

Record Running in Wellington

It took three years to get the 35th anniversary Gazley Volkswagen Wellington Marathon to the start line, but a record field and record racing made up for the long wait.

Established in 1986, the Gazley Volkswagen Wellington Marathon has been the Capital's major marathon for more than three decades. With up to 5000 participants every year, it is one of the New Zealand's "Big Five", alongside the Auckland, Queenstown, Rotorua and Christchurch marathons. This year's 35th anniversary, however, has been a long time coming.

In recurrent lockdowns in both 2020 and 2021, the Wellington Marathon was postponed not once or twice but four times. But a record field of 5264 entrants made it worth the wait.

"It was great to see so many people supporting the event," says race organiser Michael Jacques. Organising this one has been a bit like a marathon itself. It took us a while to get here, and there was a bit of pain along the way, but in the end it's always worth it."

Wellington's Sarah Drought certainly thinks so. The 34-year-old took out a tightly fought women's half marathon but needed to break the race record to seal the win. Fellow Wellingtonian Hannah Miller had a faster best time coming into the Wellington Championship event, but Drought pulled clear in the second half of the race to set a new race record by six seconds of 1hr 17min 06secs. Miller held on for second in 1hr 18min 08secs, followed by Lower Hutt's Esther George, Wellington's Emma Pearson and Auckland's Jess Wright all within a minute.



Sarah Drought

The men's half marathon was an even closer affair, with just a minute separating the top four runners. Pre-race favourite Michael Voss proved too strong in cold wind and rain. The Rotorua runner had tasted success here as a teenager, but was pushed hard by Gualter, fellow Wellingtonian Nathan Tse and Wellington-based Japanese runner Hiro Tanimoto. But Voss' strength proved the decisive factor as he edged clear into the head winds to win by 31secs in 1hr 07min 13secs.

Strength certainly won the day in the feature full marathon. Wellington's Sam McCutcheon was always the favourite, but he totally dismantled the tough conditions to win by 13min in 2hrs 30min 09secs. The battle for the remaining podium places was closer, however, with Waihi's Matt Hallam finishing only a minute clear of Auckland's Keith Burrows.

The women's full marathon was a tighter affair, with Christchurch Lisa Brignull enjoying her biggest win. Brignull clocked in a 3hrs 07min 39secs, finishing two minutes clear of Cambridge' Angela Handcock and Wellington's Bridget Douglas.

In other events, Wellington's Seamus Kane won the 10k race in 31min 44secs, while Auckland's Anneke Grogan was first among women in 35min 51secs. Auckland were also to the fore in the Kids' Magic Mile, with Tia Korewha winning among girls in 5min 50secs while Jacob Williams was first boy in 5min 08secs. Christchurch's Courtenay Ruske was the standout race walker, breaking two hours for the half marathon distance with 1hr 58min 26secs.

"It was great to see such fast running in tough conditions," said Michael Jacques. "Sarah Drought's record in the women's half marathon was especially outstanding."

But Jacques points out that there were highlights throughout the 5000-plus field. "We had runners like Mike Stewart finishing his 607th marathon and Des Young continuing his streak as the only person to have raced in all 35 events. And Tawa Intermediate with more than 30 kids taking part in the 10k."

Full results at: www.wellingtonmarathon.co.nz/history

