

Aintree Half Marathon – Sarah Woffinden



Although I wouldn't describe myself as a racing fan, my main hobby is horses. It's where all the blood, sweat, tears, time and money goes ... not necessarily in that order. And Aintree sort of transcends racing because of the Grand National.

When my run buddy Paul Ackerley got asked by a friend to suggest a half marathon to enter, the Run Through Aintree half marathon was proposed, and I was immediately up for it. A place where so much sporting history has been made.

I have never had ambitions of racing down the home straight towards the grandstands with crowds cheering, but on Sunday it happened four times, as it was a four-lap race. Unexpected goosebumps time.

So, after a 6.50am pick up of Paul (who was nursing a back injury so got in the car very gingerly) we were on our way to Aintree. Paul had said the day before he would be spectating not running due to his injury, but he was dressed to run. By the time we arrived he said he would have a crack at doing a steady 10k.

There was an "elite" 5k setting off 45 minutes before our race, so it was good to see some real athletes pinging along.

It was my first Run Through event. I thought it was all very organised, with about 4,000 runners, with 5k, 10k and half marathon distances and staggered start times.

As we collected numbers, visited loos, etc we agreed racecourses are great places for runs to be held; they have the infrastructure ready and waiting.

As we lined up for the start, I rather optimistically stood with the 1.50 pacer. At that point I noticed that about 90% of the runners were significantly younger than me. It seemed a very different demographic to local runs.

And the course? What a course! It was a tour of Aintree! We started in front of the stands, went past the parade ring, the winners' enclosure, weighing room, stables, statues of legends and that was before we went out onto the course. We crossed the Melling Road, and although I couldn't identify specific fences, we ran past plenty. All huge. It was one of those lovely courses with plenty of straight, flat or slightly downhill sections and only a small amount of twisty uphill bits. Perfect. So much so, that I got carried away and went far too fast for 8 miles and then had a 5-mile slog home on tired legs. I will never learn!

There was a lot of people cheering enthusiastically at the finish. Scousers are clearly a bit more excitable about spectating than Yorkshire folk. Paul had gone from saying he wasn't running to going to do 10k to amazingly getting round the half marathon distance. A real achievement in the circumstances.

A fancy medal, and plenty of food and water at the finish was appreciated. When the results arrived, there was a nice surprise - we both were placed in our ages categories; me third (1:53:57) and Paul second (2:20:53) ... but everyone wants a photograph under the 'First', don't they?!



Altogether, a grand day out!