

## Allister Hutton London Marathon

Scotland's Allister Hutton was a nearly man until he came through thick mist and rain like a Highland warrior from a damp Scottish moor to win the 10th London marathon. Leading from 14 miles, the 35 year old pushed his body to the limit, to win the world's greatest city marathon.

Hutton, whose first race was a Boys Brigade cross-country, had won Scottish titles on the track and country, before graduating to the Commonwealth Games where he finished fifth in the 1982 Brisbane 10 000m. He had also beaten world cross-country champion John Tracey on the mud at the 1981 Gateshead International, but had not produced the goods on the world stage.

The Edinburgh Southern Harrier's first marathon was the Moscow Olympic trial in Milton Keynes a year earlier, but he aborted at half-way vowing to never run one again. Hutton was, however, persuaded and encouraged by distance running coach, Alan Storey to stick at it.

In the 1985 London marathon the slightly built Scots fortunes changed as he finished third behind Welshman Steve Jones (2:08.16) and Olympic bronze medallist Charlie Spedding (2:08.33) in a classic Battle of Britain. Hutton's reward was a Scottish record of 2:09.16 which like Spedding's English record still stands to this day.

He finished third again in 1986, but then it looked like natural decline was setting in as he finished way-off the pace in 1987 and 1988. In 1989, in his fifth attempt to conquer London, he gave out a warning that he was once again in the ranks of world class finishing sixth.

As the rain and mist descended upon London, Allister Hutton, his remorseless padding style often seen scorching the grass in Edinburgh's local parks, the Meadows, Colinton Dell and Meggetland, seized the day. It was not all plain sailing as the coach driver carrying the elite field to the start lost his way and then was caught-up in a heavy traffic. Hutton recalled being unbothered about the looming crisis of missing the start, "I was cool, calm and collected about the whole situation. I was warm on the coach and I assumed that the race would not start without us." The coach arrived later than expected, but on time for the race. Hutton added, "At the start, I was totally relaxed, no butterflies. The rain stopped as we lined-up and when the gun went, everything clicked into action." By six miles at the Cutty Sark, the lead group was down to ten runners Hutton remembered asking the designated pace

maker Nick Rose (1980 World cross-country bronze medallist) what the story was regarding the runners around him. He said, "Rose was unable to tell me, so we pushed it along."

By Tower Bridge (12 miles) Rose had helped Hutton open up a gap and not wanting to be stranded at the Isle of Dogs, he pulled out at 14 miles, leaving Hutton on his own and in front. He recounts, "Everybody was cheering, shouting times but I was running blind until Ingrid Kristiansen's coach who was following the race on his bike, gave me what I knew was reliable information at 16 miles." The gap was 70 seconds at 19 miles and Alan Storey, who had earlier in his career advised him to stick at the marathon, sitting on the lead float with race Director Chris Brasher, shouted to the tiring Hutton, "Stay on your feet and you have it won! "

The "real race" was taking place behind him between Salvatore Bettiol and Juan Romera of Spain after world record holder Belayneh Dinsamo, of Ethiopia, dropped out at 14 miles. American, Bill Reifsnyder of America was also relegated to the ranks of also-rans by the chasing pack.

At 22 miles and nearing the return visit to Tower Bridge, the Edinburgh Southern Harrier thought for the first time that "winning was a distinct possibility." Even so, the attritional effects of the marathon, started to take their toll, "I started to hurt and I began to dig deep."

As a result of an ancient Act of Parliament, the lead float was unable to escort Hutton up the Mall. Amusingly, he recounts Storey giving him final encouragement and himself thinking, "It's alright for you, you're getting a car to the finish." At Birdcage walk and heading towards the finish at Westminster Bridge, Hutton said, "I felt Zonked." He added, "The slight slope up from Parliament Square felt like a mountain. I said to myself you've got it won, just keep your head down, and pump away. I had to swerve to avoid a guy who decided to throw himself out at me on Westminster Bridge."

Retelling the moment he crossed the line exhausted, Hutton laughed, "I've never been so relieved in my life. I was mentally and physically shattered. Being alone from 14 miles had done a lot of damage. I've never been so tired in my life."

Hutton was escorted to the press conference at the former Greater London council chambers on the South Bank. He said smiling, "I was sat on a throne like seat and grilled by the world media. I felt like a king. I was tired, but

chuffed.” Allister Hutton so nearly the nearly man had finally conquered one of the world’s greatest foot races, the London marathon.

***(Brian Aitken)***

### The Top Three

1 Allister Hutton (GBR) 2:10.10

2 Salvatore Bettiol (ITA) 2:10.40

3 Juan Romera (ESP) 2:10.48