

## Bride & Bridesmaid Going Head to Head in Christchurch

With three weeks until race day, the ASB Christchurch Marathon is again shaping up as New Zealand's premier road race, and amongst the 4000-plus starters are two top women - one the defending champion while the other has finished on every step of the podium except the top.

Almost 12 months ago Christchurch-based Brit, Hannah Oldroyd, was a surprise winner of the South Island's premier marathon event. On a bitterly cold and wet day, the 30-year-old was a crowd favourite as she finished hand in hand with her partner, Steve Darby, with a 12min lead and a grin that belied the conditions.

It was the second in a string of marathon wins that started in February 2017 when Oldroyd announced her arrival on the national scene at the Buller Marathon. She then won Christchurch, the ASB Auckland Marathon, the Queenstown Marathon and Buller again this year. Then in April, Oldroyd returned home to England for the famous London Marathon, where she was the second amateur woman in a personal best time of 2hrs 46min 27secs.



The defending champion was one of the first to sign up for 2018's ASB Christchurch Marathon, which this year is scheduled for Sunday 3rd June. But she'll need to be on top form to retain her title.

Greymouth's top cop, Mel Aitken, will also be on the start line. The West Coast police commander has done some of her best running at the ASB Christchurch Marathon. In five starts she has never been worse than fifth. Aitken turned 40 last year, but thumbed her nose at age by running her fastest ever time at the Gold Coast Marathon with 2hrs 47min 42secs. And having finished second (2015 & 2016), third (2014), fourth (2013) and fifth (2013) in Christchurch, she'll be keen to go one better to finally complete the set.

Race Director, Chris Cox, is delighted to have the women's full marathon race taking top billing in 2018.

"The country's best runners always turn out for ASB Christchurch Marathon because it's the country's fastest course," says Cox. "But so often the men's races steals the limelight, so it's exciting to see a real match up among the women."

Cox also warns that Oldroyd and Aitken might not have things all their own way.

"Christchurch triathlete Julia Grant has been third for the last two years, so she is also worth watching. As is Wellington's Letha Witham, who has been second in the Wellington Marathon and was fourth at the Rotorua Marathon recently."

Almost 5000 runners and walkers from more than a dozen countries are expected to line up at the Cathedral Square start line on June 3rd. "Entries are still flowing in," says Cox, "and we're about 15% ahead of last year, which was just over 4000 entries."

Cox points out that the ASB Christchurch Marathon is also much more than merely a marathon race. With options including the Full Marathon run, Half Marathon run and walk, the 10k run and walk and the Kids' Mara'Fun, Cox says, "this is a festival of fitness with something for everyone."

"We challenge everyone from individuals to schools, businesses and community groups to be a part of a great occasion," says Cox.

"This year Christchurch NZ have helped us create a corporate challenge where workplaces can enter groups and we'll donate \$10 from every corporate entry to our charity partner, Ronald McDonald House."

Entries for the 2018 ASB Christchurch Marathon are still open. Race day is Sunday 3rd June. For details and online entry visit: [www.christchurchmarathon.co.nz](http://www.christchurchmarathon.co.nz).

