

From Whence We Came...

With the 2020 Gazley Volkswagen Wellington Marathon being our 35th anniversary, we thought it was a good chance to look back over those three and half decades of a great race in a great place. This opening article remembers the inaugural 1986 race, when 1500 people lined up in Taranaki Street for the ICL Harbour Capital Half Marathon.

If your relationship with our event dates back less than 15 years, the route back then will surprise you. Based at the old Overseas Terminal, the race headed straight up Taranaki Street, past the old Show Building and over to Island Bay.

It was an honest start, with solid climbs over Mt Cook and past the legendary Athletic Park, followed by one more rise through Houghton Bay before heading around to Lyall Bay.

From Lyall Bay the course did something unique in New Zealand running when it headed through the walkway tunnel under Wellington Airport and popped out in Miramar. It then came through Miramar Cutting to follow Cobham Drive, Evans Bay Parade and Oriental Parade to the finish at the Overseas Terminal.

The 1986 start photo below is like a time capsule back to mid-80s beards, tight shorts and floppy hair. But it's also a who's-who of

Wellington's mid-80s running scene, with winner Steve Hunt (1548 at right), a regular top-10 on the national scene back then, winning in 1hr 07min 19secs.

Because it started and finished at sea level, the course was reasonably fast. But Wellington's infamous wind could make it honest. If the southerly was blowing the first 8k was nothing short of miserable, but the last 8k was super-fast. But in a northerly the start was fast, but the last 8k horribly slow.

The course records were set in the second year of the race when perfect weather saw local national reps Liam Healey and Ngaire Drake rip around in 1hr 05min and 1hr 15min. If not for the change of route in 2002, those times would still be the course records today.

Back then the race was just a half marathon. Now, of course you have the options of a 10k, half or the classic 42.2k full distance.

