

IMPACT MAGAZINE

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MARATHON CITIES

1 Adidas Vancouver International Marathon

On May 1st, over 10,000 runners will line up in front of B.C. Place Stadium in downtown Vancouver at the start line of the 33rd annual Adidas Vancouver International Marathon and Half-Marathon. Think about that for just a moment. Over 10,000 people will run at least 21 kilometres, with almost half running 42 kilometres. That's a lot of feet pounding over a lot of distance, giving the Vancouver Marathon the honour of being the largest marathon in Canada. This year, the marathon is capped at 5,500, the half at 8,000 (it has sold out in the past), and the children's run will hold 1,800, with a total capacity for 15,000 participants.

You might think this popularity makes sense given Vancouver's gorgeous scenery, weather that's the envy of the entire country, and its proximity to millions of people in the lower mainland, Vancouver Island, and Seattle. Those are all true and definitely contribute to the marathon's success, but according to the chairman of the race, they're only part of the marathon's success story. Derek Hodge has been with the race for 15 years and he's seen the marathon more than double in size in less than a decade.

"The boom in running and in particular in long distances in the last five years has been driven by women. The availability of running clinics and clubs that just weren't there before have empowered women to take up running in huge numbers. We anticipate that our half-marathon this year will be two-thirds or more women. A decade ago, it was the other way around."

Three cheers for girl power, but there are dozens of runs and races across Canada and around the world that following the same theory would attract females too, so there must be something else in the Vancouver event's arsenal.

After some prompting, Hodge admits—almost sheepishly—that there is one more

reason why Vancouver is number one, and it's a big one. It's because Vancouver's organizers have developed quite a reputation for trail blazing and creating numerous marathon firsts in an industry in which it is difficult to set oneself apart. Hodge points out that any basic race today with the normal bells and whistles is considered a good race, so to stand out and be a great race, event organizers have to think outside the box.

"About four years ago, we were the first marathon to offer a finisher's DVD, so every



finisher could have a keepsake of themselves crossing the line. I remember a year after doing that, when I was at Berlin's marathon, we were the talk of the town."

This year, Hodge says that they're attempting a streaming video of the entire race on their Web site so that anyone can log on and see friends or family members.

To find out more about the Vancouver Marathon and other events that day, including the very popular children's MaraFun, go to www.adidasvanmarathon.ca.

BURNCO Calgary Marathon

Canada's oldest continuous marathon will celebrate its 41st running on July 10. In recent years the BURNCO Calgary Marathon has become synonymous with the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede, as the race coincides with the Stampede's first weekend. All the more reason to visit the city to take in 'the greatest outdoor show on earth' while participating in the marathon or one of the other races that weekend. The marathon is the focus, however. "Although we heavily

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Have you chosen your marathon this year? Here are five popular marathons in Alberta and B.C.

BY LOUISE HODGSON-JONES AND LAURIE DAWSON



ABOVE: The start of the 2004 BURNCO Calgary Marathon. OPPOSITE: Elite runners get off to a head-start at the Adidas Vancouver International Marathon.

promote the other events, the marathon is our premier race,” explains Jacqui Sanderson, race director.

Held at the one of the hottest times of the year, the heat and altitude doesn’t deter runners from all over North America from enjoying the fast, flat course that takes in the Exhibition grounds, the Calgary Zoo, the Bow River pathway, and some of Calgary’s oldest neighbourhoods. Sanderson has been working closely with the City of Calgary making small but necessary changes to the course this year. “Runners will be running down Bow Crescent, one of the oldest and attractive roads in the city instead of Bowness Road, and we have a full road closure on Memorial Drive between Edmonton

Trail and Shaganappi Trail.”

Although the weather can be unpredictable in July, slow finishing times over the years have been attributed to the heat. The course record set in 1983 still stands—2:23:37—10 minutes faster than the best time recorded last year. But runners such as eight-time-winner Kelvin Broad aren’t deterred by this: “I come here to have a good time. I love the Western theme, and the course, for the most part, is flat.”

Over 1,200 runners are expected to register for this year’s BURNCO Calgary Marathon. The Crape Geomatics Half-Marathon and the Colliers International 10-kilometre race are also hoping to attract 2,500 runners apiece. The Calgary Stampede



LEFT: The ING Edmonton Marathon is now an established fixture in August. **CENTRE:** Bruce Deacon winning the 2004 Royal Victoria Marathon. **RIGHT:** Woody gives runners a high five at the Red Deer Marathon.

4 x 10-Kilometre Corporate Challenge and the YMCA Strong Kids Marathon make up this weekend festival of running. Check out www.calgarymarathon.com.

ING Edmonton Marathon

The ING Edmonton Marathon—now in its second year with a title sponsor—is gearing up to welcome thousands of runners and walkers to its “Weekend of Champions” event on August 20 and 21. The marathon and the half-marathon last year attracted 2,000 runners, a number that Co-race Director Alan White is predicting will increase to 3,000.

Although the marathon has been a fixture on the Edmonton running scene for many years, it is only recently that the event has settled on a regular date, venue, and course. What has remained constant is the low-key atmosphere, which gives it a special local focus. “We are a smaller-scale marathon, and this makes it attractive to a lot of runners,” says White. The course—identical to 2004—meanders through Edmonton’s beautiful river valley, which means that although it isn’t flat or fast it does, as White explains, “make for an entertaining course.”

Five events make up the weekend’s festivities with the 10-kilometre, Mayor’s five-kilometre, and the kids’ marathon mile on the Saturday, and the marathon and half-marathon on the Sunday. An extra bonus for Sunday’s runners is a hot brunch after they have finished racing—a welcome change from the usual cookie, banana, and juice that a lot of races offer.

And if you are a walker, then the organizers have something very special. “With walking now being so prevalent in races, we want to recognize these participants, so every runner, from five-kilometre to the marathon, will receive a finisher’s medal,” says White. For more information on the ING Edmonton Marathon visit www.events.runningroom.com.

Royal Victoria Marathon

The conditions were perfect, the course was flatter than in previous years, and the atmosphere was electric as more than 2,200 runners lined up for the start of the 25th Royal Victoria Marathon on October 10, 2004. But for one runner there was just one objective in mind—to break the course record, a record that had stood for 23 years. It was supposed to be Bruce Deacon’s swan song, but the running gods weren’t looking down on the Victoria runner that day. His finishing time of 2:21:07 was certainly amazing, but three minutes off the course record set by Tom Howard in 1981.

Bob Reid, elite athletic director for the marathon has seen course times change drastically since 1980. “In the early years runners were fast; then going into the middle years they were running their best; now the times are slower,” he says. Reid attributes this change to multi-sport training and to the change in attitude to marathon racing. “The course records were set in the late eighties and early nineties when you used to run 120 miles a week. Now that is all changing.”

Also, since the introduction of an eight-kilometre race in 1986 and the half-marathon course in 2001 the race is attracting a wide variety of runners who do not necessarily want to run the full marathon distance. “The addition of the shorter races has increased the level of enthusiasm,” explains Reid. “The half-marathon is a very popular, competitive distance that anyone can handle, and we are seeing an increase in numbers each year.”

The marathon course has seen some changes over the years, from the double 13-mile loop in the early days to the now scenic out-and-back course through James Bay, Fairfield, Oak Bay, and Uplands. It is the local enthusiasm for the event that makes it such a popular race. “We used to promote contests for cheering stations along the route, but now it just naturally happens,” explains Race

Director Rob Reid.

Rob Reid, who has been involved with the race for 16 years, has been instrumental in developing partnerships and promoting running as a healthy lifestyle, particularly among the youth. The one-kilometre kids’ run was his idea and KidSport, a charity that enables kids to participate in sport, is one of the beneficiaries of the marathon. “It’s all about promoting health—you can’t think short term where health is concerned; you have to think long term.”

With more than 7,000 runners participating in all the events in 2004, the race organizers are expecting an increase this year. A highlight of the weekend is their popular speaker series, bringing in local and international celebrities to talk on a variety of running topics. Last year Dick Beardsley, Joe Henderson, and Kathrine Switzer were among the speakers. This year will see an educational as well as motivational theme with youth activity and obesity being a focus.

The 2005 Royal Victoria Marathon will take place on Sunday October 9. See www.royalvictoriamarathon.com.

Woody’s RV World Marathon, Red Deer

Small is beautiful—so sums up the seventh annual Woody’s RV World Marathon in Red Deer, which takes place on May 22. This scenic marathon attracts runners from all over Alberta because of its size and low-key atmosphere. “This is a great race for first-time marathoners,” says Gord Deck, marathon vice-chairman. And it’s obvious why. Largely flat—although there is a challenging hill towards the end—the course meanders its way through the picturesque paved trail system following Red Deer’s river valley.

The marathon and the half-marathon—both start at the same time—attract over 1,100 runners. For more information see www.reddeer-marathon.org.