

Melbourne Marathon 2012 – Racer Report

I think I enjoy writing race reports more than running the races themselves, so this is going to be lengthy. Let the rambling commence!

History

I moved to Melbourne in 2008, and with my waistline ever expanding I searched the internets for some people to run with at lunchtime and found the Midday Milers. A combination of understated entry requirements (at the time the website described easy runs at 4:50 – 5:00 pace) and a moderately delusional self image saw me sign up, confident that I'd slot somewhere into the middle of the pack.

The next few months was testament to my desperate need to maintain my self image numbing the shame I had to endure to (sort of) achieve that end.

Reality arrived swiftly when I was dropped not long after entering Fawkner Park on my first run - about 3km at 5:00 pace. Long story short it took me a long time before I was even able to keep up with the Monday / Friday runs, and even longer before I was able to extend myself out to including the Wednesday run.

After about six months I settled into a regular routine of Mon / Wed / Fri runs or about 25km per week and was happy with that for a few years until...

At the 2010 Melbourne Marathon I went along to support the Milers running. I was unfamiliar with the course so tagged along with AL and went point to point to cheer the guys at different stages. By tagged along I mean AL jogged impatiently and I flogged my guts out trying to keep up before he eventually ditched me coming back up St Kilda Road*

* May have actually been very patient and only left me on St Kilda Road after making sure I knew where I was going and was OK.

Two things changed for me that day.

1. I got inspired watching the guys go around and achieve some pretty big results
2. I was no longer satisfied with 25km easy per week because for the first time I truly realised how far off the pace I was

So I committed to increasing my kms with a view to run MM2012. I wanted to run a decent marathon, if I was going to work my backside off for something I wanted it to be something special (for me) so I set sub 3 hours as my bar. If I didn't think I was a show to go sub 3 hours then I would postpone until I was.

TRAINING

The good news was I had plenty of room for improvement. My Tan PB was 15:55, I had done about four effort sessions in my life, and I thought Mike's Meander was a 'long run' ☺

At about that time Dozer stopped thinking of me as the pest that went out too hard every run that he had to avoid tripping over, to the pest that had no idea about running

so was regularly emailing him for all manner of advice. I still do – thanks for all your advice and without it I'm sure I'd be a long way behind where I am.

My 2 year plan was structured around two key races per year: the Great Ocean Road HM and Melbourne HM / Marathon.

Period	Weeks	Ave Kms Per Week	Effort Sessions Per Week	20km+ runs Per Week	30km+ runs Per Week	Result
2010 MM – 2011 GOR	31	40	4 (0.25 pw)	4 (0.13 pw)	0	2011 GOR 1:37:41
2011 GOR – 2011 MM	21	43.5	19 (0.90 pw)	8 (0.38 pw)	0	2011 MHM Injured
2011 MM – 2012 GOR	31	48	41 (1.32 pw)	8 (0.25 pw)	0	2012 GOR 1:35:53
2012 GOR – 2012 MM	21	53	40 (1.90 pw)	9 (0.42 pw)	4 (0.19 pw)	2012 MM 3:04:37

So although I didn't reach the level I had hoped to reach (70kms per week), all the numbers have trended in the right direction over the journey which is good to see.

Pre Race

Woke at 4.30, had a muffin and jam and got ready while Marty fed Caitlin (our 6 month old). Left home a bit after 5 and arrived at the MCG at about 5.45. I was a bit stressed and may have been a bit tetchy with Marty – poor form given she'd looked after a teething baby most of the previous night then got up before light to drive me in. I don't know why she puts up with me ☺

Wandered into the viewing area and was blown away by the setup on the ground. Wish I had my camera with me, it looked fantastic.

Saw Dozer and chatted with him for a bit, trying not to chat too much knowing he is generally likes his space pre race. Headed our separate ways at about 6. Waited 25 minutes for a toilet – next time will go there first thing to avoid lines! Found bag drop off area and did my final gear check, gels, vas etc before dumping the bag.

Was running later than I had planned so jogged out to starting area passing Smurf on the way. Reached the start line and self seeding was taking place so I made my way to the 3 hour area. Saw Rafa, House, Mitho, Thorny in the area, and glimpses of Woolies and Fat Ass warming up ahead in the preferred runners area.

Took a minute to look around and soak it in, what an absolute cracker of a day to be running!

Plan

Hold 4:10 pace as long as possible. Expect a drop in pace around 25km – 30km and hope that I could hold on to 4:20s on the way home for a sub 3 hour result. 88 out, 91 back. GGO was running my drinks for me every 7km.

Goals

3. Finish
2. Don't walk
1. Sub 3 hours

Race

Start – 7km

I immediately found out that not everyone had been as scrupulous about self seeding as I had, and found myself wading through packs of barely jogging imbeciles running 4 abreast (1st km 4:18).

I've got no problem with slower runners, many people view me as one, but every race the same thing happens where a handful of slower runners insist on pushing their way to the front and creating a log jam and it's really irritating. The temptation to make my own gaps through traffic rather than waiting for them to open up was significant, but I managed to restrain myself.

I was surprised to catch up with Dave and Lurch at about the 2km mark (4:06) given the traffic. The smart option was to tuck in with them but I was pretty fixated on holding 4:10 pace so I pushed past before they pulled in with me and we ran together for a few kms (4:07, 4:08). (I was being a slave to my Garmin, but I felt like my pace was all over the shop so next time I will run more to feel and worry less about numbers.)

The 4th km was a bit of an incline so I eased off and let them go ahead. I would only see them at the turnarounds from that point on.

The whole way along here I had planned to be in front of the 3 hour pacing group (hereafter referred to as House) but they were well ahead and setting a rollicking pace. That was playing with my mind a fair bit, no part of my pre race plans included me trailing House for 10kms!

Turned off St Kilda Road into Fitzroy Street then Lakeside Drive (4:14, 4:12, 4:11). GGO was with a few Milers at 7km with my first drink / gel right on cue, glad no-one asked me why I was behind House. Took both, dropped the gel shortly after. Idiot. Fortunately I had put a spare in my pocket so no big deal.

8km – 14km

Ran around the top of Albert Park Lake and back down Aughtie Drive (4:13, 4:12, 4:11, 4:10). Grabbed my second drink from GGO at about 11kms? Feel like I must be mis-remembering, it didn't feel wrong at the time but I'm drawing a complete blank.

Everytime I passed a MMM supporter I could hear 'Go Racer, Go Rafa' so I knew he couldn't be far behind me. I had many suspicions about Rafa's real goals, so I was half expecting him to come flying past me. Hindsight showed me to be completely wrong, and Rafa to run a much smarter race than me ☺

Managed to overtake House in the 12th km (4:12). Back out to Fitzroy Street, feeling pretty good (4:08). I realised 4:10 felt a fraction quick, so I adjusted slightly and aimed for low teens which had my pace ticking over comfortably (4:15).

15km – 21km

Out and back along Beaconsfield Parade. Conscious that despite passing House comfortably, I could hear his constant verbal diarrhoea which meant I was not putting distance into him, despite my cunning pre race plan. A couple of times I felt him get closer and pushed to avoid getting swamped, pace ticking over at 4:07, 4:10, 4:09, 4:08, 4:07, 4:09, 4:10. Felt quicker than I wanted but figured it was what I needed to do to go sub 3 hours.

Ran past Adam and Geraldine at about 16kms and again at 19km and 21km, was a very welcome distraction!

Drink/gel from AL at 21km with a few Milers, I now understand how people get fuzzy about who was supporting where out on the course ☺

Went through the half with 45 seconds 'in the bank' according to Foghorn Leghorn still yapping away behind me. With my splits quicker than I wanted and House still pressing, I decided to ease off and slot in with his group.

22km – 28km

Out and back along Marine Parade including a cute little section through a car park (WTF?).

House caught me and I let myself drop quickly into the 3 hour pack while running up Jacka Boulevard to work off them. Still no sign of Rafa but I knew he couldn't be far behind. I felt like I was working moderately hard even with the slightly reduced pace (4:12, 4:13, 4:13, 4:14) but the 3 hour group seemed to disintegrate for a while so I ran and chatted with House for a few kms.

Went through the carpark section at 26kms (4:18) and realised I was close to getting cooked. I bade him farewell and let the 3 hour group go past. Consciously backed off but still ticking over reasonably well (4:12, 4:16). Still no sign of Rafa but MMM supporters' calls made it clear he was still close behind.

GGO handed over my drinks at 28km and urged me to get back on the 3 hour train.

29km – 35km

Fark.

<Insert obligatory sook about Fitzroy Street>

I had prepared myself for the hilly section around Fitzroy Street between 29km – 31km. I intentionally backed the pace right off to get through those few kms without doing too much damage and managed 4:19, 4:25, 4:25.

If you think roughly 30 meters incline over 3km doesn't sound like much I'd agree with you most days of the week, but 29kms into a marathon isn't most days of the week!

Somewhere in those 3kms I realised sub 3 was off the cards. I realised if I didn't back right off I was headed for a Racer special, and 10kms would make a long walk of shame. By the top of Fitzroy Street I made the decision to go into damage control and focus on my secondary goal, don't walk.

I also thought about many conversations I'd had with more experienced Milers (including Dozer repeatedly) who had all told me that marathon #1 isn't about the time, it's about the experience. Have a bad experience and you might never come back. I really focussed on making the rest of the run a positive experience.

Not to be left out, my left quad and hamstring were both sending me warnings that they were considering cramping.

Even with the hill behind me, the kms bled out to 4:29, 4:38, 4:45. Somewhere in there Rafa passed me offering some words of encouragement and a pat on the back. He tells me afterwards that he was doing it tough, but he looked pretty strong to me!

GGO also appeared and I chatted with him and explained the show was over and I just wanted to try to enjoy it from here on in. I could see he wasn't sure which Racer was talking, step off Racer or on the money Racer, and seemed torn between giving me a rev up and giving me a pat on the back. Mate, you made the right call, I was cooked!

He also gave me my drink last gel. I dropped one, or both, and he picked them up and ferried them forward to me a second time. Quality service!

I knew Marty and Kim would be somewhere near Vic Barracks, along with Lauren and Dave who had all come down to support me so I worked hard to keep a positive frame of mind. I heard them well before I saw them ☺ and the cheer they gave me was exactly what I needed at that point. I didn't have to force a smile as I went past, it really swung my mood around.

Merged with the Half Marathoners while going around the Arts Centre. Having mentally prepared to run around the slower runners, my reduced pace found me tracking pretty closely with them through the tunnel. I was going past them, but not fast (4:39). Split off again at the bottom of Birdwood Avenue and headed up the Tan.

36km – 42.195km

I had been telling myself over and over again to hold onto a jog. No matter how slow I went, do not let myself walk.

For those not aware, I've developed a bit of a reputation as a step off artist amongst the Milers, and I have a pink ballet slipper to show for my efforts. I was fully aware that if I slowed to a walk I might not start running again, and if that happened I was one small soft decision away from another step off so I was desperate to hold onto a jog.

Unfortunately my warm and fuzzies from the gang at 34kms were wearing off, and with 3 hours out of the picture and my new goal completely negative (don't stop) I

was in a pretty crappy place. I ran up the hill with my two slowest splits of the day (4:55, 4:59), and through Govt House Drive roundabout I felt like my lungs were closing up and I couldn't breathe and I just felt like crying. I don't know why I felt like crying, I just did.

That was my lowest point but fortunately for me there was a cast of thousands there to pick me up. Marty, Kim, Lauren, Dave, Adam, Geraldine, Alex (brother) and his 38 week pregnant wife Elena, and their 2yo son Luke as well as a large group of Milers, and they all gave me a massive cheer on the far side of the roundabout. I had to piece together who was there afterwards as my eyes were locked onto the road 1 meter in front of me, but despite my lack of reaction it got my head back in the right space so massive thanks to all there.

I passed Dozer near the top of the Tan. That's his story to tell but knowing the competitive beast he is I wasn't sure what to say so I patted him on the back and grunted something like 'tough break mate' as I went past.

Once I hit Domain Road I was sure I would finish and started to think about times. I did rough calculations and figured sub 3:05 was on the cards if I could hold on. 4:50, 4:54, 4:50 down St Kilda Road, becoming aware of my brother's family for the first time and giving Luke a thumbs up on my way past the 38km drink station.

Starting to count down distance in smaller units. 1 Tan, 3km, 1 BFA, 2km, 1800m – I was grabbing every little victory I could. Turned right into Flinders Street at 40km, who knew that it's a slight uphill (4:54). Right down Wellington Parade and again down Jolimont Road – inside 1km now and it's downhill and cheering supporters everywhere urging me on.

GGO, at the entrance to the MCG, trying to break into a faster run but just had nothing. Caught one person who had less than nothing and crossed the line in 3:04:40, final 1km in 4:36 and lap of the G at 4:07 pace, no Slips special there 😊

Official time: 3:04:37.

Post Race

Completely exhausted. Everything from the waist down is trying to cramp. Quick chat with the pack of Milers tells me that pretty much everyone had great days with many PBs - fantastic. Looked around the crowd for Marty and Kim, but couldn't see them. Chatted for a while more then saw them coming down so went over for a chat.

Marty could see I was close to keeling over but was really happy at my result. She knew I was pretty close to a major meltdown along St Kilda Road so viewed the result as a big win. Chatted for a while and told me that Dave and Lauren had been up in the stands too but had to scoot, then I realised I should push off and collect my gear.

Walked down the ramp off the MCG. Who puts a steep down ramp at the end of a marathon? Volunteers handing out medals barely hiding their smiles as I did my tin man impersonation going down without bending either leg! Went for a massage and freaked the two trainee masseurs when my threatened quad cramps turned into actual quad cramps while they were working on them. Funny stuff 😊

Headed off thoroughly lost looking for the bag area. Stopped a bloke to ask him if he knew where it was. Whoops, sorry Mona! But still, do you know where it is? This is two reports in a row where I've talked him up but I'm going to keep saying it anyway, Mona is a legend!

Wash up

MM2013 here I come, sub 3 hours or bust!

In the nearer future I'll take it easy for a while and try to get back into regular training when my legs stop making me whine incessantly. Hopefully I can manage regular training over the Christmas period and at the end of January I'll see how I've been travelling and decide whether I'll have a crack at Canberra Marathon 2013. My gut feel is yes.

Top marks to the race organisers for the setup. Everything was laid on. Check in, luggage drop, marshalling areas, course markings, drinks, massages, split Marathon and Half Marathon chutes for most of the course – what a fantastic event.

Thanks to everyone, not just those there on the day but those who helped me out along the way. Kim, Adam, Geraldine, Lauren, Dave, Alex, and Elena (and Luke). GGO for carrying my drinks all day – very smooth operator. Slips, Grunter, AL, TW, Bacchus, Selim, GG, Smoothy and while I don't remember seeing them, PM and MJ – long live the Milers! Dozer for all your advice and ability to give me a reality check when I needed it (often). Hindsight shows you were closer to estimating my ability than I was, but thanks for giving me the nod to have a crack at sub 3 hours anyway 😊

But most importantly thanks to Marty who has always been 100% behind my running and for the last few months has picked up my slack with 3 kids under 5 to let me get out and do the training I needed to do. Your support is without doubt the single biggest contributor to my recent improvement. Hopefully it's your turn to get out for a while!

I am extremely thankful that I had so many friends and family out supporting me when it got rough towards the end. I suspect most of the Milers would understand the massive difference vocal course support makes, but to everyone else believe me when I say that it was worth its weight in gold!

Splits

1	04:20.3		
2	04:06.0		
3	04:07.3		
4	04:08.7		
5	04:14.1	20:56.4	
6	04:12.6		
7	04:11.5		
8	04:13.9		
9	04:12.6		
10	04:11.5	21:02.2	41:58.5
11	04:10.7		
12	04:12.9		
13	04:08.5		
14	04:15.9		
15	04:07.3	20:55.3	
16	04:10.4		
17	04:09.2		
18	04:08.4		
19	04:07.1		
20	04:09.6	20:44.8	41:40.1
21	04:10.2		
22	04:12.1		
23	04:13.0		
24	04:14.0		
25	04:14.4	21:03.7	
26	04:18.8		
27	04:12.2		
28	04:16.0		
29	04:19.5		
30	04:25.6	21:32.1	42:35.7
31	04:25.9		
32	04:29.1		
33	04:37.2		
34	04:45.0		
35	04:39.4	22:56.7	
36	04:54.9		
37	04:59.6		
38	04:50.2		
39	04:54.6		
40	04:50.5	24:29.8	47:26.5
41	04:54.4		
42	04:39.5		
42.348	01:26.0	10:59.9	
	3:04:40.8		