

Before the Start

There were huge queues for all the toilets, perhaps unsurprisingly. Rob, Dooley and I kept moving onto a different queue in the hope of finding one that wasn't rammed. Eventually, we found a toilet inside near the finish hall that looked like a small queue, but there were probably 40 people queuing underground around the corner. It took about 10 minutes to queue but I managed to squeeze a little bit out by around 09:45 (start was 10:00). I hadn't managed to shed much weight in the past 24 hours so was a bit worried about a Paula Radcliffe moment. I dashed to the start line and jumped over the fence near the start and pushed my way to the front of group 1 (not the elites). Showing people the pace on my hand really helped with them believing that I should be pushing in front of them. There were about 40 elite men and women in a large (20 metres ish) space ahead of us and behind the line. The guy next to me was trying to convince the guys holding us back that he should be in the elite zone because he'd run 61 half/27 10k (seemed reasonable to me). Anyway, they didn't let him. As the numbers counted down 5, 4, 3... the people holding us back started running forward so by the klaxon we were only around 5 metres behind the elites.

Start of the Race

I started my watch going over the line and didn't have any problems being crowded or anything. First sensation was that my shoes were slipping around a bit between the rubber and the pavement. This would continue for at least 5k. I did the first k around 3'20" and field was still pretty homogeneously spread out. Eventually, the Euro women's pace group started forming just in front of me and we seemed to be running sub 2:23 pace so I sat with them for a bit and started asking people what pace they were going for. 2:25/6 seemed to be the consensus so I started drifting towards the front but kept having doubts about what to do. Up ahead, the African women's group was starting to form. Going through 3 & 4 k, we were about on 3'24" pace average but clearly slowing down. I made a small gap off the front without too much effort and this Brazilian guy came with me. I said "it's you and me now mate. Let's work together here". He seemed to be keen for 2:23 as well so I prepared for a long day with just this guy, caught in no-man's land between the African women (~2:20) and European women (~2:26).

First Bottle (5k)

At 5k, I was looking out for my bottle with the union flags on the many tables of many bottles. First were the 'elite' bottles that looked very pro, as if people had spent money specifically for these special bottles. Then our 'sub-elite' bottles appeared and I spotted mine just as I'd gone past it. I quickly decided to turn around, run back around 2 metres to get it. This put me back with the Euro women but I quickly put in a small acceleration to get back to the Brazilian who was being shadowed by this Aberdonian lad. Now there were three of us. I had my drink without losing any ground on our group. I had a quick chat with the Aberdonian, who didn't seem to have a good grasp on what he wanted to run. I offered him my drink but he said no. He seemed to be having gels from pockets.

Pace Being Pushed

Now a Dane joined us and we were about on time at 6/7k (3'24" average). I remember feeling pretty tired already, a bit like the {26.2k@3'24"} in Chalgrove a few weeks earlier. I was very flustered by

the bottle incident so resolved to try and calm down by 15k. By this time, our little quartet was pacing nicely, seeming to hold the African women at a consistent distance. The Dane said he might go a bit faster than 2:22/2:23. Then through 8k we were starting to gain a bit of time over my 3'24" pace. Coming into 10k, we were going up a hill, and downhill coming into 11k and I felt like the Aberdonian and Dane were really pushing. We must have been a good 40 seconds up on a 3'24" average coming into 11k and starting to catch the African women's group. At this point I think we had dropped our Brazilian friend. Around 13k I told my colleagues that I didn't want to go this hard and was going to drop back. I just ended up dropping to their back but not losing distance and we all caught the African women by 14k. I felt ok now, despite being nearly a minute up on 3'24" pace. I felt relaxed running in this elite women's group and it looked like we were on for 2:20/2:21.

Second Bottle (15k) and Getting Dropped by the Elite Women

I drifted back as we came into 15k in order to get a clear run at my bottle. Luckily this time, the pickup was perfect but the group had sped up into the bottles section, also for the purpose of getting their bottles, so the head of the group was now a good few seconds ahead. I dropped off, trying to stay calm while drinking which was a little bit tricky because I was a out of breath. At this point, the African women were really starting to move away so I decided to run with guys who were dropping off the back like me. Up to that point, the African women's group had stuck together really well but I think this was the point at which it exploded. There was an African woman being paced by a man, both in red, who seemed to be going backwards at around 3'24" pace so a couple of guys including me latched on the back. I was feeling pretty happy and relaxed at this point. We went through halfway 55 ish seconds up on 3'24" pace and this was the first time we had started to move slower than 3'24" pace, having been over a minute up at 18/19k.

Third Bottle (25k)

At around 22k a couple of the guys including myself became a bit restless and started to move off the front. For the next few k, we seemed to hold it at around 50 seconds ahead of 3'24" pace. The third bottle was actually ok to drink. I had it for a while and took my time which is probably the right way to do it. Now we were starting to catch some of the people who had remained with the African women's group after 15k.

Teetering on the 2:22:30 vs. 2:23:30 Ridge

Around 28k we started to lose more time and this guy in a blue vest (French?) started to push and I let him go, but in doing so I also managed to drop everyone else. No-one in sight was now in a group. There must have been ten of us each running individually along the road. The guy in blue stopped moving away at around 30k and he was around 10 seconds ahead. I made the calculation that he must have been on for about 2:22:30 so I thought I'll wait back here and try and catch up in a relaxed way in case I can hold on for that sort of time. Eventually he started coming back and I caught him and immediately passed him. As we went through the next km (no idea which really) it was clear we were losing time; we had both slowed. I kept pushing and was something like 30 to 40 seconds up on 3'24" pace. From there to the finish (around 10k), I was on my own, slowly picking off elite women and the occasional man, and a few men who had dropped out. At this point I was not able to keep pushing pace and was simply trying to hold for a 2:23:30 (3'24").

Final Bottle (35k)

At 35k, there were around three of us coming into the bottles. There was an elite black guy looking at the bottles as though he expected to see his missing bottle. I shouted "TRACK!" as we approached but he didn't seem to notice. He jumped forward towards the table just as I was coming in to grab my bottle. I managed to grab my bottle and barge through him so nothing lost, but it could have been pretty disastrous. I drank about a third of my bottle before giving up.

Teetering on the 2:23:30 vs. 2:24:00 Ridge

By 38k ish, I was slowing now to the point where 2:23:30 looked very unlikely and 2:24:00 was in the balance. I was maybe 20 seconds up on 3'24"/2:23:28 pace and losing around 10 seconds per k (so travelling at ~3'34"). By 40k, I was about 8 seconds behind 3'24"/2:23:28 pace so was reasonably sure I could hold on for 2:23:59. At this point, I tried to breathe hard and think about pain. Lungs didn't have any particular problem, nor stomach. It seemed like my legs were mechanically incapable of pushing off the ground hard enough but not so bad as to be catastrophic. This second lap of the city centre was very twisty and full of cobbles which was not really appreciated. I think at 41k I must have been about 10 seconds behind 3'24"/2:23:28. People were really dying. The Aberdonian had come back to me very quickly (having followed the African women to a 70:06 half) and I tried to encourage him to run with me but no luck. He would go on to slow to over 4' per k. Coming into the final few hundred metres, I was encouraged by seeing the start banner. I didn't know exactly how far it was to the finish, but I was sure it would be less than a couple hundred metres. I think I probably picked it up a bit here (40k to the finish was 3'24" pace). Seeing stars at the finish but pretty pleased with time (watch said 2:23:36).

After the Finish

One of the marshal ladies gave me a piece of red carpet from the hall which was nice. Headed straight to get the beers.

The Block

Goals for the block were to run 7:25 at the Thames Path 100k on the 9th September 2023 and to run 2:22:30 (*this actually varied a bit throughout the season*) at the Frankfurt Marathon on the 29th October 2023.

- The block lasted 18 weeks:
 - 4 easy
 - 4 adding tempos
 - 10 adding intervals
 - This phase included 2 x 2 week tapers for Thames Path 100k and Frankfurt Marathon
- Put in ten 100 mile+ weeks, averaging 140.2 km including two tapers and two build-ups
- Lifted every week except two, typically doing 3x8 for each of [squats, bench press, dead lift, bicep curls] + 30 x weighted calf/soleus raises
- Did calf/soleus raises, glute lifts and glute band exercises every day in the office (~4 days a week)

- At full training, I would do one intervals/Tuesday session, one tempo/Thursday session and one long run per week
 - Aimed to do up to 12k of work in intervals, but I found that 12x1000 on 5 minute cycle was too many to keep the intensity high enough
 - Charlie's sessions are often significantly shorter, being typically 5 – 7k of work
 - Tempos would typically be one of:
 - 6k @ 1-hour pace
 - 10k @ half-marathon pace
 - 16k @ marathon pace
 - Long runs built up to 50k (fasted or with bottles) prior to the 100k, and up to 40k (fasted or with bottles) prior to the marathon

Block Results

- I ran 7:48:00/1st at the Thames Path 100k (6/10 performance) and 2:23:31 at the Frankfurt Marathon (7/10 performance)

Minor races include:

- Lochcarron Highland Games (3rd, 3/10 performance)
- Liverpool NAL 800m (2:07/7th tactical, 7/10 performance)
- Liverpool NAL 3000m (8:42/2nd tactical, 8/10 performance)
- Rosenheim Final 800m (2:06/3rd tactical, 6/10 performance)
- Rosenheim Final 3000m (8:41/1st, 7/10 performance)
- National 6-stage (18:14, 6/10 performance)
- Richmond Surrey League (19th, 3/10 performance)
- RunThrough 5,000m (14:44, 7/10 performance)

Lessons from the Block

Nutrition

Learning how to effectively consume calories, salt, water and caffeine during races was perhaps the biggest lesson from the block. Over the course of the 18 weeks, I experimented with all sorts of different combinations and concentrations of drinks. The recipe I settled on is the following:

Per 500ml of water:

- 56g of maltodextrin
- 44g of fructose
- 1.5g of trisodium citrate dihydrate
- 0.5g of table salt

Depending on the race logistics, you want to take about 50mg (one pro-plus) of caffeine per hour to offset the decay in blood concentration.

Aim to drink 100g of carbs per hour (for the recipe above, that is 500ml per hour).

In the marathon, I had 350ml bottles with the above concentrations + 50mg caffeine at 5k, 15k, 25k and 35k, with the intention of drinking about 300ml each time. I had about 500mg of caffeine before the race, which had decayed to perhaps about 450mg by the start (the suggested level you want is 3-6mg per kg of body weight). The half-life of caffeine in the blood is 4 to 5 hours.

In the 100k, I had 4x500ml bottles of mixture + loads and loads of water + 4 gels. I had intended to take another 4 gels but forgot to pick them up at 50k. In the future, I'll be doing 100k races with better provisions for nutrition so this detail isn't really that important.

I found the 350ml bottles really convenient to pick up and drink. The weight was really easy and it squirted nicely. The flag + cap device also functioned really well.

Training

This is a tricky one. I am reasonably sure from the results towards the end of the block (19th in Surrey League, 14:44 on the track and 2:23:31 in Frankfurt) that **I am less fit than I was in May 2023.**

Here are some comparisons:

- 5k:
 - Ran 14:44 solo dodging mickey mouse RunThroughers the whole way in May23
 - Ran 14:44 with perfect pacing by Seyfu on the track in Oct23
- Marathon:
 - Ran 31:56 solo in Sep21 before running 2:29:22 solo in Oct21
 - Ran 30:37 in a perfectly paced track 10k in May23, although it was a bit warm
 - $30:37 * 2:29:22 / 31:56 = 2:23:12$
 - Ran 2:23:31 in near ideal conditions and field in Oct23
- Cross Country:
 - Was beaten by Max Nicholls, Tom Foster, Ed Mallet and Ed Chuck in Oct23
 - These are all good runners, but being beaten significantly by all of them is not great

In May 2023, I had trained with a short build-up after a successful but disrupted build-up for Strasimeno. Mileage was good, but not huge (110 – 150k for a few weeks). The main difference between Oct23 vs. May23 could be characterised by **swapping quality for quantity**. In this most recent block, my workouts have been solid, but not any of them particularly spicy, and the long runs have been long, but lacking the faster ones that I would have been capable of before.

The question now is whether I should continue to push the 100 mile weeks? Will I be able to do so while also being capable of the quality?

Lessons from the Race

Pacing

A 16:16 third 5k and 70:43 first half characterised a race paced badly on blind reflection, however I think I made the right choices. To run slower in the third 5k would have meant being alone for the last 30k of the race, occasionally encountering the dead remnants of runners spat out the back of the elite women's group. Going through 17k with the lead women gave me the opportunity to run with disciplined and ambitious runners, with a chance of also running significantly faster than I had

planned. Perhaps with a 71:30 split and pacing the whole way, 2:22:59 could have been on, but then again maybe not.

Race Sensations

I have learnt that sometimes it can be ok to feel tired and flustered early on in the race. Even though I was pretty much on pace at 5k, I had the feeling that 2:23:30 would not be possible. By 15k, I had significantly increased the pace but felt a lot better. With more experience and data, I will be able to trust even more in the numbers and rely less on feeling.

Rubber

This was the first time in the block I had experienced shoes slipping on the road. Perhaps it was a strange combination of tarmac, humidity and standing water. Rob, who was also wearing the Nike Vaporfly Next% 2, experienced the same. Dooley who was wearing version 3 of the same shoe didn't experience this. I had noted the day before that the rubber pattern on these shoes is more sparse and thin. Maybe the Continental rubber on the bottom of Adidas shoes could be useful?

Mental

Marathons, and long races in general, have this reputation of depending heavily on mental game. I think this is true to an extent, and what makes them quite a scary undertaking. It's much more common to see someone add 10% to their time in the last half of a marathon than in a 10k. If you blow up in a 10k, you might add a minute (6" per km) rather than over 10 minutes in a marathon (14" per km).

I wrote three reminders on my arms: "Cadence", "Breathe" and "PAIN".

I don't think cadence was very useful since it seemed to upset me more than calm me down. Cadence is probably one to fix in training rather than worry about during a race. Josh Kerr has said he was thinking about cadence when he beat Ingebrigtsen to become world champion.

Remembering to breathe I find always helps. It gives you something to focus on, and may improve your performance. In a marathon it might also help to move the pain from your legs to your lungs.

Thinking about pain is the main one for me. I have a tendency to try and justify slowing down on the basis that I can lose such and such time and still run sub-whatever. Or you'll convince yourself that you've blown up and there's no point pushing anymore. If you just aim to hurt yourself as much as possible, any argument about this split or that split or this time barrier or blowing up goes out the window.

Watch

My GPS distance at the end of the race was 43.4k. That's a 6" per km difference! Looking at the pace chart, it seems the worst of this was in the city at the beginning and end. It's a good thing nothing I saw during the race had any relation to GPS data! I had my automatic intervals on, which worked really nicely. The km markers seemed to be in roughly the right places (there were no anomalous

kms where the implied pace differed hugely from my feelings relative to adjacent kms). For the next marathon, I might consider a super lightweight watch with just the metronome function – this would also work nicely in a lapped 100k race. I have become more used to not wearing a watch on the track and on the country, and getting closer to that for a marathon would be nice.

More Shoe Discussion

Brand	Nike	Nike	Adidas	Adidas	Adidas	Asics	Asics	Asics	Hoka	NB	Saucony
Modell	Vaporfly Next% 3	Vaporfly Next% 2	Pro 3	Prime X	Takumi Sen 9	Meta Speed 3	Meta Speed Elite +	MSS	Rocket X2	FCSC Ev3	Endorphin Elite
Heel	38	40	39.5	50	33	36	39	39	36	40	39.5
Toe	30	32	33	40	27	29	31	34	31	36	31.5
Weight (Men's 9)	184	195	215	272	181	220	210	205	212	215	204

See above some details of shoes available on the market. You want low weight and high stack height to take advantage of the super foam. The Vaporfly Next%3 is very tempting with its low weight and thinner rubber. The thickness is better on the Next%2 however and I think there is more scope to chop weight off the Next%3.

I have bought some Takumi Sen 8s, and it looks like there is decent scope to chop rubber off those. Not yet decided whether they'll be my race shoes given their low stack height, but £85 including delivery was too tempting. I've had about five pairs of the Takumi Sen 3 and they're probably my favourite shoes of all time; I am still nursing a pair which only gets taken out on special occasions just a few kilometres at a time.