Why did the runner cross the harbour?

To be able to run back to the other side...

by Scott Newman

Thousand of runners serpentine their way across the picturesque Auckland City landscape: running over the iconic Harbour Bridge; passing through the central business district and the wealthy waterfront suburbs, spectacular harbour views open up. It is an experience, not just a run. The race is undoubtedly New Zealand's premier road running event.

Marathons in Auckland date back to 1936, when John William "Bill" Savidan organised, and then won, a marathon along the waterfront. That event attracted just 16 runners. It was only in 1962 that the annual series of Marathons began. There has only been one year since then – 1988 – in which a Marathon has not been held in Auckland.

With more than 16,500 entries across all events, the 2012 adidas Auckland Marathon was a record breaker. The full Marathon attracted over 3600 entries. The weather played its part - it was a beautiful sunny day, with little wind and temperatures topping 20C.

The course through the city is internationally renowned, starting by the Devonport village sea shore and making the Harbour Bridge crossing. The frequent harbour views and the maritime theme in general, along with the city centre street finish, continue to attract increasing numbers of participants and to grow the stature of the event.

This year the Marathon played host to more than 6000 visitors from around New Zealand and 50 other countries.

Managing Director Stephen Brown believes that the record numbers show the potential that the event has yet to fully realise: "the Half Marathon sold out in just 10 days – much earlier than last year and with an ever-larger sell-out field for the Marathon each year, demand is strong across the board."

Brown is confident that international interest in the event will continue to grow with the support of Auckland Tourism, Events and Economic Development and Tourism New Zealand. These agencies work with the organisers to actively market the event in Australia, Japan and North America. More than 1750 international visitors came to Auckland for this year’s event; 20% up on last year and tripling numbers over the past four years. This exponential international growth testifies to the quality of the course and the running experience.

In this year’s race some key innovations for improvement bore fruit. Brown notes: "We try very hard to include things that make a difference and provide a better experience. The harbour crossing to get to the start line is one of these things; returning..."
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across the Harbour Bridge on foot is another. The course is scenic throughout, and entertainment at the finish in Victoria Park adds sparkle. This year we worked hard to create more space at key points, to accommodate the increasing number of runners.

Onward and upward: plans are in place to tweak the course for next year to further enhance the picturesque nature of the event. There can be no doubt that the largest ever adidas Auckland Marathon will take to the streets on Sunday 3 November 2013.

I http://www.aucklandmarathon.co.nz/

Blog from 2012 Half Marathon competitor Stuart Macadam:

The Auckland Marathon is New Zealand’s most popular road race. Over 16,000 people participated in one of the many distances offered. From competitive runners to weekend warriors, there was a place for everyone.

I arrived at the start area around 06.15. The overwhelming sensation was being engulfed by the enormous group of runners and walkers preparing to race. The half marathon is the most popular race distance, with over 7000 runners and walkers entered. Waiting in line for a coffee at the nearby cafes was a marathon in itself.

At 07.00, the gun sounded and everyone was off. I had found a position in the crowd, five minutes before the gun, rather unglamorously close to the race walkers. To give an indication of how many people were participating, my gun time was 5:27 more than my net time.

The race course was brilliant. A pulchritudinous view of the sun slowly beaming over Rangitoto, onto a still, calm ocean was magical to behold, and motivated me in the early stages.

The hilly terrain is there from the start; Auckland’s landscape is rugged. From 3-4km in I became charged with adrenalin and the kilometres began to melt away. Before you know it, you’re in Takapuna, then Northcote. Auckland’s support was amazing. People cheer you on from their houses, families clap you on from the sidewalk; and there was a drumming group set up right before the bridge to keep runners’ spirits up.

Going over the harbour bridge was a surprise for many participants – a completely different experience to whizzing over it in their cars every morning. This crossing afforded a dazzling view of New Zealand’s biggest city at its finest.

In the big races nothing is more frustrating than having to navigate through slower runners; nudging past people to get a drink; or being squeezed to a standstill at the pinch points. Auckland has done worked hard at reducing these inconveniences. Pacers assigned to run a particular time are also helpful and the drink stations are well spaced.

Who can forget the final turn around towards the finish at Victoria Park? Thousands of people applaud you as you make a dash to the finish line. I could see people ecstatically hugging each other, grown men in tears, and overweight runners storming through the finish. It is certainly true when people say runners come in all shapes and sizes. For these people, it was months of hard work coming to a conclusion.

I enjoyed my run in the Auckland half marathon. Things come alive at big races: Elvis was running; a Lego man hobbled along; barbecues were being struck up roadside; supporters sang songs and danced Gangnam-style.

As I walked to the car, proud to have participated in New Zealand’s largest race, one question wouldn’t leave my mind. What’s my next race going to be?

[Editor’s advice: check the AIMS Calendar on page 54]
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