



# Race Report

## Great North Run

Date: 20<sup>th</sup> September, 2009  
Location: Newcastle

### Great North – Great Race – Great People

By: Mike Monk

The Great North is one of those "must do" races on my list. So I was delighted to get a place via the ballot last year. Injury caused a deferment so come September I was back on the road and trying to get myself into shape. With the help of running partner Wendy Harding and the magic massage fingers of Tina Harrington (working on my legs I hasten to point out!) it was time to make the trek north by car on the Saturday.

Due to unforeseen circumstances my co-driver Mick (husband of Wendy) had to cancel. So bright and early Wendy and I set off complete with passports, thermal underwear and a polar bear scarer just in case the warm weather really ends at Watford Gap. Mick set up a thing called a "satnav" which insisted on chattering away for 8 hours and as we were within a mile of the hotel, near the Metro Centre, it insisted we took exits that weren't on roundabouts and generally had a hissy fit!!!

After an early night we set off to park in the free multi storey car park in the Metro Centre only to find it was closed until 10am! So parking in another car park which warned of a 3 hour maximum stay, I dashed back to meet up with Wendy and some other runners waiting for the City centre bus. There was a bright orange globe in the blue sky and suddenly I felt myself getting a bit warm. Shedding my thermals, but not discarding my anti polar bear blunderbuss, made me cooler and less conspicuous. Someone muttered something about "Southern Softies" in a rather strange dialect but as soon as I donned my Newcastle replica football shirt, strapped on a false beer belly and shouted "Away the Lads" the locals took me to their hearts!

After the bus ride it wasn't too difficult to find the start - 50,000 runners do make a big impression and tend to take over the streets! As you know, dear reader, the first place to find is the loo queue and there we came across fellow club runner Tony Flint proudly displaying a £3 Asda tee shirt under his TZR vest. Yes folks, he too believes that the temperature just reaches zero north of Watford!

So to the starting pens. Luckily we three were in the same pen and other runners moved aside at the sight of Tony's brilliant white tee shirt and my anti polar bear blunderbuss. Now what you will find, dear reader is that the GNR does "sound" in a big way. Forget the pathetic system (one speaker for 15,000 runners at the Great South) in Portsmouth. At Newcastle they do BIG SOUND with numerous banks of speakers as high as a house spaced out along the starting pens! No chance of quiet contemplation before the off and no chance to not join in the warm up with a helicopter zooming in on anyone daring not to jump up and down like a lunatic. Try that wearing a football top over a strap-on beer belly and carrying my essential polar bear scarer and crying "away the lads" in time with the air pressure coming from a speaker that blots out the sun!!

Anyway, as expected, we set off on time thanks to the BBC and large crowds wishing us well. After crossing the Tyne Bridge (not quite Tower Bridge) we suddenly found the road going up! Oh no - a hill! Now dear reader it's no secret that it's flat round Felpham so drastic measures were needed as I lay gasping at the roadside watching Wendy skip off into the distance. Yes the beer belly had to go.

Feeling better after taking on fluids, mopping my face with "the shirt" and shouldering the blunderbuss I set off after Tony and Wendy crying "away the lads" to bemused onlookers.



With such a large number of runners I can't really remember much of the course apart from the inclines. There were quite a few bands and a good level of support from the spectators. I do remember the temperature going up and the sight of quite a few runners in distress. There seemed to be a fair number of ambulances and busy First Aiders especially towards the end. Also we had to run through the Powersong Zone designed to give you a boost by administering brain-numbing music through more mountains of speakers!-

I was feeling reasonable (apart from a slight deafness) but as I got within 5 miles of the finish I was suddenly aware that the support given to me by spectators seemed to disappear until a fellow runner suggested I took off the Newcastle shirt as we were entering Sunderland supporters territory! Once freed from the black and white and putting on the red and white, the crowd rose as one to welcome me!! But, dear reader, I still held my trustee blunderbuss tightly as before long we ran down a steep hill and there was THE SEA!!! But, to my surprise, it was blue with not a sign of a polar bear on an ice flow anywhere. So offering my trustee blunderbuss to a kindly hoodie, who said he would look after it for me, I set sail for the finishing line a mile along the seafront lined by very large crowds.

I have to say that the finish area was great. Loads of space, views over the sea, bright and sunny and no Polar Bears. Much better than the London. Then to celebrate my success the Red Arrows put on a display just for me. Being a generous soul I invited my fellow runners to enjoy it with me. So we (Wendy, Maureen and Tony) relaxed in the sun, chatted and prepared for our journey back to Newcastle and hopefully a car free from a wheel clamp.

Now, dear reader, beware of the post race travel and the following if you do the GNR:

1. The queue for buses was massive and, apparently, the Metro was much, much worse.
2. You have to pay for transport although my bus pass was accepted on Stagecoach so saving £3:50p
3. The finish shuttle buses don't drop you off at the start so we had a 10 minute walk to find our connection back to the Metro Centre.
4. When we got on the road at 5:30pm it took two hours to do the first 55 miles on the A1. Where had all these people come from?! No accidents just cars, caravans, mini buses and motorbikes each carrying a rather disgruntled polar bear complaining that " No, I don't want to go south"!!
5. It's 366 miles each way from Felpham and took two tanks of fuel - approx £80
6. Hotel B&B cost £103 plus dinner etc.

So dear reader Wendy and I battled our way south reaching home at 2am. Tony and Maureen stayed "up North" enjoying the scenery and the people and returned, safe and well and without a polar bear later that week. Despite the cost and distance the Great North Run is a great experience and, if you can afford the time, spend a few days up there. Of course be prepared and if you haven't got a blunderbuss, I know a hoodie at mile 12 who might lend you one!!

Our Times : Wendy - 01:57:18 Mike - 02:05:51 Tony- 02:24:48

El Presidente