

## Records & Redemption in Wellington

With perfect weather and entries from 25 countries, the 2024 Gazley Volkswagen Wellington Marathon was a record breaker before the gun even fired. But a tightly fought men's half marathon record stole the show.

Two years ago, American-based Wellingtonian, Toby Gualter, started as favourite for the half marathon distance at the Gazley Volkswagen Wellington but was upset by often underrated Rotorua runner Michael Voss. This year Gualter returned as second seed to the well performed Eric Speakman, but managed to turn the tables in a tight race that saw the first two runners break the course record.

Gualter came to the race with the best half marathon time, but Speakman looked the form horse despite being a debutant at the distance courtesy of faster times over shorter distance right down to being a sub-four-minute-miler. The two certainly dominated the race, with Wellington's Nathan Tse along for the ride as he looked to turn two previous minor placings into a win. But it was always Gualter pushing the pace and he eventually eked out an eight second margin to stop the clock in 1hr 05min 29secs to break Michael Voss' 2023 record by 52secs.

"That was hard," said the 23-year-old while still grasping hands on knees at the finish line. "Once I got that lead, the last 2k I was hanging on hoping I could hold it. I was really hurting."

The women's half marathon was similarly surprising, but rather than a grimace Wellington-based UK runner Beth Garland finished looking as fresh as a daisy with a mile-wide smile as she crossed the line with a 57sec lead in 1hr 18min 25secs. Behind her Gisborne's Grace McConnachie held out Tauranga's Deb Fuller and Wellington-based Japanese runner, Kumiki Otani, while 60-year-old Whanganui runner Sally Gibbs set yet another New Zealand masters record for her age group of 1hr 22min 38secs.

*L2R, Chris Speakman, Toby Gualter & Nathan Tse*



*Beth Garland*

Japanese runners have always featured strongly in the Gazley Volkswagen Wellington Marathon. This year Shizuka Tanaka from Wellington's Japanese sister city of Sakai was favoured among women over the feature full marathon distance. But in another surprise Tauranga's Claire Horner and Kapiti's Cath Braddock turned the tables, with Horner winning in 3hrs 06min, 1min 43secs clear of Braddock, with Tanaka in third.

The men's marathon had no huge surprises. It was always tipped as a wide-open affair between half a dozen runners of similar ability. In the end Dunedin's Simon Cromarty, the 10k winner last year, proved too strong. But only after some mid-race drama that saw the first three runners mis-directed to the extent that they ran some two kilometres further than the classic marathon distance of 42.2k.



*Claire Horner*

Cromarty led from the gun, pushing out to a 3min lead by the 31k mark. But only a few hundred metres later he was directed off course and was followed by the next two runners, David Haunschmidt (Wgtn) and Tom Galloway (Chch). This left fourth placed UK runner Edd Charlton-Weedy in the lead, which he held to the finish line. The three previous leaders eventually finished second, fifth and sixth. But organisers re-instated their order at the point of error to award Cromarty first in 2hrs 27min 31secs, Haunschmidt second, Galloway third and Charlton-Weedy fourth.

The 10k event went to Christchurch's Ollie Palmer in 31min 47secs, just 7secs clear of Wellington's Lorcan Rabbitte. Wellington's Debbie Donald was a convincing winner of the 10k in 35min 55secs, 2min 06secs clear of Christchurch masters runner Alex Hawke.

The Kids' Magic Mile was dominated by siblings, Emily and Cooper Williams. Cooper won with a classic finish-dip ahead of fellow Hutt runner Adam Larkin with both runners recorded at 5min 15secs. Emily was first among girls, but an impressive third overall in 5min 27secs.

Exactly 4278 runners and walkers from 25 countries entered for what was the 37th edition of the Gazley Volkswagen Wellington Marathon event. Full results at [www.wellingtonmarathon.co.nz](http://www.wellingtonmarathon.co.nz).



*Simon Cromarty's tshirt was apt*

