

Brighton Marathon race report

On Sunday 10 April I took part in the Brighton Marathon. The following is my account of the race – as I haven't had a chance to catch up with the others to discuss their experiences – so please forgive the self-indulgence drivel.

The race started at Preston Park at 9 am, which was a kind start time as it allowed enough rest the night before (luckily my wife Kirsty had decided to stay with her parents with the kids so I had the rare experience of a night's sleep). I managed to bump into Sam, Steve, Mark and Kay at the start and we all discussed our training woes and Mark was worried about the state of his legs following the 115 mile bike ride the day before as part of his "staggered double ironman" for charity.

I lined up in the red pen having put down a predicted time of sub-3 hours and the others headed to their pens as no-one else was as stupidly over-optimistic as I was. The gun went and we started with a lap of the perimeter of Preston Park – I was already next to the 3:10 pace runner, but was nervous of losing time by taking it too easy. However, even early on there was an uphill and I was aware of not burning up the hills too quickly. This was only a short hill however and there was soon a quick down hill through the first mile marker and headed towards the Pavillion.

I felt comfortable at this stage and settled in to a sub – 7 minute pace. However, the first gel decided to fall out of my race belt early on. I briefly thought about stopping but carried on – after all I had two other gels and I had read there were plenty of nutrition stations around the course (wrong!). Unfortunately, about half a mile later I lost the other gels and with an empty race belt I ditched it at the side of the road.

Anyway, there were a few twists and turns around the Pavillion and the lanes and then we headed back inland for a short stretch. It was here that I saw a cavalcade of mods on their scooters coming back in the other direction leading out the race – all very quadrophenia – and the race leaders weren't very far behind – probably already half a mile ahead after 3 miles.

We were soon onto the next leg of the run, which was the long stretch out from Brighton centre past the marina to Ovingdean. It was tough going to say the least and is probably why Brighton probably isn't going to ever be a place to set a pb (unless it's your first marathon or you've only run the Brighton marathon of course!). The combination of head wind and the uphills made it a bit difficult for me as I was aware of needed to sit in with other runners to keep out of the wind but with them keeping up a sub-7 minute pace I didn't want to overcook it. By this time I had run through the first 10k at 42-ish minutes – so I was on track for my goal.

Past the Marina we headed inland to a short sharp uphill at Ovingdean (this was on quite tight roads I remember thinking and probably would have been slow going for later runners). We did a bit of a U-turn at the top of the hill through the back of a school and back the way we had come. We carried on east for a while but then re-traced our steps along the coast back in towards Brighton sea front. Luckily it was mainly downhill at this point, so I let myself 'fall' downhill and ran past quite a few runners. I noticed however that I wasn't running great at this point and was a bit low on energy – starting to wish for the energy gels.

Soon a nutrition station appeared but this was at 11 miles and I could've really done with taking something on at the 10k point. Unfortunately the only thing offered at the stations were cliff bar shot blocks – sort of cubes of jelly – which were really nasty and not easy to hold or digest in the heat.

I past the half marathon point in 1 hr 32 minutes and was pleased with my time for this – but I was already drifting a bit from the sub – 7 minute pace. I pushed on a bit more past the Grand Hotel on the right and the piers and sea to the left. It was when the route veered inland again that the wheels started coming off a bit. I was now taking two bottles at every water station (as they were fairly infrequent – every 3 miles I think).

There was a gradual uphill section inland that took us through parts of Hove and I was beginning to seize up a bit and had to stretch out the legs. At this point the 3 hr 10 pace setter past, with some smug runner noting how people were already struggling. The pace setter I recall mentioned that people set out too fast. This annoyed me no end as I was there to do better than my pb of 3 hrs 10!!! Anyhow there was not time to explain my particular predicament – I was now just hanging on for grim death.

This was how the remainder of the race went – the slow baking in the sunshine – wishing for water stations to arrive sooner than they did and the occasional need to stop to stretch out my calves which were at the edge of cramping. I was also suffering with blisters on the balls of both my feet but other stuff was hurting much more to worry about them (Note: subsequent post race inspection of said blisters highlighted that I should've been worried a lot).

I was now headed out to Shoreham power station – I can't quite remember the ordering but at 20 miles I was under 2 hrs 30 minutes. Shortly after I hit the wall – almost literally. With their amazing sense of humour – the organisers of the marathon had actually constructed a giant wall for runners to run through with a sign saying 'you've hit the wall'.

Running through Shoreham dock yard was a slightly surreal and one of the more desolate part of the course although there were a few supporters there with cow bells which seemed to give me a spur. Also, the smaller numbers of supporters there made the atmosphere seem more special once I reached the turning point and was heading east again on the promenade. I could see the piers in the distance at about 4 miles away. Slowly – oh so slowly – they became larger. I was now running a bit better again and the crowds were fantastic.

I managed to see my wife and kids just after the west pier and this kept me going to the end past the pier and to the finish, which is familiar if you know the Brighton 10k. The time on the clock showed 3 hrs 24 – so I made sure I got under the 3 hr 25 barrier (why does this matter?) and just pleased to have finished. An extended lunch with my sister and my family was enjoyed. Unfortunately, I couldn't see the others to meet up but facebook banter suggests that everyone found the heat a bit of a problem to say the least.

I was disappointed with my time but in a way I was pleased with the effort to keep going when things went bad. In hindsight an attempt at a slower time – e.g. 3 hrs 10 was probably do-able – but I gave a faster time a go and to me the fact that it didn't pay off was made bearable by my hanging in there (in fact only 41 runners broke 3 hours). Obviously the heat had taken its toll to some degree (apparently it hit 23 degrees at one point in the day); the

lack of nutrition around the course was another. But, ultimately in the run up, I had missed a lot of mid-week runs due to work commitments and family issues meant that I missed some pre-planned races that you need to do so that race day isn't such a shock. And at the very least I have a hard bit of marathoning under my belt to go for a fast time later in the year ☺.

Brighton is a great race, however, with a really nice atmosphere. And I have to say congrats to all the MTSC members that took part. Mark Jordan did an amazing time given his biking epic the day before and Jules did excellently as she had struggled so much with injuries prior to the event. It was Kay's first marathon as well so "chapeau". Seemingly one of the biggest achievements was making the start – as out of 15,000 places only 8,000 started on race day.

Final placings as follows.

	Chip Time	Position
Kevin James (1082)	3:24:32	339
Colin Chambers (5637)	3:47:59	1120
Samantha Anderson (1276)	3:58:05	1857
Stephen Birchall (9205)	4:05:30	2282
Mark Jordan (5156)	4:05:51	2280
Kate Walch (6641)	4:48:55	5138
Kay McMenamin (3444)	4:56:38	5350
Julienne Stuart-Colwill (3988)	5:28:57	6818