

On the grapevine

Lausanne Marathon, Switzerland. 24 October 2005.

Considering that Lausanne is the modern Olympic capital and the Olympic marathon is a world event, the Lausanne Marathon is a remarkably well kept secret.

The place itself surprises. Home to 115,000 people, anyone would expect the city of Lausanne to nestle along the shore of the beautiful Lac Lemman, which arches 100km through western Switzerland between Geneva and Montreux.

Early settlers did cling to the shoreline but as the Roman Empire came under attack they moved inland to a more defensible site. Although the new site lay only 2km from the lakeshore this became the centre of Lausanne, and it lies far above the Lake.

The city centre is deeply dissected by the landscape, so that, on turning a corner, a visitor can suddenly be up on a viaduct high up above other city streets.

The marathon avoids such testing topography. Although it is named after the city, it could equally appropriately take its title from the Lavaux wine region just to the east. The course heads out through the vineyards to a turnaround point at La Tour de Peilz, before returning to finish on



the doorstep of the Olympic Museum. It clings to the lakeshore for nearly all of the way, and by doing so minimises the gradients.

But the Lake does more than make the race easier. It also makes it one of the most scenic

that can be run anywhere. There are different aspects to how it does this: the steeply-sloping vineyards that pitch down towards the lakeshore; the view of the Evian massif looming from across the lake, on the French side; and the surface mist from the lake,

emitting a glow which infuses the entire landscape.

With such impressionistic surroundings it is easy to forget those other requirements of a race: that it be well organised, or where, if the balmy conditions don't favour fast times, then they at least make the experience one to remember. Lausanne has all of this.

There is a relaxed approach to the start at Place de Milan. People are still strolling through the brilliant early-morning sunshine towards the start only 25 minutes before the race begins.

There is still time for the choreographed warm-up before moving to the start line for the short wait before the gun sounds. Just around the corner expectant onlookers crane their necks to see, as the wave of runners approaches. This is as close as the race gets to the centre of town, a short way up the slope from the lakeside.

After a kilometre the course crests the hill behind the Olympic Museum and drops down through autumnal woodland to the main Route du Lac. From here, 2km into the course, it is out and back on the same road, allowing runners to get the view in both directions.

It is not just a marathon. There is a full programme of events. It would be neglectful if only marathon runners were able to take advantage of such a magnificent public stage. As the





runners go out, and it takes them a full 13 minutes to pass the 2km music station, the wheelchairs and roller bladers come back.

They started over an hour earlier, from near the turnaround point of the marathon course at La Tour de Peilz, and beelined west along the lakeshore.

With the runners gone, a Sunday morning silence descends, emphasised by the lack of traffic. All to be heard is the occasional, gentle whirring of bike wheels before the whistling breath of the first walker.

With his atypical race-walking gait, he is out on his own, and it takes another couple of minutes before anyone else comes by. They are mostly determined plodders, many of them holding

ski sticks and leaning forward. Then come the upright strollers, some of them pushing small children in buggies.

The next wave to wash past contains the half-marathon runners (a distance of 10,549m). They venture to a turning point just beyond the first of the scenic lakeside settlements to the east, the village of Lutry, just as the walkers do. That's where the vineyards begin. The marathon runners have already come by here, running along the road that holds to the contours between the lake and the vineyards.

They have gone through the next village of Cully, and at the 15km point they passed through the tiny village of St Saphorin, clinging to the hillside, which provides the name of the most

well-known wine label of Switzerland.

The race leaders were now approaching Vevey, a small town in which the Nestlé Corporation is headquartered. There were still three of them together as they ran around the central market square, with a merry-go-round in the middle of it, and along the scenic Quai Perdonnet beside the lake.

They passed the halfway point at the Rive Reine, a Nestlé sanatorium, with 1:06:30 elapsed on the clock. Only 500m later they turned around and retraced their steps, with an increasing stream of runners coming towards them.

Back through Vevey, the course rejoins the Route du Lac after diverting under a viaduct and up one of the steeper gradients of the marathon course.

The three leaders were still together, as the sun's strength grew and the stone embankments reflected its heat. Conditions were not as favourable as in 2003, when Tesfaye Eticha set the course record of 2:10:05 in winning his sixth victory in this race.

Fighting against adversity is what produces winners, and it was David Kipkorir who threw down the challenge at 33km. He quickly got away from Jonathan Kipsaina and Weyessa Urguessa, and went on for an untroubled win.

After returning through wine country, the course reaches the outskirts of Lausanne and turns off down to the Lakeshore, along

Quai D'Ouchy. For the final 600m runners are racing alongside rowing eights, sailing boats and the cross-Lake ferries. The natural scenery, even when it is as impressive as here, ceases to matter at the finish.

The manmade marathon landscape of road barriers and advertising hoardings takes over in the final few metres. The crowd used the advertising boards to beat out their acclaim as each finisher came through, to cross the finish line right outside the entrance to the Olympic Museum. It didn't quite have the resonating roar of the Olympic Stadium, but the world will eventually get the message on the grapevine: the Lausanne Marathon is a race of rare vintage, one not to be missed.



Result

MEN:			
1	David KIPKORIR	KEN	2:13:38
2	Weyessa URGUESSA	ETH	2:16:07
3	Jonathan KIPSAINA	KEN	2:16:17
4	Philip CHERUIYOT	KEN	2:21:34
5	Samson Lila MULI	KEN	2:23:11
6	Disassa DABESSA	ETH	2:23:30
7	Jean-Luc GUYON	FRA	2:34:40
8	Gioacchino SCIARROTTA	ITA	2:35:20
9	Michel BOUCHARDY	FRA	2:36:09
10	Didier CARLOZ	FRA	2:39:16
WOMEN:			
1	Tsegé WORKU	ETH	2:37:26
2	Marshet GEMA	ETH	2:42:15
3	Laurence DUQUENOY	FRA	2:46:44
4	Ursula JEITZINER-SPIELMAN	SUI	2:50:14
5	Beaticé EGGAR	SUI	2:52:30
6	Etaferahu CHERKOS	ETH	2:56:38
7	Maja NEUENSCHWANDER	SUI	2:57:10
8	Hiromi NAKADA	SUI	3:05:03
9	Martha GRABER	SUI	3:10:22
10	Valerie METCALF	GBR	3:12:01