

# WILLOW FARM

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Date 10th May 2005  
To: Generous Sponsor!!  
From: David Partridge  
Re: Flora London Marathon

I did it!!! 4 HOURS - 57 MINUTES - 58 SECONDS

After four months of training, sore achilles tendon, dodgy stomach, chaffed nether regions and tender nipples (!) marathon day arrived - along with bright sunshine!! 300 miles of running including the Reading Half Marathon in 1.53.38, 400 lengths of swimming, 200 miles of cycling and 100 miles of rowing and I was more confident this year than last year. Although still carrying a bit of a cold and having had blocked sinuses the day before, I was sure I was prepared for the 26.2 miles of the London Marathon and the sub 4 hour time I was aiming for and had trained for.

My running partner, Richard Merriweather, had dropped out eight weeks earlier with a back injury (so he claims!) so I was on my own in the 4 hour start pen and got myself alongside the 9-minute mile pace setter. Got talking to a couple of guys who were aiming for 9 minute miles so we set off together. Mark disappeared backwards within the first two miles but I ran with Steve through the East End of London and around the Cutty Sark. We enjoyed the experience together – albeit mostly in silence – and as before, crossing Tower Bridge at 13 miles to huge cheering crowds was an uplifting and incredibly moving experience.

I was so pleased this year to see friends and family on my way round at various mile points and it was a real boost as I made my way on alone as Steve dropped back at 15 miles. I still felt okay but desperately hot and tired. I maintained my 9 minute mile pace through 19 miles and then felt a tap on the shoulder as Steve caught me up. I was pleased to see him because, as per last year, miles 20 and 21 were really tough. We were egging each other on to keep going but I just suddenly hit THE WALL at 22.5 miles and Steve disappeared into the distance. The legs went, the mind went and I started doing the chicken walk!! Hilarious to watch, I imagine, but horrible to experience. Two kind runners helped me along for 50 metres to some stewards who supplied me with water (only after nearly ten minutes as there appeared to be none left at that part of the course!!) and I had to sit down for a bit and cheer on the people running passed me who I had run passed earlier!!

I had reached 22.5 miles in 3 hours 24 minutes.

After 20 minutes of regaining my senses and legs and a few phone calls to my brother, Simon, to tell him what had happened I got up determined to finish. I started walking the remaining 3.5 miles and was immensely touched by the support from the crowds and fellow runners who could obviously see I had struggled. They fed me sweets, chocolates and fruit – I am sure you could walk the whole course and finish four stone heavier than when you started if you accepted all the food gifts along the way!!!

The focus of finishing in a good time had gone now and it was just about finishing and savouring the atmosphere. The crowds along the embankment and all the way to the finish were just amazing. At 23.5 miles I got chatting to Tony – a 50 plus semi-retired civil engineer – who was dressed in a Thunderbirds costume!! We walked for a couple of miles to the incessant crowd calls of “Thunderbirds A Go Go!!” We ran the last 1.2 miles (well, shuffled!).

Tony and I shook hands and patted each other on the back. Tony said “thank you for helping me round, for getting me to walk faster, for making me run the last 1.2 miles and for talking to me just as I was about to cry! It was a pleasure to meet you”. The feeling was mutual. We parted company after receiving our medals almost certainly never to cross paths again.

I’m still not quite sure why I did not achieve my goal of a sub 4 hour marathon but I am sure that the weather was a major factor. Whilst conditions were ideal for spectators (and for Paula Radcliffe who had finished before the sun started burning!!) it really was very hot out there. It was noticeable that the number of people dropping out this year was significantly higher than last year and people started walking much earlier on the course (after only a mile or so!!). The highest number of runners ever and the hot conditions also meant that the course was significantly more crowded this year which slowed everyone down but more importantly made it very difficult to get into a running rhythm. My lingering cold and blocked sinuses probably didn’t help either but at the end of the day excuses are not needed (although I’ve just given quite a few!!!) - I finished my second London Marathon! I take my hat off to anyone who finished and also to those who took part but didn’t finish and especially to all those who beat me – and that was a lot of people!!!

Between 20 and 23 miles I promised myself I would never do this again. However, I said that last year at exactly the same point so who knows. The pain and agony soon disappear and all you can remember is the fantastic experience that is The London Marathon.

I just wanted to take this opportunity to thank you for your very generous sponsorship. I was hoping to be able to give you all a final figure but did not want to delay writing to you any longer so all I can say is that, as of today, I have raised in the region of £2000.00 for The Meningitis Trust. Last year I raised a total of £3180. Perhaps I need to do one more marathon to try and push my fundraising up to £10,000!!

The Meningitis Trust had 132 runners this year compared to 102 last year. Last year, London Marathon runners raised £200,000 for the Trust and this year they are hoping it will raise £150,000. Last year the Trust’s annual events fundraising income was £1,130,424 so, as you can see, the London Marathon accounts for between 15% and 20% of their events income making it essential to their existence.

The Flora London Marathon costs £7 million to put on and generates an income of £9 million. The Flora London Marathon is a registered charity and this £2 million profit from each year’s race goes to London charities. The youngest runner was 18 and the oldest, 90. 160 runners had their birthday on race day and the 35552 runners got through 710,000 bottles of water.

As many of you know, when I was eight years old my brother, Richard, who was just ten, contracted meningitis and died. The Meningitis Trust leads the fight to raise awareness of the disease, fund research into vaccines and treatments and offers a wide range of support for people affected by the disease and the money we have raised together will help this work immensely.

From myself and all at The Meningitis Trust – a big thank you.

Kind Regards,

David Partridge

P.S. A few photos available on [www.actionphoto.net](http://www.actionphoto.net) Enter under Event – “Flora London Marathon 2005” and under Bib No. – 41662. These should make you laugh!!!