

Record Racing in Wellington

With record entries, a record breaking winner and near perfect weather the Armstrong Motor Group Wellington Marathon confirmed its place among New Zealand's favourite marathon events.

A record 5020 runners and walkers from 13 countries enjoyed good weather and fast running for the annual marathon, half marathon, 10k and Kids' Magic Mile.

Racing was dominated by a battle for the New Zealand marathon title, with Wellington's own Dougal Thorburn finally winning a national championship after several near misses.

Thorburn didn't have it easy. A five strong bunch formed during the opening 10k around the scenic coastal course with Auckland's Stephen Lett and Palmerston North's Chris Sanson looking the most likely to challenge the Wellington doctor.

Lett came into the race with the fastest best time of 2hrs 26min and finished ahead of Thorburn in the Christchurch Half Marathon three weeks prior. So Thorburn had to put up one of the best races of his life to win the Armstrong Motor Group Marathon, setting a new course record by six minutes with 2hrs 25min 33secs.

"Wow, I felt really good the whole way really," said Thorburn after crossing the line 87secs ahead of Lett.

"We had a group early on, then I pushed it a bit and got away. About 30k I expected things to start getting tough. But in the last 10k we got a breeze behind us and I felt good all the way to the finish."

Behind Thorburn's national title, course record and personal best time, Stephen Lett clocked his second fastest marathon while Chris Sanson also slipped under 2hrs 30min for third in 2hrs 29min 38secs.

Dougal Thorburn



The southerly storms that lashed the country during race week also posed something of a challenge for full marathoners. Some of the flat, scenic coastal route was closed following the storm, which forced

organisers, the Wellington Marathon Clinic, to add an out and back section on the roads they could run on.

Much like the men's, the woman's full marathon also saw the favourite take a tumble when Wellington's Katie Kemp outran three-time national marathon champion Shireen Crumpton by 86secs in 2hrs 53min 38secs.

Kemp's time was the second fastest ever at the Armstrong Motor Group Wellington Marathon behind only 2012 winner Sara Burgess at 2hrs 48min 40secs. But Crumpton actually took home the national title because Kemp is not currently registered with a club. This made Crumpton the first person to win four New Zealand marathon titles, but the champion was gracious in saying, "Katie was definite the strongest runner out there."

In other racing the Wellington Scottish Athletics Club dominated proceedings with Tim Hodge shaking of two previous second placings in this race to out-class club mates James Richardson and Matt Dravitski by almost two minutes with a time of 1hr 09min 42secs.

The women's half marathon was a closer affair, but New Zealand-born Texan Liza Hunter-Galvan held off Katie Wright (Akl'd) and Angela Leck (Wgtn) to win by 45secs in 1hr 20min 26secs. At 43, Hunter-Galvan also claimed the veteran honours in record time.

The 10k event saw more records, with 1500m specialist Matt Harris finishing 25sec clear of Jesse Patel (Wgtn) in 31min 21secs. Among women, the ever-green Gabrielle O'Rourke was 70sec clear of Wellington's Jean Kozyniak and Charlotte Haina in 36min 37secs to break her own veteran record.

Veterans were also to the fore among walkers with David Jones winning the full marathon in 4hrs 50min 06secs and Mike Morresey setting a new veteran record when winning the half marathon in 1hr 57min 07secs. But the 10k walk saw teenage sensation Courtney Ruscke (Chch) set a new junior record of 52min 38secs to win overall by seven minutes.

Hidden in the mid-pack were several standout performers. The ageless Bernie Portenski added the 60-60 half marathon record to her 50-59 record, while Auckland's Kelvin Fitness set a new record in the 70-plus marathon. But even more impressive were the second and third placings as 83 year old Stan Gawler (Chch) and 82 year old Barry Boston (Taumarunui) became the first ever 80 year olds to finish the Armstrong Motor Group Marathon.