



# THE NEW YORK CITY MARATHON

## Over 40 Years and Still Running

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Hundreds of marathons are held every year, but there are some that stand out above all the others. One of these is none other than the New York City Marathon, the largest on the planet. With over 50,000 finishers in 2013 & 2014 and over 40 years of increasingly stimulating routes throughout the Big Apple's five boroughs, this race remains one of the chief goals for runners worldwide.

Like most great success stories things didn't begin this way. Runners of the New York City Marathon first started pounding the

pavement on September 13, 1970, but at that time they numbered only 126 men and one woman. Only 55 then managed to finish the race, which took place entirely in Central Park.

So, just how did this grow to become the biggest marathon in the world? The credit is largely owed to its

co-founder, Fred Lebow, who presided over the New York City Marathon until he passed away in 1994.

"One beautiful spring day, I was in my office early in the afternoon, and on sudden impulse, I left, went up to 90th Street and started running," the late Lebow told the New York Times in a 1980



interview. "It was wonderful, and I told myself that if it was so important to me, it would be immoral not to deliver the message to others."

Nevertheless, the book, *Inside the Apple: A Streetwise History of New York City*, reveals it was actually Lebow's frustration with the Cherry Tree Marathon that inspired him to create a new race. Greatly lacking in organization and safety measures, the Cherry Tree had participants running up and down the Bronx for 26.2 miles without roadblocks or aid stations.

A leader of the Road Runners Club--New York Association (now known as the New York Road Runners or "NYRR"), Lebow convinced the city's Parks Department to move the race down to Central Park where there would be significantly fewer hazards. The participation fee was only 1 dollar, and Lebow forked over his own money to help pay the remaining

costs. Thus the New York City Marathon was born.

As shown in the 2008 documentary, "Run for Your Life," it wasn't until a few years later that everything really took off, specifically with sponsorship. In 1973, for example, Olympic Airways provided the winner of the race with an all-expenses included trip to Athens. Many others have been attracted over the years — most recently, ING was the marathon's title sponsor for 10 years before Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) signed an eight-year partnership deal in 2013.

It wasn't until 1976, however, that the biggest change of all was made. For the first time, the marathon went through all five New York boroughs, showcasing the city's rich diversity and historical landmarks. Though the course has changed over the years, it still begins in

Staten Island and ends in Manhattan.

The New York City Marathon has been held almost every year since 1970, with the exception of 2012 (when the event was canceled in the interest of ongoing recovery efforts in the area from Hurricane Sandy). Held in late fall, the marathon typically has the benefit of mild weather and overall pleasant conditions.

Currently, the starting line is on the northeastern side of the island, just south of the Verrazano Narrows Bridge. This adds some elevation challenges right from the get-go (it's a sloping three-quarter-mile climb to the middle of the bridge), but although New York isn't famous for its hills, the inclines are far from over. There are some hills through Brooklyn, notably on Fourth Avenue and then on Lafayette. It's relatively smooth sailing from then up through Queens. The next real challenge comes with the Queensboro Bridge, which rises up steadily for about two-thirds of a mile before declining sharply down to First Avenue in Manhattan's Upper East Side.

The course flattens out as it heads up to the Bronx. The



next big incline isn't until after it loops back down to Manhattan on Fifth Avenue, where there's an incline of about 100 feet. It's then rolling hills through Central Park to the finish line. This last leg through Central Park is one of the most pleasant



things about the race though, and many runners find the grass, trees and ponds to be a welcome change from the building-congested streets making up the bulk of the course.

So, how does the New York Marathon rack up with the World Marathon Majors or "Big Six"? In fact, it is on the more difficult side, being the only one to begin the race with a long, sharp incline. The Boston Marathon may have the most fluctuations in elevation, but it is actually ineligible for world records because the entire race is a gradual drop from 490 feet above sea level to 10 feet (meaning participants can

be advantaged by tailwinds). The marathons in Tokyo, London, Chicago and Berlin are meanwhile relatively flat, though some have more turns than New York.

Logistically speaking, the New York Marathon is actually the most challenging for spectators to make their way from start to finish, since they are over 12 miles apart geographically and have the Upper New York Bay separating them (friends and family members of participants need to plan their transportation ahead of time).

Despite any difficulties, a total of 30,312 men and 20,563 women finished the New York Marathon in 2014. The diversity of the marathon's participants is only fitting for its internationally famous location. While most were from New York and New Jersey, there were participants from every U.S. state and territory. Over 100 countries were also represented. The participants also ranged from age 18 to 91, with the two oldest finishers being an 85-year-old Austrian man and an 91-year-old North Carolina woman.

None of this would, of course, be surprising to Lebow, who championed running as an activity for everyone. "Every jogger can't dream of being an Olympic champion," he was once quoted as saying. "But he can dream of finishing a marathon."