

## London Report 2009

Well we had left the support and company of Debbie Thomas (Trentham buddy sharing my hotel room) and others at the entrance to the Championship Start as they weren't allowed in. It was sad as Debbie should have been coming in with us but had to pull out last minute because of injury. 45 mins before the start, Mel Young (Newcastle AC) and I were warming up with the hand cyclists (who nearly knocked us down a couple of times), my groin and knee still all strapped up, Mel's face looking as nervous as mine but certainly looking the part in her professional 2 piece (or bikini as I say). She earlier had a great coping mechanism for the stress, lying down in the Championship women's tent with her the iPod on whilst I paced up and down like a demented lunatic. Then along came Gareth Briggs (2.35 marathon runner) and Adela Salt (British Ultra Distance runner from Trentham) with their warm smiles and relaxed form which probably comes with experience and inner confidence (well with past brilliant times it helps). There I am, a quivering wreck, yet again for the third time on the championship start, my adrenaline reaching an all time high. I couldn't even put my name on my vest properly, it was the first time I was allowed to have it on in the champ start. The referee had tried to take it off me but I pleaded that it was good luck as it was written in my daughter's handwriting and I would move it up to reveal the 'Flora' heading so they allowed me but then I put it back on cock-eyed. For the last 2 years I'd got fed up of being called 'Stone' (the big race number covering up the Master Marathoners) and hearing the aftermaths of chuckles. This time it would have been 'rentham' as the 'T' has always been missing off my vest.

We had always started with the Elite women before at 9am and this was the first time it had changed. There were quite a few complaints from people like Kim Faulke from Telford AC who had previously done a sub 2.40 marathon but was not allowed a start with the Elite women when requesting to. Then there was Michelle Ross-Cope (Elite for Stoke AC) who I think was glad to have the Champ men to pull her along and then she must have pulled Gareth along towards the end as he had a faster first half but finished 4 mins behind her.

We managed to get quite a good position; Chris Hoy was there above us on a platform giving us all a smile. It was 3 seconds before our chip went over the line after the start and I said to Adela that I would try and tag on to her behind as she is such a good pacer. I planned to do a faster first half as negative splits/even pacing has never worked for me in a marathon but I went off a bit too fast!! Into my first 900metres, I was feeling so good, my groin strain didn't hurt, I felt like I was running like the wind, I couldn't hold myself back I went ahead of Adela who was doing 6.20 min, and started doing 6.10's and still felt good half way in at 1.23. I still felt like I could have gone faster, the crowds were whipping me up into excitement and I was enjoying the moment that I'd worked so hard for for the last 4 months. I was continually waving; doing high fives with the kids, I even managed a couple of rhythmical wiggles and arm punching to some brilliant electric bands. They made up for the Champ men who gave me bottles to jump over, who kept on colliding with me and squirting Lucozade up my legs treading on bottles they'd left on the floor. Then there was the jostling for the blue line, none of this gentleman thing you get at our local races. I had been spoilt by the Women's Elite Start the last 2 years and the crowds had been amazing in that too. There's something magic about the womens elite start when you're a row behind the professionals and all the cameras are on you and when you wave to the crowds on Tower Bridge you get deafening roars reciprocated back which you know are just for you as you could be the only one waving to them on the bridge at the time!

I was due for my second gel at 15 miles which I opened too quickly and consequently lost most of as it ripped from top the bottom and went all over my face, arms and legs. I started licking it off my arm, realising that this was energy I was going to need but the saltiness off my arm made me feel sick!! It was getting hotter and hotter, the humidity was high, I kept throwing the remainder of whatever water I had left over my head every mile to cool me down but this was then soaked up by my patella tendon strap which annoyingly kept falling down with the weight and I had to keep stopping every so often to wring it out!! I could have done without that as every time I stopped it was so hard to get going again, I looked at my legs and they were beetroot red with exhaustion, my head now started to go funny, like a 'spaced out' feeling at 18 miles, I thought I was best now slowing down to make sure I finished! At 19 miles I decided to carefully open and consume my third gel but it just didn't seem to work, my legs were getting heavier, my 'spaced out feeling' was now a dizziness at 20 miles and I was really starting to worry if I

would finish, I kept seeing people doing zig zags on the road or collapsing and thinking that would be me next. I was now cursing myself for going off too quick but back there I was feeling so good, I'd done my training by the book and had started to believe that perhaps I could pull a 2.50 off as my coach Richard O'Keefe had said. Why hadn't Adela Salt, Mick Valentini, Mark Harries and Mel Young gone past me by now I kept asking myself, I'd slowed down so much and everybody else was overtaking me!! Now the pain started at 21 miles, pain I've never experienced before in my running life. The lactic acid was cruel and merciless, my strides were shortened and my groin was crying out (and everything else), I got cramp in my right calf probably because of this stupid patellar strap that was cutting my circulation off...but the crowds were so fabulous and kept me going, with them now shouting my name I found a power beyond what is normal, they were telling me 'I could do it' and that I should 'dig down deep'. Then at last I saw Big Ben!! Last year I saw it knowing I had to do a 5.5 minute mileing to get under 3hrs and I sprinted it as hard as I could. Alas, it wasn't to be as I came in at 3.02 last year. There was no way I could sprint this time, I was hanging on in there for my dear life but I had the comfort of having a 14 min margin this time, I picked up the pace a little to 7mm. I've never enjoyed the last mile more in any race!!

I cried at the end of the race and I've never done that before but this one was special, I don't know if it was relief, pain, the joy of achieving a lifetime goal (sub 3hrs) or perhaps the mixture of it all, but I'd done it and by gum I was glad it was over! I'd achieved 2.56.26, 21<sup>st</sup> lady and 2<sup>nd</sup> in my age group, also 1<sup>st</sup> in the UK for the marathon in my age group 2009!!! I was ahead of an O'40 Yank until 19 miles when I hit the wall, her pacing was so even and professional that she beat me by about 4 mins.

I saw Adela come in after me. She was hobbling with Andy at her side, I thought she had finished but she'd had to pull out which was sad. We had originally planned to aim for Team gold at London with Debbie by our side but it wasn't to be (3 needed and you have to start on champ start which is a sub 3.15 previous marathon for the ladies).

I never saw any of the Stafford Tri lot before or after the race but we were texting each other a lot anyway. Nick (aka Skippie) was the first one to text me (I'll let my husband off as he was doing Enduro 6 at the time ☺). I opened my bag and he'd told me my position and age group etc.- what a little star hey (said he was bored and so followed me on the computer).

Well done to you all that did it. It was a hot humid one and wasn't to be taken lightly!

This was my 5<sup>th</sup> marathon (including the old Potts), I've achieved my goal and I'm NEVER DOING ANOTHER ONE AGAIN – they are too painful!!