

Bogota's gorgeous carnival

Media Maraton Internacional de Bogota, Colombia. 31 July 2005

By Giovanni Zuzunaga
(transl. Paco Borao)

Bogotá is a lovely city of emerging cultures. One of the best aspects is the increasing importance of sport and recreation in the city. A full appreciation of this strikes anyone who witnesses the Media Maratón Internacional de Bogotá, the most expansive sporting event in South America, with more than 40,000 participants (amateurs and elite runners), and hundreds of thousands of spectators. It makes the Colombian capital the epicentre of Latin-American interest in running. Both locals and foreigners have had the opportunity to see this phenomenon as they keep coming to Bogota from all regions of Colombia and from all around the World.

This massive event has two races on different circuits within the city. A 10km race is open to people of all ages as well as handicapped athletes, and is organised as a recreational and touristic race. The Half Marathon is open to the best local, national and international runners.

The intention in both events is to enjoy the entire carnival which envelops the city on race day: the exotic environment, optimistic and cooperative people walking on crowded Bogota streets, renowned monuments in a mixture of post-modern and colonial styles. The overall effect is to show off both the beauty and the simplicity of this so-called 'Athens of South America' that nestles within the Andean Cordillera at an altitude of 2650m.

Bogota – Bacata to the pre-Columbian Chibcha Indians – was founded by the Conquistador Gonzalo Jimenez de Quesada in 1538 and became the capital of New Grenada in 1717. A century later it fell to the Liberator, Simon Bolivar, and became capital of the independent state of Great Colombia, including the present day territory of Ecuador Panama and Venezuela. The city accumulated a wealth of colonial architecture which has been supplemented by futuristic new buildings as the city has grown into a cosmopolitan metropolis that is now home to six million people.

The race is organised and promoted by the running club Correcaminos de Colombia, with the necessarily close support of the Colombian Athletics



Federation and the Mayor's Office of Bogota. Private businesses, universities, colleges, federations, clubs and other sporting bodies are drawn into this popular endeavour; it is the only way that the race can attract such a high level of participation.

Thanks to huge sporting promotion starting five months in advance, and a climate that provides perpetual spring-like weather, athletes are well prepared. They can select and participate in one of the free training programmes on weekends and there are even some free entries to the half marathon on offer.

The city hosts more than 10,000 visitors for the Media Maratón de Bogota. Before the race, the Expomedia Sports Fair attracts thousands of visitors who can exchange ideas at the conferences, the round-table sports sessions, and other shows put on by different sports sponsors. The Expomedia fair – a carnival in itself – allows everyone to imbibe the enthusiasm and strength that can be gained by talking to people coming from other cultures; in fact, from almost everywhere in the World. In this atmosphere, elite athletic performers rub up easily with the rest of us.

In the race itself bands and theatre groups from the city's 14 main colleges line the route, alongside the usual race paraphernalia of advertising hoardings and flags, refreshment stations, ambulances and first aid backup. It is one gorgeous carnival.

The race, for that day at the end of July every year, becomes the most important touristic project of the whole country. One of the key motivations for almost all competitors is the medal received when completing the circuit, as a token of their contribution to the gorgeous carnival.

National and international projection is ensured by press, radio and television broadcasts, with pre-event and live coverage, as well as special broadcasts in the days after the race.

One of the key objectives of the half marathon is to promote running as the healthiest of sports. With this mission foremost, the Media Maratón de Bogota has won strong national and international trademark sponsorship. This in turn has won jobs and incomes for a large section of the city's population.

Result			
MEN			
1	James KWAMBAI	KEN	1:03:10
2	Paul KIRUI	KEN	1:03:56
3	Isaac MACHARIA	KEN	1:04:13
4	Aliro CARRASCO	COL	1:04:39
5	Gabin CONDOR	PER	1:04:50
6	Jacinto LOPEZ	COL	1:05:29
7	Herder VASQUEZ	COL	1:06:04
8	Franklin TENORIO	ECU	1:06:24
9	Jorge REAL	COL	1:06:24
10	Edgar SANCHEZ	COL	1:06:54
WOMEN			
1	Adrianna FERNANDEZ	MEX	1:15:02
2	Lioudmila KORTCHAGUINA	CAN	1:16:12
3	Julia PIEVERA	PER	1:17:59
4	Sonia CALIZAYA	BOL	1:20:36
5	Ruby RIATIVA	COL	1:21:34
6	Martha RONCERIA	COL	1:21:56
7	Lina ARIAS	COL	1:24:55
8	Rosalba FORERO	COL	1:26:12
9	Claudia TANGARIFE	COL	1:27:28
10	Sandra LEON	COL	1:27:55

At a social level the race cooperates with the "Centro integral de rehabilitación de Colombia – Cirec", giving a percentage of the entry fees for the welfare and social re-integration of physically handicapped children.

These streams of awareness come together to generate strong public interest in the race. It is gorgeous, but it is more than a carnival. Last year there were 40,796 participants. Despite such huge numbers the race proceeds in an orderly and harmonious atmosphere. The peaceful environment of the race and its surrounding events flows naturally from the friendliness generated by sporting competition. It offers a great opportunity for civic participation and it gives Colombians a chance to show a good example to the World.

The Media Maratón Internacional de Bogotá proves its worth year upon year in consolidating recreational, sporting and touristic interests into a badge of citizenship for Bogatanos. Amongst the cultural diversity and the contrasts of prosperity and poverty that the city encompasses, this event demonstrates what life in Bogota is all about.