

Envy the guts and glory brigade



Miriam Lord discovers that she wouldn't mind being a marathon runner once the hard work is done

Jealousy doesn't come into it until the thoroughbreds are home and hosed, and the guts and glory brigade are beginning to cross the line.

Because who, in their right mind, would want to rise early on a bank holiday Monday morning and run 26 miles through the streets of Dublin?

God love them, and good luck to them, but rather than us.

At least that's the way the day starts, when viewed from the sidelines.

The athletes made it look so unattainably easy. First home were the wheelchair competitors, led by Welshman Richie Powell. He belted across the line in just under two hours, hardly out of breath.

Richie nearly didn't make the Dublin Marathon this year. On his way to catch the ferry on Sunday evening, he was involved in a car crash. The ferry waited for him, and he went on to win his second successive title, despite getting a puncture in the closing stages of the race.

In the women's race, Russia's Alina Ivanova breezed home with a big smile on her face. She seemed untroubled by her 26-mile journey - just a light misting of perspiration on her brow.

Finally - the starting times of the three categories had been staggered - the winner of the men's race rounded the corner and sprinted for the line. Aleksey Sokolov threw his arms in the air as he finished, before having the decency to look slightly winded after his record-breaking exertions.

The parade of the thin and the taut continued for most of the next hour. Michael O'Connor from Galway was the first Irishman home. "I'm here to win the national championships, and it's exactly what I've done," said the 34-year-old, absolutely delighted.

Pauline Curley from Tullamore was the first Irish woman home. "It's lonely, running out there on your own," she said, having just posted a time of two hours and 42 minutes. Not a hint of a wheeze, and her blue eyeliner still perfectly in place.

No. Jealousy doesn't come into it with these athletes. We can watch

them with a sense of detachment as they bounce on the balls of their feet towards the line, not an ounce of fat between them. They're a different breed.

Leave them at it.

But then the others - the thousands of others - start to arrive. The ones we wouldn't like to be at the start of the race, or half way around, or at the 20-mile mark.

But now that the hard work is done, maybe we wouldn't mind being them after all.

They have battled with mind and body and know, after all the doubts, that they have gained the upper hand.

Victory is in sight. That final corner and there, just a couple of hundred yards up the road, is the gantry with the digital clock and sponsor's slogan: "Impossible is Nothing."

We're not looking at sinewy whippets here, but all shapes and makes of ordinary people.

They see the finish and drive for it. (The fact that it's located adjacent to the gates of Leinster House doesn't put people off. The place is closed, so the danger of marauding TDs on the scent of photo opportunities is averted.)

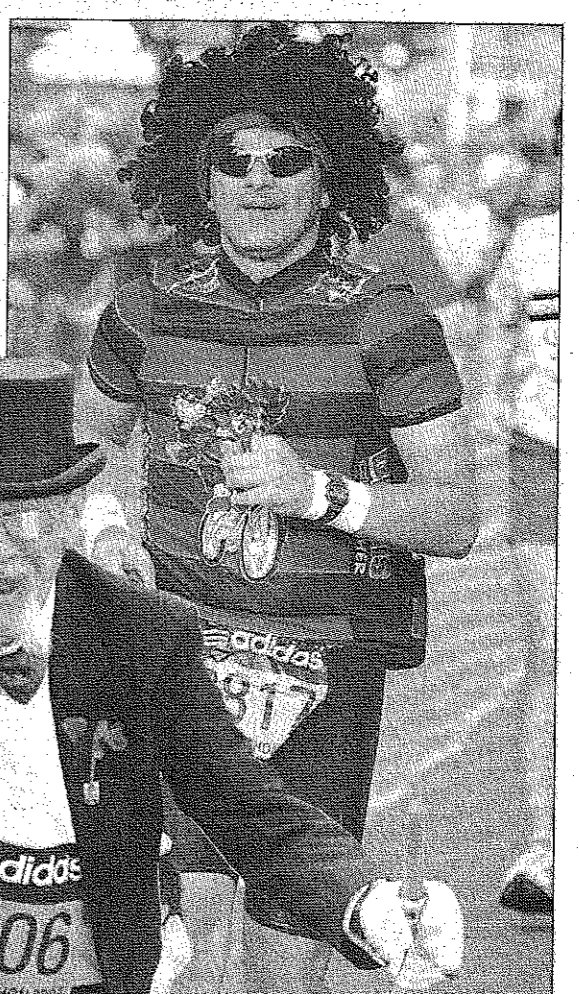
Some find something extra and sprint for home, some limp and lurch towards the line, one man charges down the finishing straight roaring "Valeri Borzov! Valeri Borzov! Valeri Borzov!" There are tears, lots of tears. Small children run alongside their parents for the last few yards.

Many are fulfilling a promise to themselves, many are fulfilling a promise made to a loved one who is no longer with them.

The experienced runners know, no matter how bad they are feeling, to look up, smile and wave to the automatic camera above.

But it's the wibbly wobbly winners who are the real heart of this spectacle. The men and women who might struggle through on melodeon legs, but can say forevermore that they ran a marathon.

Fifteen brothers and sisters from the O'Donoghue family in Birr, Co Offaly



ran and walked their way into the Guinness Book of Records when they completed the marathon.

Youngest brother Cronan (33) was first over the line, followed by Willie, Kieran, Theresa, Joe, Pat, Robert, Mary, Margaret, Noel, Adelaide, James, Brenda, Kevin and Louise.

Student Noel Mahon (27) from Ranelagh in Dublin ran the course wearing a pinstripe suit, shirt and tie. He was joined by his cousin Cormac O'Connor (21) from Sligo, who also wore a suit for the occasion. They ran to raise money for the Friedrich's Ataxia Society.

Noel explained that they only decided to run the night before, because he was recovering from an injury.

The suits were a last minute decision because they hadn't the time "to do something really wacky".

Did wearing suits not qualify? "Not really. We had intended wearing armchairs, with fake legs hanging from them."

Which brings us to Isla McCrae from Inverness in Scotland, who was dressed as a pumpkin. "I've done eight marathons already, so I needed extra motivation," she explained.

Mother of five, Evelyn McManus from Fermanagh was joined by Aoife (11), Eoghan (9), and Niamh (5) when she crossed the line. "This is my

Ireland last week," said Paddy.

A group of about a hundred from the Clare Crusaders ran in memory of Howard Flannery from Ennis, who died in a road accident this summer. Howard was one of the founders of the Clare Crusaders, who fund a clinic in Ennis for children with cerebral palsy.

Meanwhile, Mary Ann Callinan (30), a teacher in the Ursuline Convent in Thurles, said she decided to give the marathon a go after watching the London equivalent on television.

"I thought if people with heart transplants and artificial limbs can do it, so can I. But it was very hard going."

Mary Ann, from Dundrum in Tipperary, was running in aid of the county hospice.

Comedians Ed Byrne and Tommy Tiernan completed the course, with Ed coming in first. "It was brutal, brutal, brutal," said Tommy. "I need physio, a priest, a Peruvian whore, heroin and half a ton of tea."

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It's the wibbly wobbly winners who are the real heart of this spectacle - those who struggle through on melodeon legs

second marathon and this time, I ran the whole way." She was running for the Irish Cancer Society. "Under four hours - it's a dream come true."

The first leprechaun also passed through in under four hours, just after Paddy Craddock (73) from Blackrock. Grandsons Ross O'Toole (9) and Paul Smith (16) escorted him over the line. "I've won Fittest Grandparent in

Photographs: Frank Miller and Dara Mac Dónaill

Crazy costumes - from left, Kenny Murdock waddling his way to the start of the marathon. Isla McCrae from Scotland decided to dress as a pumpkin to make the marathon more of a challenge. James Harper, a Denis the Menace from the North crossing the finish line and James Hempsey (in suit, top hat and patriotic shades) at the starting line.

Photographs: Dara Mac Dónaill