

Lisbon Half Marathon – 8th October 2023



A group of us from Fountains Parkrun (myself, Sarah Woffinden, Kate & Andy Todd, Chris Brown, Peter Crowder and Steph Wilson) take an annual trip to run a half marathon.

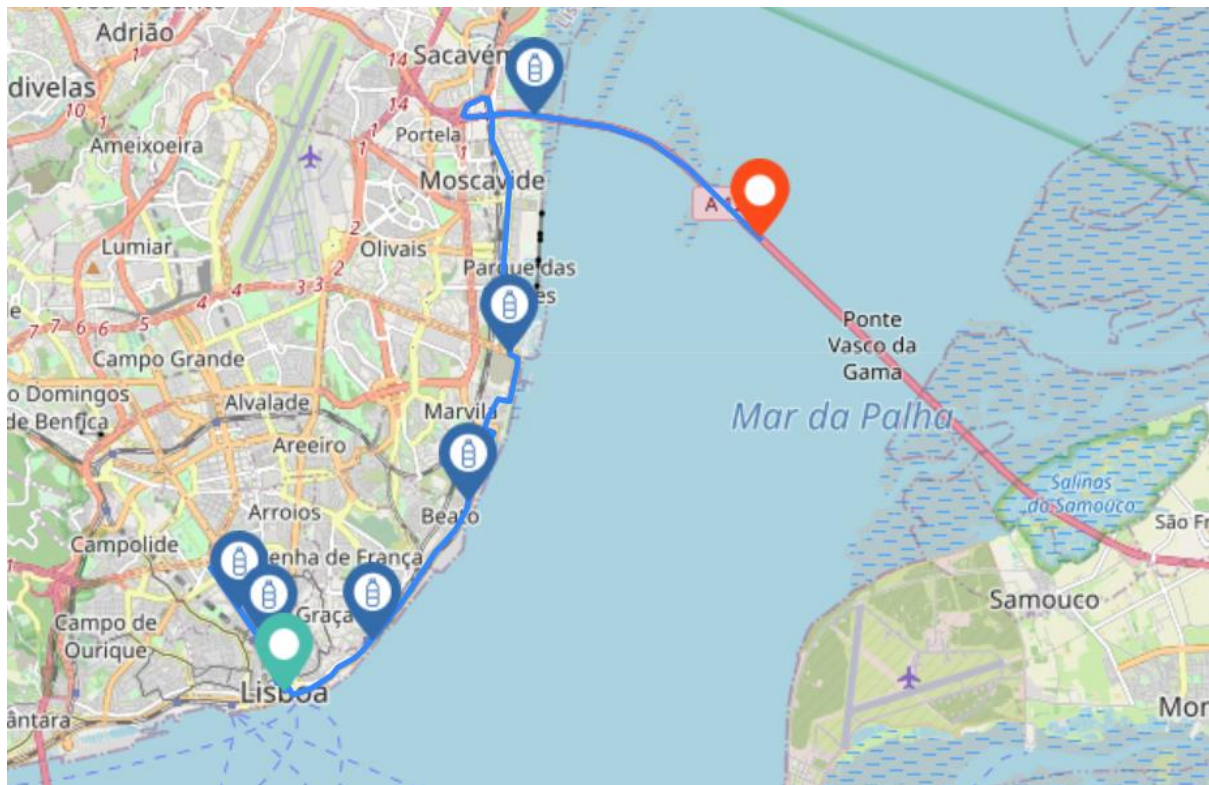
This year it was Lisbon – although Lisbon was second choice. The original plan had been to run Copenhagen, however, we twice tried to book accommodation, and each time our booking wasn't accepted, unless we were prepared to pay double the original price ... so Copenhagen lost our business.

We arrived on the Friday before the race, and it was hot. Collection of race numbers, shirts and freebies took place en route from the airport. Somehow we all had consecutive numbers – we still haven't worked out how as we didn't enter together, and we were from different clubs. Any ideas?

We got some sightseeing in on the Saturday and it was hot again. And Sunday's race, with a 10.30 am start, was predicted to be hot with temperatures getting up to 35C.

We had discussed how we would cope with the heat and had a variety of plans – which also included the pre-race as we had to be taken by bus to the start to be there up to an hour and a half before the gun – and the start line was about halfway across Europe's longest bridge where there would be no shelter.

The discussions were continuing over our Saturday evening meal when, around 8 pm, we received an email telling us that the 10.30 start had been moved forward to a 9 am start. The re-planning started in earnest ...



There were a good number of unhappy people venting their frustrations on the Event Facebook page – mainly to do with the late changing of the time as opposed to the changing of the start time itself (and we learned later that full cancellation of the event was a serious consideration). Looking at it from another perspective, and putting to one side whether it was too late a change, I think it's fair to say it's impressive to be able to change the start time at such a late stage bearing in mind the support infrastructure required for such a large race.

To get to the start line, we had to get on an official bus from a particular station. Two of us used public transport, three of us got an Uber leaving at 6.30 am, and Sarah and I booked an Uber departing at 6.20 am.

Our entertaining Uber driver had been an early contestant on Britain's Got Talent around 2011 and was very outgoing. He suggested we shouldn't do the run as it would be too hot; he would drive us around for two hours and we would buy a medal from somewhere. Amongst his other suggestions was that we should drink some cans of Red Bull (other energy drinks are available). He also had a keen eye for detail – he said I was the spitting image of Hulk Hogan, and insisted on taking a selfie with me so he could say he'd had Hulk Hogan in his car ... Sarah, by this point, was crying with laughter with tears rolling down her cheeks ...



Photo: allwrestlingsuperstars.com

And, for anyone who doesn't know me, I can assure you the resemblance is uncanny ... just not sure why I hadn't noticed it before (or why Sarah was laughing).

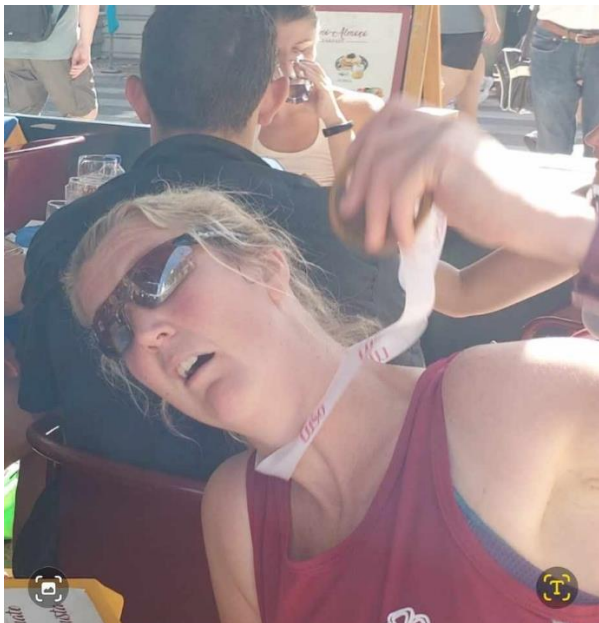


Back to the run ... once at the coach station, it was a question of when to get on a bus to the start line ... get there in the dark when it was chilly, but experience the sunrise, or go a little later as the sun was rising so that it was a little warmer. The photo (including an attempted Nidd Valley photobomb) tells you who went early ...

It was indeed a little breezy but eventually we were off. There were plenty of refreshment stations, and another presumably late addition was a fire engine every 3-4 kilometres offering free showers – which was welcome as the temperature was 23-25C during the race. It was okay in the shade, but uncomfortable where we were in direct sunlight.

But at least it didn't get to the expected temperatures. However, the heat took its toll and there were a good number of runners it impacted on. One dropped like a stone in front of Sarah, and she very caringly stopped to put him in the recovery position before official assistance arrived.

A few bands playing along the way entertained us, and there was lots of support; probably the most touching was two homeless men who were standing next to their sleeping area clapping all the runners.



4 or 5 miles in, I wasn't feeling too good – possibly a bit of sun stroke from the day before – so I started taking it easy; Chris then caught me up and I ran the last 3-4 miles with him. I could only marvel at his grit and determination in the conditions, whilst he also waved at everyone holding encouraging placards.

The finish was in the main seafront square – Praca do Comercio; they had also erected a grandstand at the finish line, but it was very sparsely populated due to it not having any shade. Across the line, water, fruit and ice lollies were provided – but the main priority was to get out of the heat.

Different people were affected by the heat in different ways

The first thing Chris said to me after crossing the line was, "I'm glad they moved the start time". There was a brief pause, and then he added, "Did I beat you?".

Mr Brown wanted some strawberry ice cream, so that was what we went for; and the sit down was equally welcome. After that it was a tuktuk back up the hill to our rather lovely, converted church we were staying in.



Shade at last!



Riding with the king!

And the results ... everyone finished which was great as the conditions were tricky¹. Sarah finished first out of the Ripon Runners with a cracking run, and Kate ran brilliantly to knock 19 minutes of her Valencia time from a year ago!



And the team results ... Whilst the individual runners from other running clubs finished in front of the four of us, they didn't take the overall trophy ... awarding 7 points for first, through to 1 point for seventh (Evening League style system), RR romped home with the Cup (a request for a rule change regarding the calculations was considered, however, it would have been defeated 4 votes to 3).

Fountains Parkrun Peeps International Challenge Trophy		
Placing	Team	Points
1 st place	Ripon Runners	10
2 nd place	Nidd Valley Road Runners	7
3 rd place	Otley AC	6
4 th place	Pudsey & Bramley AC	5

The remainder of the long weekend was spent chilling, sightseeing and celebrating. Overall, a really well organised event which coped well with the extreme weather conditions.

¹ Whilst Andy Todd is not a RR member, he did a fantastic time, coming 2nd overall in his age group