I hope no one in today’s world thinks of Siberia as a place with bitingly cold winters, where only heavily-bearded men live and where wild bears walk in the villages. It’s nice to hear about the frosts, beards and bears, but only as fairytale symbols of Siberia’s enormity – extending for thousands of kilometres from the Urals to the Far East. Cold and snowy winters are real enough, but not every year. Siberia is absolutely different to what it was in the past. Here live open, kind and educated people. And the women: they are so beautiful. If I were younger I would fall in love with every one of them.

For the last 20 years I have gone from Moscow to Siberia every August. My destination is Omsk; a big city with a population of more than one million people. Of course, I visit Omsk not only to look at winning women, but also to see one of the best marathons in the country. I once called Omsk the running capital of Russia. It has not only the Siberian International Marathon, but many other races too. The Ice Half Marathon is held every year on 7 January. In the middle of May comes the Half Marathon Handicap, in which runners start according to their age: the younger you are the later your start time will be, but the winner is the first runner to cross the finish line.

The ‘running capital of Russia’ has two other important things connected with the Siberian Marathon. The first is the sculpture named ‘Marathon Man’ holding pride of place on the main square. The second is an IAAF Road Race Bronze Label.

Every year many top Russian runners, including members of the national team, take part in the Marathon in Omsk. Some years ago the winner of the race was Yakov Tolstikov – winner of the 1991 London Marathon in 2:09:17 and a regular participant in the Olympic Games and IAAF World Championships. Albina Mayorova (née Ivanova) is the holder of the SIM women’s record (2:30:21) from 2002. She finished 9th in the 2012 Olympic Games Marathon in 2:25:38.

This year people in Omsk talked a lot about the London Olympics. The SIM organizers decided to change the traditional date of the race by one week to coincide with the men’s marathon of the Olympic Games. The start time was also the same. The Olympic Marathon started at 11:00, but the six-hour time difference to Omsk fixed it at 17:00 local time. Two big TV monitors placed on the main square helped to synchronize the race starts and to give marathon runners in Siberia the feeling that at that moment they were closer to Olympic ideals. So in 2012 the Siberian International Marathon was organized under one more name: ‘The same day, the same time’.

Continued on page 21
REGISTRATION
- Registration opens: 1st August
- Limited Places

THE RACE
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- Included on the calendar of the RFEA (Royal Spanish Athletics Association)

LA CARRERA
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 Nobody could believe that in the middle of August in Omsk it could be scorching hot. But the hot weather came two days before the race and stayed put for the marathon. The temperature climbed to just short of a regional record: 35–37°C in the shade. In the direct sun it was ten degrees hotter. Even so, 13,000 runners decided to race. Most of them opted for shorter distances, but 680 runners started the full marathon.

Among the marathoneers, who came from 18 countries, only a few elite runners from Africa looked at the race with optimism. Phahlane Othani from South Africa was confident, saying that he had enough experience to run in hot weather. But in the race itself his optimism melted away very soon and he dropped out – as many of the top male runners did. So many that it was a female runner that assumed the overall lead. The 23-year old Olga Mazurenok from Belarus ran a very cautious first and only later, when she was confident that she could withstand the hot conditions, did she run faster. Her second half was three minutes faster than the first. She won the race outright with a time of 2:44:47. The second runner to cross the finish line was more than four minutes slower than her. It was a man.

Some runners remember another case, in 2001 during the Ice Half Marathon. The weather was quite the opposite: it was 39°C below zero. And again it was a woman who won the race.

Looking at these striking examples, one question arises: who is stronger in such tough and stressful situations? Men should think about it.

Because of the terrible heat many marathoneers dropped out before the finish. Considering the possible adverse consequences, nobody would argue with their decisions. At the same time it is worth recalling what the essence of the marathon is all about. It is a symbol of invincible will, courage and persistency. These are qualities which the French historian Michel Bréal put into the conceptualisation of the marathon. He based his argument for the inclusion of an endurance race at the inaugural modern Olympics on the example of legend about a Greek soldier in one of Plutarch's essays who died after delivering the victory message from the Battle of Marathon.

In recent decades the Marathon, which had long remained accessible only to a small group of very committed athletes, was adapted to appeal to a wider range of everyday runners. Organizers try to hold events at a favorable time of the year, under the most comfortable weather conditions, with all the necessary facilities provided. That’s really good, but when athletes are called upon to bear difficult weather, topographic or other conditions – and it becomes really hard, they sometimes look for someone to blame. Their first thought is not that it is a marathon, a real one; a marathon in its original form. Maybe they were just not ready for it.
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