

# A city inspires...

## Prague International Marathon, Czech Republic 19 May 2002

By Barbara Wells

The "city of a hundred spires", provides the backdrop to one of the most beautiful urban race courses in the world.

Commanding heights, topped one by the Castle and another by the monumental national stadium, overlook the narrow Vltava River, as it winds its way through the centre of Prague. One Sunday morning in May each year, a contrasting river of humanity is released from the Old Town Square.

This year there were 3,100 of them, a record number, coming from 50 countries. Located right in the middle of Europe, Prague has the most international of marathons, with two-thirds of the field coming from other countries. Their numbers were up by 15% for this 8th edition of the race. The cosmopolitan cultural atmosphere of a city once renowned as the world's centre of alchemy provides an inspiring architectural stage. This is signalled from the word "go" as Master Hanus's overwhelmingly ornate astronomical clock, dating from the 15th century and just alongside the start line, simultaneously starts its elaborate hourly show.

The starting shot was fired by Petr Svoboda, who scored the Czech national ice hockey team's gold medal-winning goal in the 1998 Nagano Winter Olympics. The singleminded purpose of the runners contrasted to a veritable



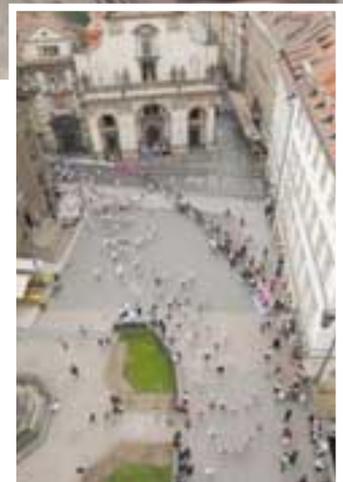
confusion of activity in the baroque pastel-painted Square. They swarmed away without a sideways glance at the PIM Serenade's latino-samba drum band Batucada Rio Reno. The PIM Serenade is a cultural and musical programme uniting sport and culture and, in keeping with Prague's rich cultural heritage, is now part of all events organised by Prague International Marathon.

The runners surged along Prague's answer to the Champs Elysees; the tree-lined Parizska

Street, built through the old Jewish quarter a hundred years ago, and now filled with many up-market shops and Art Nouveau-style buildings. The course then goes through the historic centre, one of the most beautiful areas of Prague. After crossing the 14th-century Charles Bridge, with its statue-lined parapets and magnificent views of Prague Castle, the race passes through the narrow, winding cobbled streets of Mala Strana. This is the "lesser quarter", at the foot of Castle Hill, founded in 1257 but substantially rebuilt after a great fire in 1689 and today a favourite location for filming.

The main journey now begins, southward alongside the Vltava River at first through the old industrial area of Smichov and then to the outskirts of the city. After the turn point runners return along the scenic banks of the Vltava to finish back in the Old Town Square.

Up at the front, Henry Tarus restored Kenya's domination of the Prague International Marathon. He waited until the 38th kilometre before attacking, and went on to win by a hundred metres in a time of 2:11:41. The defending champion, Tanzania's Andrew Sambu, came through to second after running down third-placed Joseph Chebet in the finishing straight. In the women's race the Italian Franca Fiacconi led for the first third of the race but then dropped out, leaving the way clear for Alvetina Ivanova to win in 2:32:24.



The Czech Championship finished with an upset, as the defending champion and favourite, Jan Blaha, faltered in the final kilometre. Jiri Wallenfels instead took first place with a time of 2:25:52. Jana Klimesova came through to win the women's title and to place fourth overall.

This year a marathon relay for secondary school students was run concurrently with the Marathon. There were 12 teams of 10 runners which had previously qualified through races held in the major Czech cities. Intended to encourage local youth to participate in distance running, the winning Ceske Budejovice team finished in 2:29:19.

All runners, young and old, elite and amateur, were accompanied all along the course by the various live bands of the PIM Serenade. The music helped to invigorate and inspire them, as well as entertain





## Result

### MEN:

|    |                       |     |         |
|----|-----------------------|-----|---------|
| 1  | Henry TARUS           | KEN | 2:11:41 |
| 2  | Andrew SAMBU          | TAN | 2:12:00 |
| 3  | Joseph CHEBET         | KEN | 2:12:01 |
| 4  | John KIPNGENO         | KEN | 2:12:05 |
| 5  | Joseph SIMRETU ASSEFA | ETH | 2:12:10 |
| 6  | André RAMOS           | BRA | 2:12:18 |
| 7  | Josephat CHEMJOR      | KEN | 2:13:56 |
| 8  | Jimmy MWANGANGI       | KEN | 2:15:22 |
| 9  | Zebedayo BAYO         | TAN | 2:16:02 |
| 10 | Nam-Kyun CHUNG        | KOR | 2:16:13 |

### WOMEN:

|    |                       |     |         |
|----|-----------------------|-----|---------|
| 1  | Alvetina IVANOVA      | RUS | 2:32:24 |
| 2  | Judit NAGY            | HUN | 2:35:30 |
| 3  | Alla ZADOROZHNYAYA    | BLR | 2:38:56 |
| 4  | Jana KLIMESOVA        | CZE | 2:47:24 |
| 5  | Milena POCHASKOVY     | CZE | 2:53:24 |
| 6  | Hana HAROKOVA         | CZE | 2:56:02 |
| 7  | Denisa KOZAKOVA       | CZE | 3:05:58 |
| 8  | Anne-Christel SIAHAYA | NED | 3:09:10 |
| 9  | Maija VUORINEN        | FIN | 3:12:36 |
| 10 | Angela VON BERG       | ITA | 3:14:15 |

the many thousands of spectators who lined the route, cheering them on. This year the Serenade extended to a three-day open-air street festival. During the two days preceding the Marathon, live bands and top local DJs performed at various points throughout the city as part of the Serenade, including an eight-hour festival in one of Prague's favourite parks. It all culminated in a concert featuring popular singers and bands in the

Old Town Square. In addition to the musical programme, other pre-race events arranged by the Marathon organisers included a fashion show featuring leading Czech designers, sport exhibitions and the traditional eve-of-race pasta party.

An hour after the start of the Marathon, Czech actor Petr Rychly started the PIM fun runs – the 5.5 km City Run, Inline Race and Corporate Run. These help to make

the Prague International Marathon a truly all-inclusive event, attracting participants of all ages and abilities. This year's runs drew nearly 9,000 participants – including many pushing baby strollers. Among the field were leading political figures from the Czech Government, including the man who won the premiership in the country's June elections, Dr. Vladimir Spidla.

As the digital finish line clock clicked on, more and more runners collected in the Old Town Square. They rested on the steps of the statue of Jan Hus, sat replenishing themselves at open air café tables, or gazed vacantly at Master Hanus's hourly horological pageant. There is no better place to come to the end of the journey than in this expansive but intimate space, that has been at the centre of Czech national life throughout the ages.