

Shipshape and ready to run



By Helen Hewitt

Bristol's 20th annual half marathon attracted entries from over 16,000 runners, making it one of the UK's most popular races. It draws runners from across the region, the nation, Europe and beyond.

With an international airport on the doorstep and excellent train and road links, Bristol is easy to get to and can boast a good selection of hotels and places to stay. But what is it about the race that pulls people in?

First-time runner, Stephen Hewitt explains the attraction:

"Everyone agrees, from novices like me right up to the top international elite, that the flat course is a great advantage. It's perfect for those new to long distance running and a great opportunity for experienced runners to achieve really fast times - and often a personal best."

The route serves the needs of both runners and spectators. By taking the race through parts of the old city, around the historic harbour and along the Avon Gorge, runners pass by scenes of outstanding natural beauty as well as historically important architecture. Isambard Kingdom Brunel's SS Great Britain and his renowned Clifton Suspension Bridge are the

most significant of these. Spectators get the chance to cheer on friends and relatives from specially appointed locations at key mile markers, although they are also free simply to line the route and cheer from the roadside at a place of their own choosing.

The half marathon race starts and finishes in Anchor Road in the city centre, next to Millennium Square. The square is close to the floating harbour with moorings for hundreds of pleasure boats and sailing craft, and hosts lots of festivals throughout the year. In July it is the harbour festival; in September the organic food festival - but on half marathon day, it is home to the athletes' village and the winners' podium.

"As a first-time runner I followed the recommended 18-week training programme from the race website" said Hewitt. "This gave me a realistic week-by-week guide to what I should be doing, from a gentle 15-minute jog in the early weeks right through to a 100-minute run a week before the event."

"The website also offered valuable advice about diet, nutrition and maintaining fitness levels. I wasn't able to take part in any of the specialist workshops that Bristol City Council organised to support runners, but I did meet Nick Rose,

Bristol's best-ever runner who dominated the road circuit in the US and Europe a generation ago. It's great that ordinary runners like myself can have a chat to someone of Nick's stature and get some tips to improve my technique.

"At the start of the half marathon I wanted to pace myself at about 10km an hour, aiming for a finish time of about 2hrs 15 minutes. The start was staggered to avoid bunching up, and as a first-timer I was near the back, but individual timing chips, triggered as you go over the starting line, ensure that you get the exact time for your race.

"One of the good things about running in Bristol is that you pass lots of great places to see and visit. Within minutes of the start I was passing Brunel's famous SS. Great Britain, the world's first iron passenger liner, built in 1843. It has now been restored and is a major tourist attraction. Moored next to it is The Matthew, a replica of John Cabot's 15th century ship that crossed the Atlantic in 1497 to what we now call Newfoundland.

"A bit further along, the race route goes through Hotwells - there was a natural spring here a long time ago which people drank from as a cure-all for various illnesses. Hotwells is now home to The Bear Be-bop club

Runners pass by scenes of outstanding natural beauty as well as historically important architecture.

- a favourite place to listen to jazz on a Friday night, although not on race weekend.

"The race route goes along the banks of the River Avon and I was soon running under the Clifton Suspension Bridge, another of Brunel's masterpieces. This bridge has spanned the Avon Gorge for almost 150 years and the river has one of the most variable tidal flows anywhere in the world. The water level can vary by more than 27m between tides.

"It's a 5km run up the gorge before turning round and coming back. With seven miles under my belt I was on the home stretch. It's at times like this when a novice runner



appreciates all the early, step-by-step training advice and guidance. Early on in my training I completed the 5km 'Run for Moore' fun run, which taught me about pacing myself. And three weeks before the half marathon I did a 120-mile Action Research cycle ride from Bristol to London to help build stamina and strengthen my leg muscles.

"The route goes back on the other side of the harbour past the Spike Island galleries, where the new Museum of Bristol is due to open in 2011. The final few miles to the finish line takes runners through Queen Square, past St Mary Redcliffe Church and Castle Park.

Queen Square is a splendid 18th century square, once the residential quarter of wealthy Bristol merchants, many of whom made their money in sugar, tobacco, wine, and the slave trade. St Mary Redcliffe Church, a wonderful example of mediaeval architecture, was described by Queen Elizabeth I as 'the fairest, goodliest and most famous parish church in the country'.

"As Castle Park comes into view I know that there is only another couple of kilometres to go. This final stretch leads through the cobble-stoned road of Welsh Back where the Llandoger Trow stands.

It is the second oldest pub in Bristol and claims to be the place where Daniel Defoe first met Alexander Selkirk, inspiring him to write Robinson Crusoe, based on Selkirk's real-life story.

"With the finishing line in sight I'm on course for 2 hours 20 minutes. It's a personal best time for me, and a personal best experience for everyone in the race."

RESULT

MEN:

1	Tom PAYNE	GBR	1:05:48
2	Toby LAMBERT	GBR	1:06:28
3	Ben MONREAU	GBR	1:07:28
4	Richard HOPE	GBR	1:08:13
5	Nathaniel LANE	GBR	1:08:23
6	Daniel DALMEDO	GBR	1:08:24
7	John MCEARLANE	GBR	1:08:46
8	Mark JENKIN	GBR	1:09:00
9	Soren MOLBECH	GBR	1:09:28
10	Nigel STIRK	GBR	1:09:46

WOMEN:

1	Birhan DAGNE	GBR	1:14:18
2	Lucy MCALITER	GBR	1:14:35
3	Claire MARTIN	GBR	1:16:54
4	Jo FRIDAY	GBR	1:18:27
5	Louise GARDNER	GBR	1:18:52
6	Nicola BROOKLAND	GBR	1:19:01
7	Fiona CLARK	GBR	1:19:12
8	Helen PARKINSON	GBR	1:19:16
9	Clare MARTIN	GBR	1:23:02
10	Emma PHILLIPS	GBR	1:26:26

RACE CONTACT DETAILS

REEBOK BRISTOL HALF MARATHON SEPTEMBER

Georgette Van Hoof, Event Manager
Sports Services Culture & Leisure, Bristol City Council,
Colston 33, Colston Avenue, BRISTOL BS1 4UA
Tel: 0117 922 3282 Fax: 0117 922 3744
Email: georgette.vanhoof@bristol.gov.uk
Inet: www.bristol.gov.uk/sport www.bristolhalfmarathon.com

Full race contact listings start on page ??