

From Ireland to Japan to Wellington

Almost 4500 participants from 18 countries and all ends of New Zealand turned out for today's Gazley Volkswagen Wellington Marathon, and the battle for line honours were an equally global and national affair.

Irishman-turned-Aucklander, Ciaran Faherty made light work of the feature Gazley Volkswagen Full Marathon. The 28 year-old only started to take his running seriously two years and quickly became a regular place getter on the domestic scene.

In March he won the Mountain to Sea Marathon in New Plymouth, then finished third in the Rotorua Marathon and Christchurch Marathon. In Wellington the Irishman matched strides with local standout, Dave Parsons, for 40 of the 42.2k before easing away for a 36 second win in 2hrs 36min 56secs.

After a busy season the affable Irishman was happy to canter across the line, saying, "The legs felt ok. It was just a hard training run really."

The womens race over the full distance was similarly close, but much harder fought. Pre-race, Auckland's Katie Wyrill was tipped as the runner to watch.

The 30-year-old claimed a surprise second at the Rotorua Marathon in May, but in Wellington she was pushed hard all the way by Japanese runner, Yumiko Tanaka, and Kapiti coast ultra-distance specialist, Jo Johansen. In the end the Aucklander proved 5min too strong, winning in 3hrs 02min 46secs. But the battle behind continued as Tanaka and Johansen were separated by just 18 seconds, with Tanaka getting the nod in 3hrs 07min 03secs.

Tanaka was in Wellington representing Wellington's sister City of Sakai. This year's Gazley Volkswagen Wellington Marathon was the first of a marathon exchange with Sakai, where the first Sakai woman in Japan's Senshu Marathon wins a trip to the Wellington race and the first Wellington woman today won a trip to Sakai and the Senshu Marathon.

That prize proved a winning consolation for local runner Letha Whitham. She had finished fourth but didn't realise she was first Wellingtonian and had no idea of the prize. So it was an overwhelmed Whitman who spluttered, hands on face, "I can't believe this. I've never won anything in my life!"

Nineteen-year-old Mike Voss has won a few races in his still young life. But after leading from start to finish to win the Shoe Clinic Half Marathon distance, it was obvious that the Rotorua runner will be seen on the top step of the podium for some years to come. Shrugging off blustery conditions and vastly more experienced competition, the teenager finished almost two minutes clear of Palmerston North runner Chris Sanson in 1hr 10min 14secs. Third place Brian Garmonsway was just 38 seconds further back in third, but as first local runner took the combined Wellington Half Marathon title.

Wellington runners struck back for the home side in the woman's half marathon, with national triathlon reps Rebecca Elliot and Taryn Ryan claiming the top two spots ahead of Charlotte Haina. Elliot was 1min 40secs clear of Ryan when she stopped the clock in 1hr 25min 03secs, with Haina less than a minute further back in third.

In other events, the Mizuno 10k saw a repeat of last year with Wellingtonians Tm Hodge and Nathan Tse taking the top two spots, with Hodge winning in 33min 12secs. The first woman was Sarah Drought with a fast 36min 26secs ahead of Jean Kozyniak and Ariana Harper. The Hits 90.1 5k race saw Wellingtonians Kevin Pugh and Phoebe van Boheeman take top honours, while Sam Williams and Amelia Abernethy were tops in the Bluebridge Kids' Magic Mile. The standout walkers were New Plymouth's Harry Terweil, who set a new Full Marathon walk record of 4hrs 26min 08secs, while Wellington's Jacqueline Wilson claimed second to Nelson's Barb Pauling in the 10k walk but set a course record and possible national record for 70 year olds of 1hr 06min 42secs.

The 5k event was introduced in 2014 to encourage a wider array of people into the sport. Involving the community is a big part of the Gazley Volkswagen Wellington Marathon. Almost 300 volunteers make the event tick and they are sourced from clubs and schools, who all receive donations for their help.

Wellington also benefits from the 1400-odd visiting participants. "With family & friends that means close to 4000 visitors, which creates serious economic impact." says event manager Michael Jacques.

The event also benefits the New Zealand Heart Foundation, with more than \$10,000 raised in 2016.

"But first and foremost," says Jacques, "we organise this event to get people doing something positive for health and fitness. "I've been a runner for more than 40 years, so it's very much an event organised by and for runners."

Mike Voss

