Who would have thought that, 33 years after the original vision, a modest sporting event in the small Slovenian town of Radenska would have grown to be so vibrant, so energetic, and so hearty?

It started out as a concept of a few Slovenian businessmen, who created the race, and they never looked back. Like Marathon runners, with whom they identified, the only possible direction was forwards: towards the future of this wonderful and unique running experience.

The distinctive three hearts symbol of Radenska declares the aim of the organisers: to provide hospitality to runners, visitors and all those people who come to support them along the scenic Marathon route.

This year’s 33rd edition of the Three Hearts Marathon, held as always on the third Saturday in May, still managed to bring a new experience to participants - and to the organisers, who always want to learn from the runners in their race.

But race day is more than the race: it is a full day, which starts with a hike at 08.00 in the morning, as thousands of participants walk around the surrounding Kapela Hills and on trails along the Mura River.

The Marathon and Half Marathon races start an hour later, preceded by a dedicated half marathon event for handicapped athletes. While the title races are in progress 10km and 5.5km runs are set off, and then a Nordic Walk. In the afternoon, when all of these events are over, a municipality-sponsored Humanitarian run is held, followed by a Children’s run. These, along with the hike and the Nordic Walk, can be entered on the day. A closing concert is staged at 21.00 under the open sky in front of the Radin Hotel – part of the Radenci Health Resort.

Happy faces – that is what we are making Marathons for.
Left: Leading men from the year 2003. (Photos: Dani Mauko)

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1,000,000 spectators
40,000 runners
80 bands
8 world records
1 goal
Three Hearts Marathon, Slovenia

**Result**

**Marathon**

**Men:**
1. Elisha Kiprotich SAWE KEN 2:25:46
2. Micah Kiplagat SAMOEI KEN 2:31:00
3. Bohdan DZUBA POL 2:37:12
4. Miran DONNIK SLO 2:47:49
5. Ales ZONTAR SLO 2:47:49
7. Zvonko BLATNIK SLO 2:52:10
8. Iztok PODREZNIK SLO 2:59:28
9. Attila KOPICS HUN 2:56:44

**Women:**
1. Daniela CIRLAN ROU 2:41:55
2. Marija VRAČIC CRO 3:06:53
3. Natalia MALAJA UKR 3:23:34
5. Silvija FANZOL DUNJKO SLO 3:35:06
6. Antonia NEBENFUHR AUT 3:35:35
7. Titina SOFIA BADIS HUN 3:35:36
8. Natasa ANICIC ZAVASNIK SLO 3:35:36

**Half Marathon**

**Women:**
1. Daniel Kinyua WANJI KEN 1:04:34
2. Wycliff Kipkorir BIWOTT KEN 1:07:24
3. Barnabas BENE HUN 1:07:44

**Men:**
1. Daniela CIRLAN ROU 2:41:55
2. Marija VRAČIC CRO 3:06:53
3. Natalia MALAJA UKR 3:23:34
5. Silvija FANZOL DUNJKO SLO 3:35:06
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7. Titina SOFIA BADIS HUN 3:35:36
8. Natasa ANICIC ZAVASNIK SLO 3:35:36

“Sometimes I get the feeling we are running on the moon”

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Marathon runners complete two laps of the Half Marathon course. They have to finish the first lap in less than 2:15. The route varies in elevation by only 7m, which surprises Slovenian runners who are accustomed to more of a challenge:

The flat route offers a completely different experience to other Slovenian marathons. Since there are no reference points present in the flat Prekmurje region you have a feeling of boundlessness. “Sometimes I get the feeling we are running on the moon”, said one runner. “The experience on both banks of the Mura is unique, indescribable and intimate to the last fibre of your body” said another.

The course threads its way through the beautiful unspoiled landscape on the left and right banks of the Mura River. The Three Hearts Marathon brings people together not only from both banks of the Mura, but also with people across the border in Austria (the nearest airport to the race is Graz, 89km away). The marathon route used to pass through this neighboring country: crossing the border required only a race number, no passport.

The Three Hearts Marathon incorporates the Slovenian National Marathon and Half Marathon Championships. Course records are held by Italy’s Gigliola Borghini (Italy) with 2:38:33 and Kenya’s David Biwott with 2:15:26.

In 2002 the race organisers were honoured by an award from the International Olympic Committee recognising the Three Hearts Marathon as the best event in the category “Sports and well-being”. Part of what secured the award was the kindergarten offered at the venue from 08.00–14.00, where children of the runners can enjoy a number of supervised workshops and activities while waiting for their parents to reach the finish line.

Over 15,000 people from more than 20 countries worldwide participate in the event – several times more than the number of Radenci residents. Logistically this is a challenge for the organisers, but they manage it to the satisfaction of all thanks to a team of over 80 volunteers led by the President of the Organising Committee, Boštjan Gerlec. Gerlec is Head of Export for the Lasko Group, of which the sponsoring company, Radenska d.d. Radenci is a part.

The Radenska company is something of a Slovenian institution in its own right, having started to produce mineral water in Radenci back in 1869 when Karl Henn, owner of the land, filled the first bottles. In 1923 the water was recognised as having healing qualities and is now Slovenia’s largest water manufacturer, producing the world famous mineral water of the same name – the official water of the Marathon. Since 1936 three red hearts have been used as the company logo, and the Marathon name “Three Hearts Marathon” derives from this.

Gerlec continued with this theme in his parting words for the 33rd edition:

“Our only wish is for all the participants of this beautiful celebration of life. Special thanks and credit for our long run through history goes to all those who have helped create this event over the first 33 years and who have believed in the slogan that has united us: ‘Compete with yourself - everyone is a winner’.

“We look forward to welcoming you to Radenci for the 34th Three Hearts Marathon on 17 May next year.”

A snowy Three Hearts Marathon in 1987 (Photo: Dani Maiko)
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