

All Age, Ability & Aspirations Taking on Christchurch's Marathon

With more than 4000 entries, 200 volunteers and thousands of spectators, the ASB Christchurch Marathon will once again be one of the South Island's most colourful community occasions bringing together runners from all walks of life.

On Sunday, the annual ASB Christchurch Marathon returns to the iconic Town Hall venue for the first time since 2010. Race Director Chris Cox says entries are well over 4000 and he hopes good weather forecasts might see almost 5000 participants on the start line.

While the event will also double as the New Zealand Marathon Championship, for most people it is a personal challenge taken on for as many reasons as there are runners.

At age 81, Whangarei's Dave Eastmond is taking a shot at becoming the eldest ever finisher of the feature 42k distance in Christchurch.

Similarly, Christchurch's Jeanette McGrath admits her motivation is simply to be able to say she can still walk a half marathon in her eighth decade.

Age doesn't appear to affect motivation either. The youngest entrant in the full marathon, 16-year-old George McCulloch, says, "It's a challenge I want to do before I turn 17." Which happens to be two days after race day.

The youngest starters in the half marathon this year are sisters, Anna (13) and Katherine (14) Babington, who are running their first half marathons with their father, Scott.

Taking on the marathon, half marathon or 10k for the first time is a common theme. But there are a select few who just cannot stop. For Auckland's Andy Harper (69) and Tauranga's Christine Maxwell (56), this year's ASB Christchurch Marathon will be their 96th time over the classic 42.2k distance.

Maxwell's first was in Christchurch exactly 20 years ago, while Christchurch's own Geoff Gilfedder (58) is lining up for his 13th consecutive ASB Christchurch Marathon.

Others who don't seem to be able to stop include former New Zealand Olympic cyclist, Gavin Stevens, who since taking up running in his 40s went on to win masters titles in every major marathon in the country, including six times at Christchurch. After a few years away he is back aiming at the 60-69 age group record set by Australian Ron Peters in 2016 of 2hrs 48min 31secs.

Another Australian hunting records is former Olympian Shaun Creighton, who with a 2hr 10min best time is the fastest marathoner in the field. But at age 52, his sights these days are set on the Australian 50-54 age group record of 2hrs 30min 52secs. Gavin Stevens will watch Creighton with interest, because he holds the ASB Christchurch Marathon 50 to 59 age group record of 2hrs 32min 14secs set in 2007.

Race Director, Chris Cox, knows something about longevity and motivation. He has been organising the Christchurch Marathon for 24 of its 39 years and says, "I've always felt the greatest thing about this event is that it's a true representation of the community, with different people from different walks of life and different motivations for why they run."

It helps that the iconic route central city route from the Christchurch Town Hall, around Hagley Park and the Avon River is one of New Zealand's most scenic and supportive courses.

"This course is very iconically Christchurch," says Cox. "We see people cheering runners from their front gates and at intersections and we get bands coming out and playing music for the participants along the way.

"Entrants love the atmosphere we create around their personal challenge."

With entries from as far afield as United Arab Emirates, India, French Polynesia, USA, Canada, Malaysia, Ireland, Namibia, Germany, Singapore, France, Japan, Chile, Thailand, Hong Kong, China, the UK and Australia, the ASB Christchurch Marathon continues to be popular with the travelling marathoner.

One such visitor is 19-year-old exchange student, Hatsumi Hasegawa, a keen competitive runner from Japan who wanted to run a marathon here before she heads home.

A Kiwi abroad had special motivation to head home for this year's ASB Christchurch Marathon. Former Christchurch Press journalist, Ashleigh Stewart (28), now lives and works in the United Arab Emirates and entered after hearing

about the Christchurch mosque terror attacks, saying, “I’m running in honour of the victims of Friday’s attacks, and in support of their families.”

Dunedin’s Angie Carter was similarly motivated. She entered the half marathon within a few hours of the terror attack, saying, “The terrorist attack in Christchurch today was the motivating factor for me. Forty-plus people no longer have the choice to enter, so I’m running it for them.”

Regardless of personal goals, motivations and inspirations, every finisher can help raise funds for Youthline via ASB’s “Every Step Counts” promotion, where for every finisher who runs an extra 20 metres to ASB’s Youthline finish line, ASB will donate five dollars.

“The events of earlier this year took a toll right across New Zealand, but nowhere more so than Christchurch,” says ASB head of community and sponsorship Mark Graham. “We wanted to partner with Youthline because we have a huge amount of respect for the work they do, and we know how vital that work is, especially after recent events,” says Graham.

“We’re proud that every person who completes the ASB Christchurch Marathon this year and crosses the second line will be helping to support an incredibly worthwhile cause.”

The 39th ASB Christchurch Marathon is scheduled for Sunday 2nd June. For online entry and information, visit: www.christchurchmarathon.co.nz.