

# A fairy tale marathon

By Bjarke Vestesen

The first time a runner completes a marathon is like a fairy tale come true. After so many kilometres the pain is replaced with the ultimate joy, the enthusiasm and the rush of victory experienced in running the last hundred metres before the finish line.

My fairy tale came true in the H.C. Andersen Marathon, my first marathon ever. The race is named after the famous Danish author Hans Christian Andersen, who was born more than 200 years ago and whose books have been translated into more than 100 languages. The race takes place in the city of Odense, where he grew up and wrote many of his most successful stories like *The Ugly Duckling*, *The Emperor's New Clothes* and *The Little Mermaid*.

The H.C. Andersen Marathon was held for the first time in the year 2000. Since then it has been held every September, with an ever growing number of participants. More than 3000 runners from 28 nations competed in the 2007 race, which incorporated the Danish Marathon Championships. A separate women-only half marathon was held as part of the event.

Participants ranged from professional elite runners to amateur marathon debutants, to runners dressed up as characters from Andersen's fairy tales. I approached this marathon after several months of preparation with long and short runs following a sports injury. At the age of 42 and with many half marathons behind me it was now or never. Anxiety grew in me leading up to the race, although I was eager to try the marathon distance. When the starting signal finally sounded it was a fantastic feeling to have defied my own scepticism.

I chose this marathon because it is one of the flattest marathons in Denmark. This makes it a good debut race or if you are going for a fast time. The route takes you through beautiful parts of Odense, Denmark's third largest city, crossing back and forth between suburbia, the city centre, the harbour, and back to the city centre. The race starts and finishes at the University of Southern Denmark and has refreshment stations every 2.5km.

Spectators cheer the runners on in many places along the course. A good, supportive audience was crucial for me in finishing the race after having completed most of the



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harrowing distance. The biggest challenge is the tunnel in the city centre between 35-36km. The road out of the tunnel is merciless and many choose to slow to a walk up the incline.

But the race is much more than just a marathon. For the locals it is a city festival with lots of entertainment along the route. Music has always accompanied the marathon. All along the route orchestras give small concerts and loudspeakers are put in the street to entertain the weary runners as they pass. On one corner a rock band is placed to make sure the runners can hear them for as long as possible. In another place the Odense Postal Orchestra and the Odense Marching Band give us an extra fanfare. Just as the crisis is at its worst, when your legs hurt the most and all your energy is spent; suddenly there is a samba band with inciting, exotic music that cannot fail to make you feel good.

Somehow the samba rhythms are transferred to our bodies and we are sent on our way towards the finish - always fighting our inner demons. The last kilometre is a constant battle to move your legs towards the finish line.

just 100m to the finish line. My name is announced over the loud speaker, and I put on a final spurt to cross the beeping chip timing mats and have a medal thrown around my neck.

In that very second all the pain is forgotten. It is like flying or walking on water, even if I can hardly stand. The same chip on my shoe that tells me that my time is four hours and 12 minutes has also allowed my friends and family to follow my split times at home on the computer as I passed through the timing points every 10km. It is far from the winning time of the





race but it is my personal victory as it is for everybody else who finishes – no matter how fast or slow they have been.

Just like in many of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales my personal fairy tale ends well. I have completed my first marathon ever

in the city where Andersen was born. The ugly duckling has become a beautiful swan and the tin soldier has gotten his princess.

I get a beautiful medal with a portrait of the old poet in memory of my first fantastic marathon. It will definitely not be the last!

For the locals the race is a **city festival** with lots of entertainment along the route

**MEN:**

1	Jonah KEMBOI	KEN	2:15:05
2	Philip BANDAWE	ZIM	2:15:27
3	William KIPROTICH	KEN	2:17:43
4	Andrej TOPTUN	UKR	2:18:03
5	Julias MUTAI	KEN	2:21:56
6	Soren PALSHOJ	DEN	2:21:59
7	Steen PETERSEN	DEN	2:23:09
8	Thomas SONDERGAARD	DEN	2:23:26
9	Jeppe FARSOHT	DEN	2:26:13
10	Alexey KHOKHLOV	RUS	2:28:16

**WOMEN:**

1	Irina SONGERLAYNEN	RUS	2:42:15
2	Jane ROTICH	KEN	2:43:48
3	Agnieszka LEWANDOWSKA	POL	2:45:39
4	Lotta SINCLAIR	SWE	2:47:36
5	Olga GONCHARENKO	UKR	2:48:53
6	Margrethe LOGAVLEN	NOR	2:51:25
7	Lene K DUUS	DEN	2:57:12
8	Tove BRODERSEN	DEN	3:12:45
9	Mia SORENSEN	DEN	3:15:17
10	Christina NIELSEN	DEN	3:16:04

**WOMEN-ONLY HALF MARATHON**

1	Agnes MUTUNE	DEN	1:17:44
2	Pauline NJERY	DEN	1:17:46
3	Anne-mette AAGAARD	DEN	1:19:41

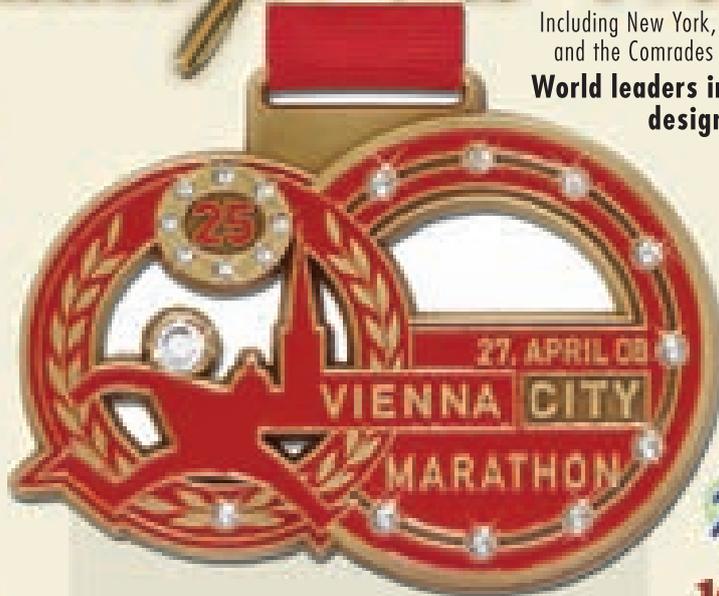
**RACE CONTACT DETAILS**

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Full race contact listings start on page 78

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