

Sorry for the delay in getting my report out (although nothing compared to some Miler performances in the past). I started it on Monday but some work I should ideally have done pre-marathon caught up with me and resulted in a very late night or two.

I've ended up waffling on a fair bit more than I planned, so please feel free to skip ahead if I get too self-indulgent.

Now on to my first ever celebratory marathon report, what a novel experience (excuse the pun!). YAY ...

I'll start with a brief recap of some personal history, with accompanying apologies to those that feel these details have been too oft repeated. I'll get over one day - probably the day I nail my lifetime half pb (if that ever happens).

School Years

My all too familiar (to many Milers) story ... I got interested in running at school in Hong Kong and had some success in the inter-school cross country championships (which were largely on roads). I joined the HK Distance Runners Club and ended training with a coach who at his peak had been an international level steeple chaser. He made a huge difference to my running, especially on the track, much as the Milers have again over the last few years.

On a training diet of mainly track reps at Wan Chai Stadium and a fartlek session my coach used weekly in his training back in the day, I got to an ok level for my age at 800 / 1500.

- Incidentally that fartlek session consisted of 15 sec on, 15 sec easy off, increase in 15 sec increments up to 2:00 on, then 1:45 easy off, back down to 15 sec (total 32 mins). So on the way down you get 15 secs less rest than you have just run, which makes the 1:00, 0:45, 0:30, 0:15 ons very good approximations of surges in middle distance races. Unfortunately the session only fits onto a Garmin as separate up and down legs which makes it cumbersome (but Jarrod and I did do it semi-regularly a few years back).

Given that I was a much better runner those 32-odd years ago (especially over middle distances); I do sometimes wonder what made me faster. In one way it's hardly surprising that I've lost a lot of speed as I've aged, but then I look at Slips and GGO as examples of Milers that still seem to have plenty of fast-twitch left. One thing I did once or twice a week (usually as the start of a long run) was run from our flat in the mid-levels to the top of Victoria Peak, which was a pretty brutal 2k or so at a very considerable gradient. This probably led directly to the nickname the Chinese runners gave me: "chicken-legs". I think I weighed about 62 kg then, and probably 40kg of that was quads ☺

I didn't realize at the time, but the fact my coach was dead against me running further than 10k and my complete lack of specialized training and knowledge of longer distances, was probably a very wise gift I inadvertently gave to my adult self. I attempted two marathons at ages 14 and 15, and on my second one in HK I was on track for 3:20 until I cramped terribly in the last 5k

and ended up with my pb of 3:47 (I knew I was really in trouble when my mum ran with me for a bit). I dreamed of one day cracking the 3 hour marathon, but not as often as running a sub-4 1500 (which I also never got close to).

In 1981 I moved from HK to Canberra to do my last two years of high school while living sans parents in an Australian National University residence. I got an Achilles tendon injury just before leaving for Oz, as I started running twice a day 3-5 days a week. It took 9 months before I ran again when I did a few sessions run by a guy my coach knew (Arthur Shacklock). One of his group was only a bit older than me but hoping to break 1:50 for the 800. I quickly realized I was out of my league once out of the small pond of HK, and loss interest in running. I didn't run at all seriously again for about 26 years, but enjoyed the occasional jog on and off.

Given all of this the marathon is therefore particularly significant for me personally: it's the only event I've been able to get a pb in as an adult (so far, at least).

MMM History

Sometime around 2005 Jarrod started working at the same company as me. I was jogging twice a week by myself, but now there were two of us running we upped that to three times a week and eventually he even convinced me to race a few times at Run For The Kids and eventually a Half. As I'd expected my times were rather depressing compared to my school boy times, and I wondered how I could be soooo much slower. At any rate I'm indebted to Jarrod to getting me running a bit more seriously.

By 30/05/2010 I ran the Williamstown Sri Chinmoy Half (highly recommended if it gets reinstated to their calendar next year) hoping to break 90 minutes, but came up short with 91:12 and decided it was time to finally try a session with the MMM group we'd seen in a R4YL edition.

My training log entry for 03/06/2010 reads "*First run with MMM, 4x(4x1 min / 30 sec rest) / 2min rest. Hard but enjoyable*" (I won't share my colourful comment for my first Airlie St session). After only a month of MMMing I'd ticked one target that had been way out of reach for many years, when I ran 39:10 for 10k.

A couple of weeks later I wanted to have a crack at my Tan pb of 14:15 and really hoped I may sneak under 14 for the first time. I got my first taste of one of the great advantages of being a MMM when House and a group (maybe Moo, Rohan Claffey, Smoothy, AL? and some others, apologies for the fuzzy recollection) offered to pace me while they did a two lap session. My resulting forum posting says it all:

Thanks heaps to everyone in the MMM group, and especially House and the other three pacers today!

I'm in a very pleasant state of shock! Just 6 weeks of training with you guys has already had a

*major positive impact by the looks.
My CC style time was 13:33... just can't believe it!
Cheers*

And I really couldn't imagine how the pacers had a casual chat at that pace! I clearly had a lot to learn (and still do) about how the pointy half live.

Fast forward and MMM has continued to drive my improvement, and I live in hope (excuse another crappy pun) of more to come.

A Tale of Two Campaigns

After my two early marathons as a youngster, my progression at the distance had been:

- Oct 2009 Melbourne Marathon 3:22:57
- Oct 2010 Melbourne Marathon 3:11:44
- Oct 2011 Melbourne Marathon 3:01:40

The last was a major blow up, just like all the previous ones had been. I should have been able to manage sub-3 with a Half pb of 1:23:28, especially as I felt that pb should have been more like 1:22 if I hadn't injured my back and had to drop out of Burnley last year.

The hardest stat to swallow was that at the finish my garmin said "Moving Time: 2:57:xx".

As I was licking my wounds Bacchus mentioned that maybe I should approach AL for some guidance, as doing so had clearly worked very well for UB1 and UB2 over the previous two years. I did so and AL kindly agreed to advise me on the road to Gold Coast 2012 and I put in the best training block I've ever managed: 16+ weeks averaging 100k, max 133k.

No injuries and pbs of 1:22:14 over fairly hilly Sydney Morning Herald Half, and 55:53 for 15k at Ballarat (10k split 36:58) had me thinking I was in pretty good shape. Not to mention Bevo paced me to a 13:14 tan pb 10 days out. There were also some great testing long runs at Churchill with Slips and Bacchus, as well easier long runs with the Eaglemont Crew (they know who they are), and all of them went well.

Crucially AL also convinced me to work on my form which was great advice, and something I'm still working hard at.

Then I got sick on the Wed before the race and it all went pear-shaped, despite my forlorn hope that I had recovered just before the start.

So on to disappointment #6:

- July 2012 Gold Coast 3:11:12

Part of my comment from the forum which captures the disappointment:

Like Jarrod said probably hardest run of my life, certainly for the least reward. I was certainly in sub 3 form: had the right results in all the lead up races (for a change, and some welcome pbs) and stuck to the right strategy (for a change, and much thanks to House and Peely for the company until about 24k when my wheels became hexagonal).

One of the most challenging things about the marathon, compare to shorter races, is that you put so many eggs in the one basket. All those months of training ultimately led to some pleasing pbs, but there was little to take from the race that mattered most, other than a) I gutted it out to the finish and b) I didn't cramp. The marathon had flattened me again.

After returning from a few weeks holiday up north I raced a small Victorian Road Runners 10k and was happy to win (in a fairly pedestrian time of 37:43), but at least it helped to forget the GC disappointment somewhat. I decided I wasn't willing to waste all my training for GC and took my wife seriously when she mentioned off-handedly that maybe I should run Melbourne (never make the mistake of such idle suggestions to a running junkie!).

Marathon 6: Lurch 0-1

I took up Dozer's kind offer of some advice this time around, not because I wasn't (and aren't still) very indebted to AL for his help, but just to get another perspective.

Dozer suggested a lighter training load, which was realistically the only realistic option for me as I was pretty exhausted both mentally and physically. Training was relatively low key and I got sick again and had to take a week off early in the campaign. I set very few sessions pbs but still thought I was in reasonable shape. I averaged about 85k for this second campaign, with three weeks over 100k.

Smurf, Rafa and I did a 35k run at Eaglemont (ended up being 37k) with 10k tempo section after halfway, and I was happy to tick that off the tempo section comfortably in 39:40. The strange thing is I hadn't found any 30k+ runs hard over the last couple of years, have had very few twinges of cramp, and yet still hadn't translated my training into a pleasing marathon.

I resolved to treat Melbourne 2012 as a bonus run, and not put too much pressure on myself because of the back-to-back campaigns. However, if it was another bust then I'd only give myself one more shot at breaking 3 hours. I know some much more talented Milers have decided the marathon is not for them, and maybe I'd have to make the same call.

Burnley was to be the tester race. I felt like I was probably in decent marathon shape, but didn't expect much other than a solid hit-out. Dozer's suggested plan for me was simply to run the first half fairly easy and make sure to negative split. Given my assessment of my shape combined with that plan, I had zero expectation of a pb.

I felt unusually relaxed at the start, and ticked over the first 10k or so running with Hally at 3:55 pace and enjoying it. When it was time to give it a nudge I felt great and was able to really push to the line. I was over the moon with the 81:29 final result, including a 4:35 first k in traffic, and a 1:10 negative split for the second half (3:48 pace). Major thanks to Dozer for the strategy suggestion, as it worked a treat, and I'd only ever experienced a negative split once before (by accident at the Sydney Half earlier in the year).

Hally seemed pleased with his Burnley too, and I think it was around this time his plans for Melbourne 2012 also firmed up. One day I hope to improve enough to be able to enjoy his company over 42.2k, but I was certain it wasn't going to be this year!

I'd intended to race another 10k before the big one, but ended up doing Romsey instead, which was probably much better preparation. Then there was another failed attempt at a tan pb (apologies to all the pacers who have kindly attempted to help me get close to 13) and it was on to the big day.

As people's pacing plans were discussed, Dave "Rog" Mellings and I realized we had similar goals and decided to run together: the plan was 3k @ 4:12 and then 4:07 pace for as long as possible. I was surprised to find out that Rog's 3:01 at Melb 2011 was his debut, and over coffee (when he handed his race drinks over) I mentioned that I wouldn't be surprised at all if he finished in front of me again in 2012, but that I didn't care at all as long as both of our times started with a "2". And so it turned out ☺

Having required so much patience of any readers making it to here (if any), I will spare you a blow by blow description of the race and just touch on some significant points.

Firstly huge thanks to the MMM drinks and support crews, as well as friends and family who gave us all shouts of encouragement throughout the race. As others have pointed out in their reports, it makes a huge difference to performance and motivation on the day, and was greatly appreciated. From Rog and I a special thanks to Grunter who did a fantastic job, his efforts meant we could speed through all the drink stations and therefore never had to stop or slow while drinking (especially important from 35k onwards when the going gets really tough).

Well done to all the other Milers who turned in such great results (and great reports). It is very humbling for me that there was so much interest in my modest goal on a day of much greater achievements and great debuts.

Apologies to anyone who I neglect to mention, your support was no less appreciated!

Rog and my first half ended up a little slower than intended (spot on Dozer's suggested pace as fate would have it), but given past experiences I was inclined to see that as a plus. I'm not sure why but some of the MMM crew thought I looked to be struggling at halfway, but I suspect it may have been to do with drink logistics or sweat in my eyes as I was feeling fine. Rog however, was feeling even better, and I wisely let him push on ahead at maybe 23k-ish. I was feeling good but was very mindful of how I wanted to feel at 30k, and given the pace was still heading for a comfortable sub-3 I thought I'd be sensibly conservative for once in my life.



I was still feeling well in control at 27k but glad I hadn't tried to push the pace, as when I waved at Ando I felt my first twinge of cramp. Through 30k, and for once my vision wasn't swimming and my will hadn't deserted me. The split from the Half runners this year worked a treat, and I was able to see the fellow marathoners I was keying off. This was something unique in my experience, past 30k and still feeling strong. Maybe today is going to be the day!

Got though the art centre mix-up with minimal hassle and was actually looking forward to the hill, mainly so I could get it over with. My splits show it slowed me a fair bit but I still managed to pass maybe 4 or 5 runners on the way up, which was a very welcome change compared to last year when I walked a fair bit of it.

I saw Dozer's unmistakable figure ahead – clearly he hadn't got to the start healthy. Bummer, deserved so much better.

Over the top of the hill and my pre-race pipe-dream of lifting the pace to the finish is clearly not happening. Go around the Domain Rd bend and I'm a little startled to see House and his balloon!

.... How long is it since I went around the corner?!?

... NO... PLEASE NOT OVER-TAKEN BY THE 3 HOUR GROUP AGAIN (no matter what great blokes they are) !!!

At any rate, I'm now running a little scared all of a sudden, and see an MMM posse just before we swing on to St Kilda Rd (see below):



At this stage GGO gives me some great advice to concentrate on trying to catch runners in front, without which I probably would have got complacent.

Then Bacchus jumps in and offers some pacing, as well as a gulp of Gatorade, which are both extremely welcome. It's a little disconcerting that he's slightly gapping me when I assume he's running 4:15 pace, but I'm holding up ok and it's not long to go now. He says goodbye and that I'm well on target, but I only half believe that.

My hands have gone numb, and my field of view is narrowing, but not alarmingly. I am, however, very keenly listening for any extra cheering or footsteps that may signal the House-brigade is about to swamp me.

No drama past Fed Square and now I'm really starting to believe. Even if I'm caught now I've got enough to get home.

Finally the road outside 'G' and I lift, but a group of 4 other guys lift more.

Into the 'G' and I pass a guy on the mats who is in my age group, and glance at the big clock not so many meters away and realize I've got it this time!

I sprint as best I'm able and give the double fist pump when I'm past the second timing mat.

And then I just can't stop smiling despite all the pain! 2:58:08 (later officially 2:58:04) and I am so VERY HAPPY!



Despite the family planning not to watch the finish the night before (because it is my daughter's birthday), it turns out that Fiona, Arabella and Fergus are in the stands to see my proudest running moment in 32 years. Apparently they were nervously watching the clock tick down and were getting very concerned until Arabella spotted me. Yes, I think my form is much improved (thanks AL!), as she commented I was harder to spot at the finish because I wasn't looking at the ground with "washing machine arms".

She's certain it was her Birthday Luck that that got me in under 3 meant (and that they found a great park for the car). Was great to congratulate Rog on his excellent 2:55, a fantastic result especially for a second marathon! Great talking to Hally, Rafa and Racer after their great uns and smiles all round. Unfortunately Rog went on ahead so he is missing from the evidence below:



Finally after 7 attempts... DELIGHTED!

Was excellent to catch up with Smurf on the grass afterwards, two of the happiest runners ever! There is breaking 3 for the first time and then there is absolutely smashing it into oblivion - hugely impressive end to a hugely impressive year.

Thanks so much to el pres Slips and the merry Milers: what a fantastic group. Always someone there to help you, someone in front to aspire to and someone just behind to keep you pushing as hard as you can.

Thanks to Dozer and AL for getting me over the line, and to everyone else that has offered advice and shared a run or session. Past members and current members, there is so much experience an achievement on tap. What an amazing club, which has changed my running outlook incredibly.

I'm looking forward to a year of shorter stuff next year, and hope to tick a number of outstanding targets off. Then it's on to 2014 and time to find out if I can run the sort of marathon time that various predictors (computerized and human) say I should! I suspect by then there will be quite a posse lined up looking at the magic 4 min kms all the way.

For the bean counters:

Official Splits:

Splits

Split Name	Race Time	Leg Time	Pos	Cat Pos	Gen Pos
10k	00:42:06	00:42:06	280	28	257
20k	01:23:44	00:41:37	251	23	229
30k	02:05:23	00:41:38	213	18	194
40k	02:48:47	00:43:23	188	17	170
42k	02:58:12	00:09:24	189	16	171

I calculate my splits by half were 1:28:16 and 1:29:48, and I'm very happy with the differential. My Garmin 305 gave the total distance as 42.52k:

Split	Time
1	04:09.0
2	04:10.4
3	04:10.8
4	04:05.8
5	04:11.1
6	04:08.6
7	04:07.1
8	04:13.7
9	04:06.0
10	04:07.8
11	04:06.6
12	04:09.1
13	04:01.9
14	04:11.8
15	04:02.2
16	04:11.3
17	04:13.7
18	04:09.2
19	04:02.3
20	04:08.1
21	04:06.7
22	04:02.6
23	04:03.7
24	04:07.2
25	04:09.7
26	04:11.0
27	04:16.0
28	04:16.6
29	04:17.8
30	04:13.9

31	04:17.6
32	04:17.3
33	04:13.2
34	04:19.7
35	04:15.3
36	04:16.0
37	04:29.3
38	04:17.7
39	04:14.5
40	04:17.9
41	04:19.8
42	04:11.0
43	02:07.6

Summary 2:58:08.1