Neujahrsmarathon Zurich is the first official marathon of the year – and half marathon, and 10km race. It starts on the first day of the year at the stroke of midnight – the very first second of the New Year. The winners’ performances head the list of official world best times of the year – at least for a while.

The marathon is run on a lap with the start and finish inside a sports hall. Runners pass through the sports hall at the end of each lap, which makes it attractive for supporters. Inside the hall there is music, places to sit and relax, and food and drink. It’s a good place to see in the New Year, even for non-runners.

The starter’s gun fires at midnight, and runners head off out into the dark. They are accompanied by neighbourhood fireworks on all sides and, on the first lap, you even get to see the fireworks in the city centre - about 6km away – as if the whole show was designed just for you. This lasts for about an hour before fading. With fewer and fewer lights around, the race takes on a completely new character in which wearing a headlamp is definitely recommended.

The course is as flat as you could hope for along the banks of the River Limmat (the main river draining Lake Zurich). The only inclines are the ramps which link the bridges at the river crossings. What makes the race tough is the weather. It is usually around freezing and it is dark. With about 200 marathon runners and a total of 600 runners, the atmosphere is relaxed and familiar throughout the night.

It is this special atmosphere that attracts an international field from more than 30 different countries and all continents. About half the runners come from outside of Switzerland, which is unique for a Swiss marathon. The internationality of the race makes it even more special. A regular participant explained: “The race is professionally organized, but you feel the enthusiasm of the organizers – they are 10 runners at their best marathon age. They know what runners need from their own experience. One feels that for them quality rather than quantity is important.”

A runner from the US said: “I visited my brother in France over Christmas and took the opportunity to start the New Year with this marathon – it’s not so far from where he lives. He joined me and we ran the marathon together.” Two runners from Israel said: “We have stopped trying to explain to non-runners why we come here. And to runners, you do not need to explain.” Runners in this 2013 edition were very positive about the course, and in particular about the new section passing through the sports hall after each lap. “Even when I finished quite late on the atmosphere was still very good”, said a surprised first-time participant, “and with the indoor finish, you are warm as soon as you stop running. You can really enjoy the food and drink in the finish area without freezing.”

Continued on page 19
AUSTRALIA'S BOUTIQUE MARATHON EVENT

Brisbane Marathon Festival

SUNDAY 4 AUGUST 2013

www.brisbanemarathon.com
Continued from page 17

But what amazes most participants is the enthusiasm of about 50 volunteers who stay on duty throughout the night out in the dark, at some lonely fork in the road. “On the first lap, they wish every single runner a great New Year. And even four hours later they do not stop cheering. I was stunned” said an Italian runner.

Roger Kaufmann, with a best marathon time of 2:50, came up with the idea for the race. He mused that if he was to organize an official marathon at the very beginning of the year, the winners would automatically set the world leading time of the year.

After checking the rules and discussing the idea with training groups he was surprised to find that many runners relished participating in such a race. So he got to work, setting up an organizing committee; finding a course to run on; getting an official measurement.

This last task was done by Kaufmann himself: at that time there was no internationally qualified course measurer in Switzerland. Given the very restricted budget, Kaufmann decided to do it himself. Being a mathematician and having worked as a land surveyor in the Swiss Army, he took to it with ease, and qualified. He is still Switzerland’s only IAAF-AIMS course measurer.

The inaugural edition of the New Year’s Marathon Zurich finally took place on 1 January 2005. While the organizers originally expected a few dozen runners, in the end there were more than 150 people standing at the starting line at midnight. The successful first edition effectively committed the organizers to spending every New Year’s Eve in a sports hall. But even now their enthusiasm has not waned and you can see the pleasure they feel in enabling hundreds of runners to start the New Year in this unique way.

Usually a half marathon, a 10km and a marathon relay are also offered. This opens up the event to those who like the idea of running into the New Year, but are not ready for the full marathon distance. For the 2013 edition, due to works along the River Limmat, the races had to be run on a 6km lap, and instead of the half marathon and the 10km, there were races over distances of 18km, 12km and 6km.

The work will be finished during this year and the 10th anniversary edition on 1 January 2014 will be held on a 10.5km lap – still passing through the sports hall after each lap. A race for children under 15 will be introduced. It will start in the early evening of New Year’s Eve simultaneously with a marathon party in the sports hall which will continue until the last marathon runners finish in the morning.

Although the Neujahrsmarathon introduces innovations each year, the organizers have stuck to their principles. The committee is a non-profit organization and all members are volunteers. There is no prize money for the fastest runners either – just the glory of holding the world best time of the year for a few days. And every runner gets the chance to set a seasonal best time.

Result

MEN:
1 Jan FRYC CZE 2:45:56
2 Christophe SCHERNO FRA 2:47:16
3 Antonio Alegre GAL BE ESP 2:52:04
4 Philippe ARNOLD SUI 2:55:50
5 Roger GERBER SUI 3:00:35
6 Ralf ZACHARAS GER 3:03:16
7 David ROSS GBR 3:05:10
8 Roman CASANOVA SUI 3:06:27
9 Markus VON GUNTEN SUI 3:08:24
10 Virgilijus TIKUISIS LTU 3:12:08

WOMEN:
1 Astrid MUELLER SUI 2:59:29
2 Abby KNIGHT USA 3:24:58
3 Micaela RACKY GER 3:27:38
4 Petra SCHOPLOCHER GER 3:32:55
5 Nadia TOS ITA 3:34:55
6 Caroline ROHR GER 3:35:23
7 Andrea KAEPELJ SUI 3:35:23
8 Rosi KNAEBEL GER 3:38:03
9 Konstanze HAHN SUI 3:39:02
10 Virgilijus TIKUISIS LTU 3:45:15

18km
MEN:
1 Domino ANDERHALDEN SUI 1:05:25
2 Richard STOFFEL SUI 1:08:30
3 Peter KELLER SUI 1:11:56

WOMEN:
1 Caroline STEINER SUI 1:15:32
2 Tanja SONDeregger SUI 1:16:21
3 Franziska ETTER SUI 1:17:49
SSQ Quebec City Marathon

World’s 10 Best City Marathons
Runner’s World UK, May 2010

August 23-25, 2013
quebecmarathon.com

42.2K • 21.1K • Oasis 10K
Tanguay Kids Run
SSQ Health 5K
SSQ Star Race