

Record Racing in Wellington's Perfect Weather

Wellingtonians are often heard proclaiming, "you can't beat Wellington on a good day." That wasn't exactly true today, for while the weather couldn't be faulted, the near perfect conditions meant race records were beaten left, right and centre.

Crisp clear skies greeted almost 4000 runners and walkers from 13 countries. And it was internationals who led the way amongst men.

The race was billed as a battle between former Japanese school friends Hiroataka Tanimoto and Kosuke Hamada, the former now living in Wellington while the latter was representing Wellington's Japanese sister city, Sakai. But it was American Dan Lowry who forced the early pace and jet lag saw Hamada fall away to sixth place, while Tanimoto succumbed to an ankle injury, which left Lowry romping away for a 10min win.

Lowry, a PHD student at Victoria University and former American university teammate of Kiwi Olympic medallist Nick Willis, claimed line honours with a startling race record of 2hrs 22min 43secs. This took two minutes off the record set by Wellingtonian Dougal Thorburn when winning the national title here in 2013.

As a non-resident, Lowry was unable to claim the national title. This went to local runner Stephen Day, who claimed second place overall and first masters runner in 2hrs 32min 04secs, just nine seconds clear of Scottish Wellington clubmate Sam McCutcheon. With clubmates Chris Hartshorn and Chris Wharam not too far adrift in fourth and fifth, Scottish also took the club teams title.

While favourites faltered in the Full Marathon, the half marathon went the way of the form book and also went off shore as Australian Nick Earl fell only 40secs sort of the race record but claimed the win in 1hr 07min 09secs.

Palmerston North's Chris Sanson was best of the rest, repeating his second place from 2016 and out sprinting Lower Hutt's Nick Horspool for a personal best time 1hr 08min 58secs.

The women's racing saved the day for Wellington. Former teenage standout Alice Mason returned to her hometown to take her first national marathon title, while 2015 full marathon winner Ruby Muir made it a double with the half marathon title.

Both races were tightly fought, although in the end it was the clock that the winners were trying hardest to beat. In the national marathon championship, Mason trailed super-vet Sally Gibbs through the first half before moving through for the win. The Cambridge doctor still had enough left in the final kilometre to shave four seconds off the race record with 2hrs 48min 36secs.

Behind her, fifty-four-year-old Sally Gibbs held on for second place and first masters woman in 2hrs 53min 49secs, while Auckland's Katherine Morgan claimed third.

The women's race also went the way of the favourites, with Ruby Muir and Invercargill's Hannah Miller relegating 2016 winner Rebecca Elliot to third. But Muir was the surprise package of the day, breaking American Belinda Wimmer's 2008 race record by nine seconds. Miller, still a teenager, set a junior record of 1hr 20min 15secs.

In other events, the 10k run was Scottish Athletic clubmates Tim Cornish, Nathan Tse and Sam Pendreigh made an intentional tie to finish together in 33min 20secs. Local standout Sarah Drought claimed the women's 10k in 36min 43min. More than 600 also took on the 5k, while 300 kids aged 3 to 11 took part in the Bluebridge Kids Magic Mile.

Standouts among the masses included 91 year Masterton athletics stalwarts, Peter Tearle, becoming the eldest ever finisher with 1hr 42min 20secs in the 10k walk. Auckland's Garth Barfoot was the eldest marathon finisher at 80 years young, while Wellington's own Brian Hayes slashing the record for men 70 years or older by 23min with 3hrs 38min 54secs.

Meanwhile, local runner James Fraser was convinced by his children to dress up for the race and ended up setting what he hopes will be a Guinness world record for a marathon dressed as a 3D aircraft of 4hrs 18min 33secs.