Milton Keynes was a sleepy scenic village in rural Buckinghamshire before the urban planners of the 1960s came their way. In the 1970s it became a burgeoning “new town” — set up to attract companies that otherwise would probably have located in the British capital London, only 70km to the south.

When the new town was first built one of the town planners with a sense of humour thought it would be a good idea to appease local opposition against development in the countryside by placing five concrete cows alongside the railway line to keep the rural feeling alive. The gesture was widely ridiculed: a post-modernist joke before its time.

More central to their concept of the new town was the network of “redways” (literally red-bricked pathways, with bridges and underpasses) that allowed pedestrians and cyclists the benefit of rarely having to come close to busy roads. That was when runners were still a rare breed but over the last 40 years the redways have given ever-increasing numbers of runners the opportunity to enjoy undisturbed and varied runs beside the town’s lakes and through its parks at all times of the year. Milton Keynes (known affectionately as MK) is a great place to run.

It is also very easily accessible, located 70km north-west of London on the M1 motorway and only 30 minutes away by train. Luton Airport, with direct flights from throughout Europe and many places beyond lies 30km from MK, on the way to London.

Redway Runners is the biggest running club in town with over 880 members. It was founded in 2010 to cater for every level of runner. Over 300 novices passed through the club beginners’ courses last year and organised runs take place every day of the week.

Against this background of local running activity and with the 2012 London Olympic Games looming closer by the month local runner Andy Hully woke up one morning in August 2010 with the idea of staging a Marathon in Milton Keynes to coincide with the Olympic year. His fellow Redway Runners could be relied upon to assist and official backing was quickly secured from Milton Keynes Council and StadiumMK who were in partnership working towards establishing MK as an ‘International Sporting City’.

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It took 18 months of hard work to plan the first event. It couldn’t have been done without the enthusiastic support of the Redway Runners, who provide the majority of the 500 strong event crew required to stage MK’s flagship sporting event. Their commitment and enthusiasm has been instrumental, as it was with the London 2012 volunteers, in generating the very positive feedback received to date.

The inaugural race took place on a very wet and windy day in April 2012. The stadium was being extended by one tier at the time and the building works caused it to flood. Since it was completed the Stadium has provided a world class finish for the MK marathon.

Many lessons have been learned since and the organising team strive to put on the best event possible each year. The stadium facilities include probably the biggest baggage hall of any event in the UK and runners find that there is minimal queuing for toilets. The MK Marathon has leapt into the top 10 marathons in Britain yet has one of the cheapest race entry fees. Modern hotels, restaurants and leisure facilities abound, making pre and post-race activities both fun and easy to arrange at very reasonable cost.

The course takes full advantage of the green surroundings Milton Keynes offers. In the first third of the race runners complete an out-back section which from 4-11km is on the wide, tree-lined boulevards of the city centre. From 16km runners embark on a meandering loop through a mixture of quiet roads and rural redways which have a curiously intimate feeling to them as they progress through woodlands, along lakesides and across parks. The route skirts the pre-existing Milton Keynes village at around 25km. Three course records were broken in 2015 and the race is attracting faster runners as it becomes more widely known.

Apart from providing hundreds of volunteers many Redway runners run the marathon. In a new initiative for 2015/16 MK Marathon and Redway Runners have established a “Zero to Hero” programme to take 12 aspiring marathon runners from novice status to running the MK Marathon in May 2016. A training programme is set for each runner and a network of mentors will take runners to their goal.

When planning your 2016 schedule why not look at the Milton Keynes Marathon and Half Marathon? Race day is the first Monday in May which is always a national holiday in UK. Visiting runners are more than welcome to join the Redway Runners (www.redwayrunners.com) at any time. Come and let us introduce you to the delights of running in MK.
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Marathon + ½ Marathon
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www.hcamarathon.dk