

Fast Times Foil Winter Weather in Christchurch

Winter weather failed to dampen the spirit or speed of more than 4000 participants at the 2019 ASB Christchurch Marathon.

Despite southerly rain and wind that saw wide-spread flooding across Christchurch, spirits were high as some 4300 participants from 17 countries lined up outside the Christchurch Town Hall. It was the first time back at the iconic race base since 2010.

No one was happier than race director Chris Cox, whose organising team had seen the race grow non-stop to 5800 participants prior to the earthquakes. “Much like Christchurch itself, this event has been through some tough times since 2010,” said Cox.

“The 2011 earthquake hit only a few months before the 2011 race. But rather than not hold it, we rallied around and were stoked to get 3000 starters out at Lincoln. Then we spent four years at the Airport before finally getting the OK to re-kindle the central city event. But then we faced all sorts of roading and financial issues trying to re-establish our traditional route. So to be finally back at the Christchurch Town Hall, running much the same route as before the earthquakes, and seeing entries start to rebuild, is a big thing for us. We refused to let the Christchurch Marathon die and Christchurch has refused to let us let it die!”



Alice Mason

The winners of the feature full marathon, which doubled this year as the New Zealand Marathon Championship, followed suite. Christchurch’s Oska Baynes and Rotorua’s Alice Mason simply refused to let the conditions kill their ambitions. Both had tasted success in the ASB Christchurch Marathon, Mason winning the half marathon last year and the full marathon on debut in 2015. Baynes had won the 10k and Half Marathon in the past and was aiming to be the first person to win all three events at the ASB Christchurch Marathon. But more than anything, they wanted to run fast.

Mason, who was aiming to become the first woman to win three consecutive national marathon titles, led the woman’s race from start to finish. In the heavy wind and rain, no one would have blamed the Rotorua doctor if she had run only fast enough to win her third title. But so focused was she on a fast time that Mason found herself matching strides with the female half marathon and 10k leaders.

Passing the half marathon in 1hr 18min, her only pressure in the final 20k was the weather and the course that it had ravaged. Normally runners follow the Avon River, but this year the river followed the runners, flooding the roads in some parts. And yet her time at the finish of 2hrs 39min 17secs was her fastest ever and the fastest women’s win at the ASB Christchurch Marathon since 2005.

Pre-race, Mason had shared the favourites tag with Australian representative, Marnie Ponton. But such was the winner’s form and focus, she left the Australian exactly six minutes behind, while third placed Lisa Cross (Auckland) was six minutes further behind again.

“I felt good out there,” said Mason. “But it got really hard in the last 10k into the wind and rain. I couldn’t feel my hands or arms.”

She could feel the love though. As an out and back course, the leaders enjoy the support of slower runners still heading out. “There was so much encouragement from other runners. It was really great.”

“Really great,” would be fitting tribute to men’s winner Oska Baynes. The local boy shrugged off the pressure of favoritism to romp away with his first national marathon title by nine minutes. Baynes fancies his future in the marathon and despite only one previous foray over the 42.2k (first place at the 2016 ASB Auckland Marathon) he lined up wanting to run fast at home.

Watching the rain pour down the previous day, Baynes did consider deferring to the conditions and running only fast enough to win. But once running he felt good and decided to push it. And push it he did, leading from start to finish and rolling through halfway in 1hr 08min. The final 6k into the biting south-west wind and rain took its toll, however, and while finished nine seconds clear of Australian Dion Finocchiaro and Wellington’s Mark Moore, when the clock stopped at 2hrs 18min 11secs the winner dropped in a heap on the ground.

It was perhaps the bravest run this race has ever seen. Baynes would have to be carried away from the finish line and even 10min later, when hugging his wife, she was as much holding him up as hugging. In 39 years only four men have won the ASB Christchurch Marathon faster than 2hrs 18min. But none have run that fast in conditions even remotely like 2019. The same can be said of Alice Mason, whose winning time was the fifth fastest among women.



Oska Baynes



Dan Balchin

“Really, that just shows how fast the ASB Christchurch Marathon course really is,” said race director Chris Cox.

“We’ve always had the reputation as the fastest marathon in the country, but it really was brutal out there today and people were still putting up fast times. We had several course records in the age groups and 52-year-old Shaun Creighton, who was an Australian Olympian in the 1990s, set an Aussie record for 50 years old of 2hrs 30min.”

Indeed, times were fast across all races. Cromwell’s Daniel Balchin took out the half marathon in a faster time than when winning the same race two years ago. Although only after a titanic struggle with Christchurch’s Caden Shields.

The two men ran away from their competition in the first few kilometres and tried several times to run away from each other.



Margie Campbell

Shields, who has finished among the minor placings several times in this race, tried to seal the deal with 1k to go, only to have Balchin counter with a blazing finish that saw him finish four seconds clear in 1hr 06min 41secs. In third place, Christchurch's Chris Dryden was only 46secs in arrears in a personal best time 1hr 07min 27secs.

On a day when favourites reigned, the woman's half marathon turned the form book upside down when the predicted first, second and third actually finished third, second and first. Dunedin's Margie Campbell had to run her fastest ever time to overcome Commonwealth Games silver medalist Nikki Hamblin and Tauranga's Sarah Gardner.

Hamblin, on the come-back trail after starting a family, was the favourite but finished third as Campbell and Gardner stayed clear in a private battle for line honours. On the finish line Campbell was as delightfully surprised as anyone by her 15sec winning margin, stopping the clock in 1hr 18min 50secs. Gardner took consolation with her second

fastest time ever, while Hamblin was only 30secs further back for third.

The 10k race was won by Hamilton's Jacob Priddey in 30min 57secs, while Auckland's Audrey Gregan was equally dominant among women in 36min 03secs. But there were great stories further back in the field too.

No one put up a more impressive performance than Whangarei's Dave Eastmond. The 81-year-old became the eldest ever finisher of the ASB Christchurch Marathon, stopping the clock at 5hrs 36min 26secs.

And no one ran the ASB Christchurch Marathon for a better reason than 28-year-old Ashleigh Stewart, who finished in 3hrs 49min 06secs. The former Press journalist now lives in the United Arab Emirates and was motivated to return home in support of victims in the Mosque shooting last March. In the ASB Christchurch Marathon she ran in a shirt bearing the names of every person who died in the shootings.

Principal sponsor ASB also put their best foot forward, donating five dollars to Youthline for every person who ran an extra 20 metres to the ASB Youthline finish line. By days end finishers had run more than 72 extra kilometres and raised almost \$20,000.

Results from the 2019 ASB Christchurch Marathon can be seen at www.christchurchmarathon.co.nz/history. In 2020 the ASB Christchurch Marathon will celebrate its 40th anniversary. Held annually on Queens Birthday Weekend, the 2020 race date will be Sunday May 31.

