

Melbourne Marathon 2013

Simon “Duffman” Duffy

Part One – training

This bit isn't so much a race report as a reflection on a rapidly changing life and trying to fit running into it.

In late 2011 I started a job in Box Hill and we moved from Collingwood to Fairfield and it was no longer practical to make MMM's sessions, so I have been an absentee Milers since then. About the same time I abandoned training for the 2011 Melbourne Marathon due to a niggling injury, I didn't see the point in running if I couldn't be in shape for a PB.

In April 2012 my brilliant little boy Henry was born, and running dropped a couple of notches down the priority list. I maintained reasonable fitness and trotted around in a few AV races but wasn't training for a goal and was doing practically no quality sessions. I was spending early evenings with my son so Collingwood track sessions were also out. The only way I could fit running in was commuting – running to or from work, or pushing a pram around Darebin or Yarra Bend parks.

Also my job requires travelling to Africa three or four times a year for two to three weeks. This is a good thing but for lots of reasons but it is awkward for training. I can usually run about twice a week while I'm away, on beaches, treadmills, around hotel grounds, whatever is safe and practical (I've only been mugged once), but it is not great for quality training or for building mileage. Add two days travel each way and the fact that long haul flights do bad things to my legs, plus the usual training interruptions of illness and injury, and you'll understand why it's difficult for me to string together a decent block of training.

Early in 2013 I realised I could block out mid June to October with no travel, and that was probably the best shot I would get at doing the Melbourne Marathon (on October 13th). I didn't have much of a base to build on so figured a PB was probably not going to happen but I really wanted to run the home Marathon with all the support from Milers and friends on the course. The catch was that we had a baby due on October 3, but I figured that would be taper time anyway so wouldn't be too big a problem. What I didn't know when I signed up was that we would be buying a house and moving in less than a month before race day.

I drew up various training plans on the back of note pads (usually in dull work meetings) that had me building up over a couple of months to 100+km weeks. It would be based on commuting with a few easy pram runs and two long runs per week including regular 30km+ weekend runs. I bought a Garmin to help me turn some of the commute runs into fartlek, tempo or long reps (most often a fartlek session, 2 min on 1 min off x 10).

In practice, the build up phase took much longer than planned due to two or three bouts of illness, and I never got above 90 km per week. I was prioritising long runs, with a midweek commute run of about 20km and doing the Job Jog whenever I could.

By late August I was starting to feel improvement and could see my training times improving. I had been injury free for quite a while but managed to strain a muscle in the week leading up to the

Burnley half, and missed about three days training. The Burnley half went badly for me, my time (high 81s) was below expectation and a positive split by about two minutes, but worse I picked up another muscle strain (hammy? can't remember) and lost about another three days. At the end of that week we moved house from Fairfield to Upwey with all the associated busyness, disruption and chaos. All together I lost about ten days training at a really critical time. Instead of continuing to improve after Burnley I went significantly backwards and never really got back to the same level. I only managed two 30+ runs before Burnley (32 & 36) and figured four was minimum. I squeezed another two in (34 & 31) within a week of each other in the back half of September, but really struggled through them on my own on the cycle tracks around the Eastern suburbs.

Louise was getting to the pointy end of pregnancy by this stage (probably not the most appropriate turn of phrase) and needing lots of support, and Henry (now 17 months) was taking a little time to adjust to his new surroundings. Little baby Frankie arrived safely and beautiful a few days ahead of schedule on 30 September, and that was really the end of my training. I think I managed three or four more runs, including a set of 500m reps around a footy oval pushing Henry in a pram, in the rain.

So on the start line, I knew it was not going to be pretty. I was never targeting a PB but before Burnley I had thought mid 2:50s was achievable. On the day I was just hoping to crack three hours but based on my recent long runs I knew I would find it very tough after the 30km mark. My plan was to go out with the three hour group and just try to hang on in the later stages.

I was also too busy to do sensible things like check my email so missed Racer's messages about personal drinks, and ended up trying to organise something over the phone on Saturday evening before the race with desperate phone calls and facebook messages to Racer, Slips, Hally and GG. GG agreed to provide water bottles and between that, a couple of gels, my 'official' personal drinks (3x water with electrolytes – although I missed the first one) and sips of Powerade whenever I could get them, I was pretty well hydrated throughout the race.

Part two – race day

On the start line I ran into some old ex-Sandringham training mates (Derek McDonald and Mick Ryan, for those that know them). Derek was also targeting sub three so we started hunting for House's pace group but for some reason, we could not find them. So when the gun went Derek and I just headed off at a pace that seemed about right. I had my Garmin but didn't really trust it after it messed me around at Burnley. It said we were a little ahead of pace but I was not too worried about that as it usually seems to tell me I'm going a little faster than I really am. Around the entrance to Albert Park we were joined by another familiar face, Steven Oliver who has trained with the Collingwood group from time to time, and was also targeting sub three. We picked up a few others going a similar pace, but somehow the group disintegrated around 10 km and Steven and I ended up pushing a little ahead. Derek told me after the race



he had thought we were going too quick and intentionally let us go (he went on to squeak under 3 hours).



I didn't see the three hour pacers until after the turn around at 11ish Km when I first realised we were a minute or so ahead. I wasn't too bothered as I was feeling very comfortable. I carried on running with Steven until about 25 km. I don't recall slowing down at that point but a gap opened up while I was taking a gel and a drink and I realised I didn't need to go any faster than I already was, so I let him go (he had a blinder and ran 2:54 – thanks to coach Hally?).

My official splits up to 30km are quite even at 4:05-4:10/km pace, but it didn't feel very even to me and my Garmin splits were much less consistent. I had developed a pain in my hip at about 16 km which was with me for the rest of the race, uncomfortable but not a big problem. I felt pretty good up to about 28-29 km. Then I really started to feel fatigued, as I had on my long runs. My Garmin splits started to get into the 4:20s and by 32km I was struggling to keep to 4:30 pace.

Somewhere in the early 30 I caught up to Smurf. I had seen him a couple of times during the race and could tell he was battling but it was still a surprise, especially as I was slowing down myself. After a quick chat I left him to his misery and continued trying to talk my legs into maintaining a respectable pace. It didn't work. By the time I heard the three hour group coming up behind me around the back of the Tan I was going at about 4:40/km. House was yelling encouragement but I knew I could not stick with them.

A few hundred meters later I felt the first twinges of cramp. Toward the top of the hill both hamstrings went into full spasm and I couldn't stand up, let alone run. I tottered to a tree at the side of the track and tried to stretch it out but it only seemed to get worse. I saw a family strolling in my direction and yelled out to them. A bloke came and following my instructions, helped me to get into a sitting position and pushed my toes up. I guess I was stationary for about two minutes, but really I don't know.

The rest of my race was a bit of a blur. As I was getting up I saw Smurf with Slips running alongside in support and tagged along with them. But I was surprised to find that the rest had reduced my fatigue and I could now move quicker than before the cramp, so I soon left them behind. Woolies ran with me down the hill which was a huge encouragement. The hammys were still painful and the cramp (although less intense) was still coming and going so I had to keep adjusting my stride to minimise the pain and prevent them going back into spasm. There was a lot of grunting and gritting of teeth and I must have looked and sounded pretty ridiculous.



Oddly, I found myself passing people, probably people who had gone past while I was on the ground (I dropped 100 places between 30 and 40km – ouch!) but it was a bit of a tortoise and hare affair. When moving freely I would make reasonable pace, but then I would tie up and slow to a stagger, and the same people would sail on past. Eventually in the 41st km my legs seized up completely again, now with cramp in the adductors as well as both hamstrings. I had to stop and ask for assistance and was stationary for about another minute. I restarted initially at walking pace before breaking into a trot and then finding myself moving quite quickly and passing people again.



By the time I entered the stadium I at least knew I was going to finish, and was just hoping not to end up sprawled on the grass in front of all those spectators. The legs held out and the photos even show me passing a couple of people in the stadium, although I don't remember that too well.

3:05:01 is a personal worst, (but not by much - I had cramp problems at Hobart in January 2011 as well) and a long way below what I should be capable of, but somehow weirdly it still feels like an achievement to be proud of. I honestly enjoyed most of the race, the atmosphere, the familiar places and faces. Was my early pace too quick? Maybe, but I don't think it would have made much difference, perhaps just delayed my decline by a couple of kms. In the end I just didn't have the kms in my legs. Lessons for next time? I have tried a few things to prevent cramp but nothing has worked yet, so it's back to the drawing board on that one. But I think the main thing for me is to focus on training for the last 12 km. In three marathons I have not done well at maintaining pace when fatigued (even before the cramp set in). I know there are a bunch of strategies to train for that so will look into it before the next campaign.

SIMON DUFFY #794

Gender:
Male
Division:
20-39

Team:
Melbourne Midday Milers

From:
Fairfield
State:
VIC
Country:
Australia

STATUS - FINISHED

Overall Rank	Category Rank	Gender Rank
314 from 6820 finishers	189 from 2677 finishers	293 from 4816 finishers

**03:05:04**

Overall Rank	Category Rank	Gender Rank
321	195	300

**03:05:01****HIDE SPLITS**

LOCATION	TIME	SPLIT		RACE TIME	ACCUMMULATIVE		
		DISTANCE	SPEED/PACE		OVERALL	DIVISION	GENDER
10k	00:41:20	10.0km	14.52 / 4:08	00:41:23	212	134	195
13k	00:16:18	4.0km	14.72 / 4:05	00:57:42	206	133	189
20k	00:24:52	6.0km	14.48 / 4:09	01:22:34	196	131	179
30k	00:41:40	10.0km	14.40 / 4:10	02:04:14	186	123	172
40k	00:49:20	10.0km	12.16 / 4:56	02:53:35	297	182	277
42k	00:11:29	2.2km	11.49 / 5:13	03:05:04	314	189	293