

## Melbourne Marathon – 12 October 2014

Rob Dalton

I turned out a very good result, in fact it was an absolute cracker of a day for me.

My first 4 splits were 3:50, 3:57, 3:52, 3:55, then... No more data.

I couldn't sleep the night before and while I was lying in bed I started playing with my watch. I was planning 4 minute pace with a goal of 2:50 so I set up alarms to tell me if I was going quicker than 3:55 or if I dropped outside 4:10. Once I started running my watch started beeping every 5-10 seconds. It was loud and annoying and almost constant. The people around me started grumbling. I hooked in with Rog, Smurf and LG and after about a minute of trying to ignore it Smurf said, "you need to turn that off or you can't run with us... nothing personal". Fair enough - it was *really* annoying.

So I turned off the watch. The timing mats were disgracefully useless, as were the markers. There were supposed to be markers every 1k, I think I saw about 8 for the whole race and I had no faith that they were anywhere near where they were supposed to be. So I had very little idea of my pace for most of the race except from the people around me and my distance from the pacers. Still, it was quite liberating to run to feel.

I started out in front of the 2:50 pacer, and at 4ks I was feeling very strong. Stodds was ahead but still in sight, Tony George behind out of sight, and lots of other Milers right around me.

At 8k I took off from my group and opened up a little gap ahead of Rog, Smurf and LG. They were all targeting 2:48 - 2:50 or thereabouts and they are pretty experienced campaigners who know what they're doing so I knew that leaving them meant I might be going a bit fast at this stage. Still, it was pretty comfortable so I just went with it. I starting picking my way forward and fell in with a group that included the 4th woman.

Somewhere along Albert Park at about 11k, Stevie pulled up beside me and paced me for 1-2k. This was the first of three times and I enjoyed it so much. It made everything fell much more relaxed, like a normal Sunday run. I immediately relaxed and felt like Stevie was doing all the work. I remember saying to him at this point "this is easy!"

I dropped the 4<sup>th</sup> woman as we turned onto Fitzroy St and I put on a quick k down the hill. Might as well make up some time on that easy long gentle down, but I was sure to check myself and slow down when I hit the bottom.

As we opened up onto the long straight headed towards Port Melbourne Stodds was about 100 metres ahead. I tucked in behind an Asian bloke who was dripping with sweat and working much harder than he should have been at that point. He clearly wasn't going to last, but he was useful to keep me out of the wind. He also had headphones in so he didn't seem to notice that I was always one step behind him and not taking a turn at the front. Stodds wasn't getting closer and he wasn't getting further away, but I could see that he was doing it easier than I was and even if I did catch him he would be able to pull away from me whenever he felt like it.

At the Port Melbourne turnaround I took back up with the 4<sup>th</sup> woman and about 6 others. We ran for a long way as a peloton, with everyone taking up the running and taking a turn at the front. I can't tell you how good it was to be out of the wind along the straights, even with only low winds you could really feel them along the beach. At the 25k mark the 5<sup>th</sup> woman dropped out of our group and by 27k the peloton was down to three. Then, three plus Stevie, who once again came out of nowhere to take up the pacing. The three of us asked him to jump on to the front of our group, which he duly did and we received some extra much appreciated wind protection.

Nick Tobin had my drinks all along the course and was doing a stellar job getting them to me at pre-determined points. Many thanks mate! The Milers had set up collective drink support spots every 7k and the level of support from those guys as we went through their stations was amazing. I would light up each time I saw any of them – I'd get this little rush of endorphins that made me stand up straight and run strong every time.

Then at the 28k drink station I decided I needed water and my electrolyte drink. I took the water from the official aid station, but couldn't also get across to Nick for my own drink. I yelled out to someone that I still wanted it – and sure enough, Nick came riding back past to hand deliver. I was very pleased that worked out ok.

From the feeling and what I picked up in the chatter around me we were running between 3:50 and 3:55m/ks along that section. A bit too quick for me but at least I was sheltered so I figured I'd hang in there as long as I could - we were on for a 2:47 finish at that stage. That 4th placed woman went on to finish 2:47:10. But I dropped off the back of the pack at 29.5 and was left to grind my way up Fitzroy St solo.

Passing through 30k I knew I had a few min up my sleeve for 2:50, but I also knew that my pace was fading fast. It was the best thing for my confidence that I never found out how slow I was actually going. I'd say I put in a couple of 4:30s around here.

Back on to St Kilda Road and through 32, 33 (the only consecutive course markers I saw) I picked back up and probably was averaging around 4:05s. Then who else but Stevie jumped onto the course and ran with me to the Arts Centre. He said he couldn't he'd leave me there as he was "feeling fatigued". Probably the understatement of the day. he must have run about 150ks at that point. Absolutely top effort and very much appreciated. Each time it was a remarkable lift for me. I tried to say thank you but just mumbled incoherently. Stevie had put me back on 4 minute pace and delivered me safely to 37k.

We dipped under the Arts Centre and David Alcock then the 2:50 pacer passed me with Tony George in tow. They seemed to be on for 2:47 so I was happy to let them go.

I slogged up the back of the Tan - I didn't walk for a change, but this section was so slow and demoralising. I had always planned to lose one to two minutes here but when it actually happens it still feels like a fail. Slips yelled to me - "maintain effort on the uphill and push on the downs!" That became my mantra. My heart rate was high even if my turnover wasn't. I reached the top and pushed the downhill. I picked up a couple of guys and the 2:50 group got a bit closer. But I can't see Stodds or Tony. I had been touting that my goal for the marathon was to reel in Tony in the last 300 metres, if he faded I thought I might have a chance at it (he didn't – awesome run). I put in my first 4 minute k for a while, probably 3:40ish.

I passed the 39k marker. 3.2k to go and 13 minutes to do it. I now need to get back to 4 minute ks and stay there. I can feel cramps setting in all over my legs but they never actually start they just threaten. But I know if I start opening up my stride like I want to they will destroy me. So I try to pick up my cadence instead.

I don't see another marker after 39, but I'm fairly sure now that I'll just get under 2:50. I hit the downhill on Jolimont Rd and pick up the pace. I surge, fade and surge again. I have a short battle with a guy in black but my heart wasn't in it and I lost interest.

There is an uphill finish for the last 150 meters or so. I had checked it out earlier that morning. I knew that when I rounded the last corner I'd better be sprinting because that was the only way to get up that hill. A few others around me started walking it but I pushed for home. I passed the 2:50 pacer in the last 10 metres and crossed in 2:49:42.

Not an even or well-run race, but I was strong and I got what I came for. That's a 14 minute PB for me and I couldn't be more proud.

