

NIKE PEOPLE'S MARATHON: A Personal View

May 10 1981

Chelmsley Wood, Solihull, West Midlands

The event was promoted by Centurian Joggers and race director John Walker and his huge band of helpers deserve great credit for putting on a race which, in terms of organisation and facilities even surpassed London.

Light rain began whilst hundreds of competitors were being transported by a fleet of buses from the multi-storey car park at Chelmsley Wood Shopping Centre, about 2 miles from the start. Registration took place in a large marquee on the playing fields of a local school and was both efficient and friendly. There was already something of a carnival atmosphere, despite the overcast skies ruining any chance of seeing the planned fly past of 'Concorde'. We were handed the now customary 'Goodie' bag which, apart from the usual race number etc, contained a 'do it yourself' certificate, race questionnaire and a superb 'Viga' commemorative race vest. Minutes later we received another plastic bag containing an orange, some cake, plus a copy of 'Athletics Weekly'! Refreshments were readily available and changing facilities, considering the number of runners, were excellent.

Conditions were quite good as we made our way to the start – fairly heavy rain by now, though it still felt quite warm. A dozen or so wheelchair athletes were given a tremendous cheer by a surprisingly large crowd when they set off on the same course as the marathon, but thirty minutes before the official start. The start was a bit like a mini- New York with runners on both sides of the long dual carriageway; gear was occasionally pretty weird e.g. another pantomime horse, a Viking warrior and even a male (I think) ballet dancer who kept all of us on our toes. Race commentator Tom 'Chariots of Fire' McNab made some amusing comments prior to the official start by the deputy mayor. Although placed on the front line, there must have been 150-200 runners charging off at what seemed a crazy pace by the time I had reached the first mile. It soon became clear though that there were some class runners up front, despite the 2:40 time 'limit' for this year's race.

The course was much harder than London. There were several long inclines and the 'up and down' sections run on dual carriageways and even an 'out-and-back' stretch of an unused motorway was rather disheartening. Feed station and sponging points were the best I've ever experienced, in fact it was more difficult at times not to take a drink or sponge every mile or so because of the keen helpers. I was very surprised at going through 5 miles in 28:50, 10 in 58:30 and 15 in what was for me an incredible 1:28.00. At this point I felt quite good and it seemed reasonable to go for 2:36 or 37 and with a 1:57.58 20 mile time everything was looking good; I had worked through the field and was in the low 20s, but with about 3 miles to go the old legs started to feel some cramp, I had to rapidly ease down to around 7-7.15 minute mile pace but picked it up again, thanks to a tremendous crowd near the finish and just failed to get under 2:40. However I was very pleased with my run, only a few weeks after London on a tougher course.

Arrangements at the finish were really excellent – warm woollen blankets, a superb medal, plenty of drinks and numerous `Mars` bars! The finish resembled London's euphoric atmosphere in many ways but there were even more novice runners. It was amazing that 93% of all the official starters actually finished the course. The main problem was due to the gatecrashers who saw to it that there were more finishers than the 1,858 who registered at the start and many unregistered runners went off with a finisher's medal!

I would strongly recommend any club runner to take part in one of these mass `folk` type events – and please don't knock `Joggers Marathons` unless you have experienced one; when they are as well organised and as spectacular as London or Birmingham they represent an unforgettable experience.

30th Brian Elliott 2:40.07