

The highway of life

Corporo Sao Paulo 10km Classic, Brazil. 23 November 2003

By Hugh Jones

At first sight, it is not the 17 million people who live in Sao Paulo who catch the attention; it's the countless thousands of cars – whether buzzing furiously down the expansive highways that cut through the metropolis or locked in a solid jam on those same roads.

Sao Paulo is the world's third largest city, but 'city' is too definite a word to describe the reality of this agglomeration. Over the last few decades the population has increased several times over as Brazil's rural poor flock down the highway to engorge this continental centre. The Corporo 10km Classic provides a vivid physical image of the demographic movement upon which the city exists.

The course runs down one side of a broad concrete highway, and comes back on the other side. It is for once, miraculously, clear – as if some deity had parted the waves of traffic for an hour or so to allow eight thousand runners free passage. And when they are in full flow, reclaiming the primacy of people over cars, it is a magnificent sight. The rolling out and back course rapidly fills up with a mass of bobbing human heads. It is a highway quite literally full of life.

What impresses from a distance is different to what is experienced up close. The start area lies in Ibirapuera Park, one of the few green spaces that relieve the unrelenting pressure of roads and buildings in Sao Paulo.

You can jog a relaxed warm-up on the Park paths or grass and only finally slide into the mass of runners backed up behind the line, just 10 minutes before the start. At that time, 10 minutes before the main race, a few dozen elite women are set off down the road.

Some of them may be closed up by the elite men, and even by



the mass runners who set off behind, but this is one of those few events that takes the trouble to showcase the women's race in this way.

Back at the start line, awaiting the gun, we were still massing. My attention was drawn by warm water against my leg, and I turned to see another runner squatting low to give his bladder some last-minute relief. The clear skies and the temperature, rising to 23C at

the 09.00 start, had led runners to water themselves thoroughly.

At the gun, the few dozen elite men sprang off the startline. The 33-minute plus performers set off 50m behind, passing over the chip timing mat a few seconds (or more) later, in a rolling start.

The first kilometre led out of the Park, past the Museum of Modern Art, in a snaking approach to the out and back section along

the highway. We joined it by way of a long downhill slip road. Only a couple of kilometres into the race the heat of the direct sun felt strong on the skin, with only momentary relief when we passed under bridges.

One of these bridges had some kind of blower on it, but not directed at the runners. It released a shower of tinsel ticker-tape over us, as if we were running through a snow globe. The illusion may have been cooling, but the reality wasn't.

There were ample opportunities to grab water, and the plentiful pre-race supply was still having an effect on some. At around 3km I saw someone managing the difficult task of relieving himself while still on the run. But maybe it was something else – 500m further on we passed a sign: "Sex Shop, Aberto 24 horas".

By now we had completed the section of highway walled in by embankments – some of them so leafy that we seemed to be running in an extension of the Park. Now there were pavements next to the road, and buildings typical of the broken commercial area surrounding the true central city.

Before 4km we saw the lead women approaching, after they had taken the turn. We had a great view of the contest, with three of them still together at 6km, never mind the sight of the beautiful girl giving chase in fourth place.

We took the turn ourselves through a gap punched in the central road barrier, with steel ramps in place to take us over the low concrete kerb of the divider. Heading back after the turn we got our first view of all those thousands of runners behind us. It was a seething river of gently undulating motion; a highway filled with life. It was probably even more impressive looking





back, with the right hand side and the top left hand quarter of the field of vision completely filled with runners.

Vehicles weren't entirely absent from the scene, though, as the turn lies at one end of the Congonhas Airport runway, and right on cue a plane came in, powering low over our heads.

What from a distance appeared a uniform mass soon became a recognisable collection of individuals, as friends shouted greetings, congratulations and encouragement to those coming the other way. At close quarters, unknown runners became more and more recognisable as the race progressed, especially as we negotiated the switchback return. Some were stronger on the uphills, some faster on the downs. We migrated back and forth within our immediate group, and later congratulated each other at the finish.

For the final kilometre, turning off the highway, it was gently



downhill back into the Park. We pass the giant obelisk and the huge Christmas tree being constructed nearby and dog-leg to the finish. The front runners achieved impressive times, given the heat, the hills, and the 800m elevation at which Sao Paulo lies.

Gradually the giant car park that provided the finish area began to fill up. There were bright

multicoloured tents at which clubs congregated, and a large stage from which presentations were made. It became a car park full of life. There is a satisfying message being sent by this race, where space dedicated to cars is converted into space dedicated to people - no matter that it is only a temporary arrangement.

Result

MEN

1	Clodoaldo Gomes Da Silva	29:48
2	Luiz Fernando De Almeida Paula	29:54
3	Paulo Roberto De Paula	30:02
4	Emerson Iser Bem	30:16
5	Elenilson Da Silva	30:22
6	Luis Carlos Fernandes Da Silva	30:29
7	Emerson Jose De Souza	30:31
8	Domingos Nonato Da Silva	30:40
9	Jose Teles De Sousa	30:43
10	Antonio Ferreira Da Silva	30:48

WOMEN

1	Fabiana Cristine Da Silva	34:30
2	Nadir Sabino De Siqueira	34:44
3	Marcia Narloch	35:03
4	Maria Zeferina Rodrigues Baldaia	35:40
5	Rosangela Raimunda Pereira Faria	35:47
6	Maria Cristina B. Vaqueiro Rodrigues	36:15
7	Maria Lucia Alves Vieira Moraes	36:47
8	Maria Das Graças Silva Moreira	37:12
9	Valkiria Sanches Prieto	37:18
10	Valeria Sanches Prieto	38:00

Top left to right, the highway of life - looking north on Avenida Rubem Berta; then 10 minutes later; finish area; top 10 women.

Bottom left to right, lead men returning; feeling the heat; tinsel ticker-tape; 60m to run; against the flow; looking cool - feeling hot



Pictures by Hiroto Yoshioka and Flavia Prado