would definitely recommend it to marathon novices as well as serious competitors – everything felt really under control and well organised and the course was flat and fun, with entertainers and support for most of the route. There were fruit and water stations every 5k. There were plenty of sites to enjoy en route – including Place de Concorde, Le Louvre, and the beautiful Chateau de Vincennes, 5 miles along the banks of the Seine, Place de la Bastille, Notre-Dame, the Eiffel Tower and 2 stretches of lovely wooded parkland.

I ran with Ian for about 16-17 miles and then Ian who was struggling, stopped for a stretch and waved me on. I found our support party just after that at around the 17 mile mark and they were a really welcome sight. They hadn't spotted me though, I had to leave the race and run right up to them waving my arms before my 2 devoted daughters and my best friend blinked in recognition at me. Their excuse was that I had made much better progress than they expected and were watching out for Ian coming along before me. To be fair I had been pretty worried about my niggling lower leg problems the day before the race and had moaned the entire day about how torturous I was going to find the race. However I took the cautious approach of heavy strapping to both knees and both ankles and though I looked a bit like the walking wounded my cunning plan worked fine.

I had heard tell of the wine and cheese that was being offered en route – about 22 miles I think. Everyone I spoke to beforehand thought that was a very silly idea which they would steer well clear of. As it happened the wine was served up by some very agreeable people promoting the Beaujolais marathon and to further publicise their event they pulled a barrel allegedly full of the red stuff along the route. In the end, I thought it would be churlish to refuse and I knocked back half a cup of quite the nicest wine I have ever had. I turned my nose up at cheese though – stupid idea when running a marathon.

Thanks probably to the pink pace makers my 5k splits throughout the race were nice and even, I stuck to a little over 10 mins per mile and got across the line in a

time of 4hr 30 mins and 20 seconds. That knocked spots of my last marathon time and I was delighted with it. I don't think there can be anything quite like the emotion of getting to the end of such a long race, and as we crossed the line me and all the étrangers around me whooped and grabbed each other and hugged each others sweaty bodies in delight. Bliss.

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