

Land and sea

The motto that appears on the new emblem of Valencia's Town Council reads "Tierra y Mar" (or in Valencian "Terra i Mar"). It is an accurate description of the way in which Spain's third largest city has forged a strong new identity for itself, using the interplay between these basic assets.

The Valencia Half Marathon has played its part in the restructuring. Until this year's 18th edition of the race (which for many years was actually a 20km event) the start and finish were inland, with much of the course run out-and back on unexceptionable roads carving their way as convenient corridors through the city. This year's edition was a groundbreaking new venture, with the race start and finish switched to the port.

Over the last decade Valencia has become a showcase for all kinds of cultural activity. Valencian architect Santiago Calatrava brought a distinctive style to the huge modernist buildings of the "City of Arts and Sciences". Sport, too was an essential ingredient. Since the AIMS Congress was held in Valencia in 2005, it has been the venue of the World Indoor Championships in Athletics, the America's Cup and most recently a formula 1 competition.

The urban F1 racetrack was constructed in the last two years. The circuit snakes around the port and marina on land which has largely been reclaimed from the Mediterranean Sea. For the first and last 5km of the Half Marathon, runners use the same smooth asphalt laid for the Grand Prix drivers.

All around lie the old port buildings – cavernous nineteenth century warehouses for which new uses are being found now that the whole area is being rejuvenated. The Half Marathon found a home for its registration and expo, along with space for press conferences and the organisation itself in just one of them: Tinglado 4. That's the warehouse lying most conveniently alongside the start and finish line. With half of the course lying close by, and on roads not open for public use, the race set-up is satisfyingly simplified.

Runners likewise benefit. On race morning it was possible to warm up until ten minutes before the gun, and then retreat past the start gantry, file on to the course through the designated entry points – and still have time to spare. Once the gun went the broad start allowed runners to get away quickly, on to the racetrack. And even the



quickest among them were not slowed by the tightest of hairpin turns.

The marina is situated in the same area as the racetrack – between land and sea. One of the requirements for hosting the America's Cup is open water but another is reliable wind, and Valencia usually has plenty of it. The racetrack seemed to offer protection for the runners though, and both course and climatic conditions combined to offer great chances for personal best times.

The course is also spectator friendly, and an active supporter could watch the start and catch runners at 3km and 5km, just before runners head away from the port towards the city. After the serpentine bends of the racetrack, the long uninterrupted vista down the Avenida del Puerto is slightly intimidating, as it runs straight as an arrow for 2.5km, through what seems like a chasm of buildings. It disgorges onto a large ornate roundabout after which a formal avenue brings runners on to the embankment of what used to be the Turia River.

A catastrophic flood in 1957 led to a decision to divert the Turia River south of the city, and the dry river bed was subsequently converted into a green corridor equipped with all kinds of recreational and sporting facilities. Runners train

The circuit **snakes around the port** and marina on land which has largely been reclaimed from the Mediterranean Sea.

here daily, and the final section of previous Valencia Half Marathons were run through here, ending on a 400m track a little further up the old river course.

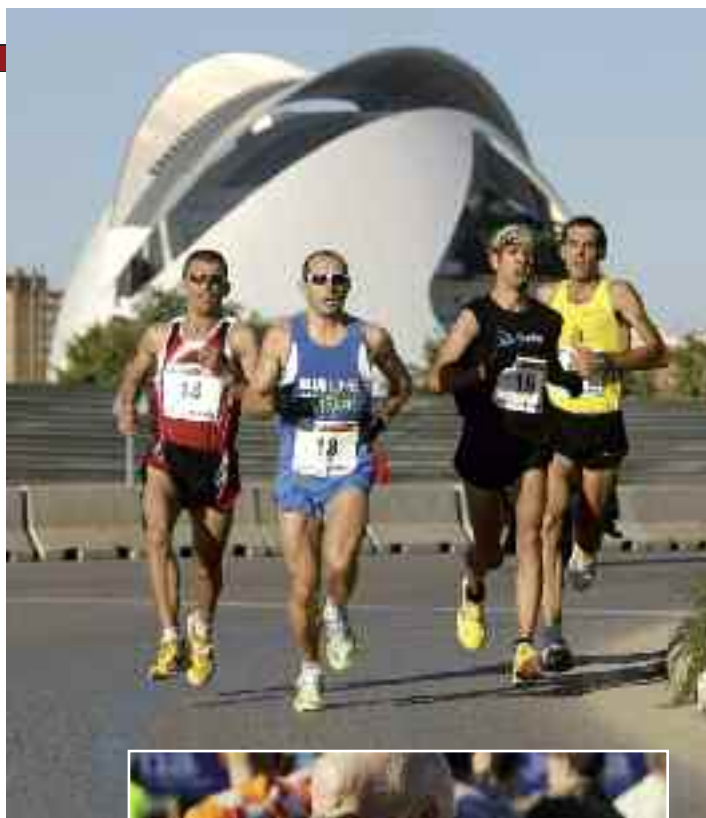
The present course follows the old left bank for a kilometre or more and almost exactly at the halfway point crosses over towards the historical city centre by means of an old stone bridge, now blocked off to traffic. The trees in the old river bed are big enough to put the right bank into shadow. Runners take a short diversion to touch the city centre but are soon back on the embankment, and cross back to the left bank at around 13km. The journey back to the Port, first passing the City of Arts and Sciences to the right, is along some long straight sections with the Mediterranean sun beating down in all its brilliance.

Crowds gathered at the start/finish area greet runners as they came through with 5.5km to run, just before retracing their steps around the racetrack. It demands a shift in attitude and concentration, after running on straight city streets, to follow the racing line around the

track, but it is as well to have something to fix upon as there are very few spectators on this final stretch.

The clock tower, the central feature of the port district, loomed into view with the reassurance that the finish line lay just a few hundred metres beyond it. The first two





RESULT

MEN:

1	Jacob YATOR	KEN	1:01:32
2	Abraham CHELANGA	KEN	1:01:34
3	Julius LIMO	KEN	1:04:18
4	Hichan ETTAICHME	MAR	1:04:53
5	Hassane AHOUCAR	MAR	1:05:33
6	Abderahman CHMAITI CHMITI	MAR	1:06:26
7	Piotr PALKA	POL	1:07:53
8	Mohamed Said DAYDAY	MAR	1:09:43
9	Jean Michel FAURIT	FRA	1:09:43
10	Samuel Rodriguez MORALES	ESP	1:09:47

WOMEN:

1	Sarah KERUBO	KEN	1:15:18
2	Mercy CHEBURET	KEN	1:17:39
3	Marta Esteban POVEDA	ESP	1:24:20
4	Maria Mochili JMENEZ	ESP	1:27:40
5	Doreen VELLA	MLT	1:27:49
6	Esther Balaguer PLANELLES	ESP	1:27:53
7	Eva Iglesia GARCIA	ESP	1:29:30
8	Marisa Guillen DOMINGEZ	ESP	1:30:40
9	Maria Giner MARTINEZ	ESP	1:31:26
10	Amparo Abad MORALES	ESP	1:32:37

home smashed the old event record by an impressive margin, and a significant percentage of those following in behind were obviously delighted at their times.

There were four thousand of them, significantly more than any

previous edition of the race. The general air of wellbeing and optimism that pervades the city of Valencia has led to impressive development in recent years. The Half Marathon is more than keeping up with the pace.

RACE CONTACT DETAILS

MEDIO MARATON DE VALENCIA NOVEMBER

Paco Borao, Arz. Fabian y Fuero, 14, 46009 Valencia

Tel: 34 96 346 0707 Fax: 34 96 346 3635

Email: maraton@correcaminos.org Inet: www.correcaminos.org

Full race contact listings start on page ??

ADVERT