

AMSTERDAM MARATHON

Trinity Booth from Absoluterunning.com shares her exhilarating experience of achieving a PB in the Amsterdam marathon.

Words by Trinity Booth

Sunday morning. I woke about 20 minutes before my alarm was due to go off. It was marathon day and I felt calm and ready for it. Soon enough it was time to head over to the Olympic Stadium for the start. Built for the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics, the stadium is now home to a sporting museum, but is still today and impressive structure. When I got there I couldn't resist going up into the stands to look around - it was immense. The track was packed with runners all excitedly milling about, strapping on water-bottle belts, munching Power Bars, stretching and generally getting ready for the off. The stands were packed with supporters. The atmosphere was incredible and I couldn't wait to be a part of it. I ran back down the stairs and got myself where I needed to be within the pink band of sub 3.30 runners.

Steady Start

I stood at the start of the race, which was on the running track. I untied and re-tied my laces, as you do, and at last I started to feel some adrenalin, my body was preparing to race. I got chatting to a few of the other runners, one guy was from the UK like me, we wished each other luck and a minute later the gun fired.

We were off. I saw the Kenyans and speedy guys already leaving the stadium by the time I got across the start line - awesome. We went halfway round the track and then out of the stadium. Hearing the cheers from the crowd as we left the stadium was amazing, I can't describe the feeling it gave me. I felt like breaking into a face pace, but conscious that I had to keep it steady for the first few miles while I settled in, I held back. I kept checking my sports watch, which shows what minute-mile pace I'm running at. It read 7.52, so I knew I had to drop it off a little

Vondelpark and the Rijksmuseum

The first 5k took us to the beautiful 48-hectare Vondelpark, full of trees, ponds, paths and playing fields. I thought to myself that it was to be an even more welcome site when next laid eyes on the park after the course had looped back along the Vondelpark at around the 40K mark. By then

the Olympic stadium and finish line would almost be in sight.

At around the 10k mark we pass an impressive building. I discovered later that it's called the Rijksmuseum. It's the Dutch national museum in Amsterdam, founded in 1808 by Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, King of Holland, as the Great Royal Museum in the Royal Palace. It is famous for its outstanding collection of Dutch paintings, but there was no time to pop in to admire them on marathon day. Not that I'd have wanted to, at this point I still felt bursting with energy - I was flying.

The Amstel River

For a while the route of followed the Amstel River, past stately mansions and several iconic Dutch windmills. This rural part of the course treated us to some fantastic panoramic views of the city. In the distance the Arena was just visible, the stadium where the Ajax football team play. I wondered if they were inside training as we ran. The course loops back along the other side of the river and the faster runners began to appear there, already well over 20K into their race. I looked at my watch, my time wasn't too shabby either - all on course for sub 3.30. Brilliant.

Then disaster struck, at about 18k I got an old familiar feeling in my right leg. At first I tried to convince myself that I was imagining it. If I didn't think about it, maybe it'd go away. But it didn't go away, it got steadily worse. It's always the same, it starts like a vague ache and then gets stronger and stronger. It's almost like having a bad toothache in your leg. The choices I had available to me seemed to be to finish the course in run-walk intervals, or to drop out altogether. I didn't fancy the idea of either of those. ▶



www.absoluterunning.com
0844 7799 714



▶ So, I gritted my teeth and tried to ignore the pain. Luckily the views across the Amstel River helped to distract me and I was pleased to be still holding the pace, despite the worsening pain. I knew run-walking might be more sensible option, but that would mean finishing in 4.30. I'd trained so hard for a 3.30, I'd be totally gutted with that time. I decided I'd dig in and keep running for as long as I physically could.

21k - Half Way Home

The 21k marker appeared and suddenly a mantra came into my head from nowhere: "just keep running, just keep running, just keep running..." So that's what I did, all the time trying to ignore the pain.

Then something happened that took me completely by surprise. I can only put it down to my body's response to the trauma in my leg. The endorphins kicked in and it was like nothing I've ever experienced before. It was like I'd pushed my pain threshold to the limit and my mind responded with, "OK then, if you insist on carrying on, I'll give you a break". The human body is a truly amazing thing.

The pain subsided, I could still vaguely feel it and I knew that I would probably pay for this later, but I could now get some focus back on my

running. From 22k I started to count down the kilometers to go. '20k to go, that's only just over 12 miles... you can do this Trinity,' I whispered to myself, 'you've got another chance, don't blow it!' The spectators, locals and visitors alike, were creating a great atmosphere along the course I absorbed it all, allowing the atmosphere to spur me on to keep running.

Gel Power

At 27k I did a few sums and worked out that I had less than 10 miles to go (that's one good thing about races with kilometre markers – if you're used to working in miles it gives you something to keep your brain busy). So, I was down to single figures and miraculously I was still holding on to average pace 7.57's. By then I knew I was going to finish in a personal best time no matter what.

My name was my on shirt and I heard shouts of "Go Trinity" from the crowd, which is always a huge boost. I was passing so many runners, I recognised some from the start line and felt glad I'd kept my pace steady at the beginning of the race, they were paying the price of a fast start now.

I had a few energy gels with me, but foolishly I hadn't worked out any plan for when I'd take them. I'd meant to do that and even at the start

“You can do this Trinity,’ I told myself, ‘stay focused’. I swallowed one of my gels and dug in for the last six miles.”

the thought crossed my mind that I should work out at which kilometre markers I was going to take them, but with all the excitement it slipped my mind again. So I had been taking gels as and when I felt I needed one (which was probably a bit late by then). I'd started with four normal gels and two caffeine ones. At this point I was glad I'd kept the caffeine ones until last.

At 32k I realised there was just over 10k to go and worked out that was over 6 miles. 'You can do this Trinity,' I told myself, 'stay focused'. I swallowed one of the caffeine gels and dug in for those last six miles.

VOC Amsterdam

The VOC Amsterdam was a wonderful sight, not least because it's a well known signal that you're nearing the end of the race. It's basically Amsterdam's equivalent of London's Cutty Sark and the ship is equally iconic in the city. After she ran aground near Hastings, England in January 1749 this impressive replica became part of the Netherlands Maritime Museum and is now a longed-for sight among Amsterdam's marathoners!

We reached the Vondelpark once more, some three hours after I'd passed it the first time. The spectators were fantastic here. I remember one American girl shouting "Go Trinity, you've got it girl, it's in the bag, you've got it!". I managed a smile. I'd got my PB in the bag, and barring disaster I had the sub 3.30 too. She was right, it was in the bag!

I searched the skyline hoping to make out the stadium, but it was obviously too soon. But I felt comfortable enough, the gel was working well and I finished off the drink that I was carrying. The crowds were getting thicker now and the cheering was getting louder. We crossed the street, turned a couple of corners and there it was...

Back at the Olympic Stadium

I ran onto the ramp and entered the stadium. The path of the stadium entrance was paved in something sparkly. It looked so pretty that I was momentarily transfixed. But as I entered the stadium the noise distracted me. The cheering, the track, the music, the announcer, and above all the finish line - it all blended into such a fantastic experience. I crossed the line and immediately looked at my watch. I couldn't work out if it said 3.29-something or 3.28-something but I didn't care about seconds, I had a PB, and I had a sub 3.30!

I was choked up. I couldn't believe what I'd just done. My body had given me everything I asked for and more. I wanted to cry but tears wouldn't come. I shuffled to the side of the finishers funnel and removed my chip, before carrying on to pick up my medal. Then I took a moment to lap up the atmosphere whilst lying down in the sun at the side of the track right by a huge speaker playing loud music.

To say I was ecstatic would almost be an understatement. I can't put into words how good I felt, except to say that I wanted to get up and start dancing on the track. I very nearly did, but I wasn't sure if my legs

were willing and it could have ended up being very embarrassing.

I checked my watch again. With less blurred eyes I could now clearly make out my time - 3.28.42. Wow!

Time to Celebrate

I got showered and changed at the stadium and, after cheering in a few other finishers, I worked my way back to my hotel. I must've still had my head in the clouds because I got lost a couple of times on my way, but luckily I was rescued by a couple of lovely Dutch guys who put me back on the right path again.

Amsterdam is a great place for tourists, so there's always plenty to occupy anyone coming to participate or support runners in the Marathon for a few days. The variety of museums, art, architecture and canals are a great way to spend your post race recovery and the Amsterdam nightlife, as I was about to discover, is second to none.

I'd had a cereal bar, but somehow forgot about a main meal and then went out to celebrate for the evening...Oops!

Amsterdam combines a beautiful marathon course with enthusiastic support and the unique culture of the city to produce a fantastic event weekend you simply can't miss. You can run the Amsterdam Marathon with absoluterunning.com from just £333 which includes, guaranteed race entry, flights, accommodation and all transfers. Let absoluterunning.com go the extra mile for you and make your next running holiday an amazing experience you'll never forget... **RF**



ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST ENJOYABLE MARATHONS

Starting and finishing in the 1928 Olympic Stadium the Amsterdam marathon is building a reputation to rival that of the city itself. Internationally recognised as one of the top marathon events, an increasingly large number of foreign runners are attracted by the undeniable charms of the city and an increasingly swift course.

Held annually since 1975, the marathon draws bigger crowds year on year. Nearly 200,000 spectators crowd the streets and canals to watch the athletes, with a further 10,000 inside the Olympic Stadium, to witness the start and the finish of the race giving you a much deserved heroes welcome as you complete the run. Predictably, the course is a flat one and includes nature reserves on both sides of the river Amstel, the Maritime Museum, the historic canals lined with gabled houses, the world renowned Rijksmuseum and the leafy acres of the Vondelpark.



Spectacular, beautiful, exciting.

TRY SOMETHING NEW WITH ABSOLUTERUNNING.COM

Paris-Versailles 16.3K

Why? If it's your first time on the Paris-Versailles Run you're almost guaranteed a PB - how many other 16.3K races have you heard of?! Starting in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower, the scenic route takes you along the banks of the Seine, through the Bois De Boulogne forest, and finishes next to the beautiful Palace of Versailles.

What? 16.3K

When? September 27, 2009

Standard Chartered Nairobi Marathon

Why? Taking place in the beautiful capital city of Kenya, the country that has produced some of the greatest distance runners in the world it's no wonder the event attracts over 15,000 runners from 58 different countries.

What? Marathon, Half Marathon & 10K

When? October 25 2009

Milan - The Fashion City Marathon

Why? Although amous for fashion, the Scala Opera House, the Cathedral or in sporting terms the two football giants (AC and Inter) the city of

Milan is not well known as a marathon city. But the organisers of the event intend to change that.

What? Marathon

When? November 22, 2009

Zürich New Years Eve Marathon

Why? New Years Day doesn't have to be an anti-climax. Why not start it doing something you love? The Zürich Neujahrs marathon starts at 12.00am January 1st with a huge firework display. You'll have the first marathon of the year under your're belt before most other runners have finished singing Auld Lang Syne!

What? Marathon, half-marathon & 10K

When? January 1, 2010

Tromsø Polar Night Half Marathon, Norway

Why? In January the winter sun is completely absent from the Tromsø sky. The only sources of natural light are the moon and the breathtaking Aurora Borealis or Polar Northern Lights. Running across the snow of Tromsø with the dancing fluorescent ribbons of the Polar Northern Lights illuminating the course is a spectacular and unique experience.

What? Half Marathon

When? January 9, 2010



www.absoluterunning.com
0844 7799 714