

RACE

LET YOUR RUNNING LOOSE

IF YOU'RE SO INCLINED
Runners make an ascent during the Macclesfield Half Marathon.

WHO ORDERED A BIG MACC?

The Macclesfield Half Marathon proves to be more of a meal than a morsel for Scott Reeves



Conspiracy theorists know all about the Bermuda Triangle and its disappearing aircraft, but I doubt very much they are familiar with the Golden Triangle, where PBs vanish mysteriously. It's in Macclesfield, but the locals may not even know of its existence.

I too was blissfully ignorant, as the Macclesfield Half Marathon started so well. I joined a little

over 550 runners in a lap-and-a-half of the athletics track at the leisure centre before heading into the town itself. Formerly part of the North's industrial heartland, and the world's leading producer of silk, Macclesfield is now a thoroughly pleasant commuter town within striking distance of Manchester. After a quick tour of the town centre we headed out into the leafy →



observatory with telescopes trained on the cosmos. The vista was partially spoiled by the traditional northern weather – it was raining by this stage – but there was no mistaking the outline of the gargantuan 3,200-tonne Lovell Telescope, the third-largest of its kind in the world.

The rain mingled with sweat and stung my eyes, but I could still see miles of undulations stretching out in front of me, including, in the distance, a second large climb. Time to dig in. As we skirted Wilmslow I put my head down and focused on my cadence instead of trying to see if Sir Alex Ferguson was out walking his dogs.

The excited hope I might be on for a shiny new PB now seemed an awfully long time ago; I'd entered the Triangle on course for a PB but was now leaving it wondering if I'd even make it to the finish – or if that PB had ever existed. Easing back into Macclesfield itself I decided simply to slow down, enjoy the throng of supporters as we neared the finish and then give it the gun on the final stretch back on the track.

No matter how many times you do them, stadium finishes are always thrilling and any race that includes one gets a big tick from me, but the Macc Half, as the locals call it, has much more than that, including a tough course, plenty to look at, a touch of reflected glamour, pretty slick organisation and a real community spirit out on the roads. It would have been nice to see a few famous types high-fiving runners and waving foam fingers by the side of the road, but I guess you can't have everything.

The next Macclesfield Half Marathon is on September 24. Visit macc-half.co.uk

QUICK OFF THE MARK
A fast start on an athletics track is tempting, but not terribly wise.

environs of Cheshire, where, my research had told me, real money lives in great luxury.

At this point, about four miles in, I began to get excited. I'd gone out a tad fast (athletics tracks will do that) and my watch was telling me I was on for a time I had not run in many years, maybe even a PB.

We were making our way towards Prestbury, a pretty village that forms one corner of Cheshire's Golden Triangle, northwest of Macclesfield. The other corners of the triangle are Alderley Edge and Wilmslow and the area within is one of the most affluent in the country. As if to mark our crossing into the fabled Triangle, I turned a corner and spotted a gleaming red Ferrari. I was too focused on my mile splits to notice who was driving but there was a small chance it could have been Wayne Rooney, Rio Ferdinand, Joe Hart, Yaya Touré or any one of the gazillion footballers who live in these

parts; in fact, another nickname for the area is the Footballer Belt.

While we didn't actually run down the nearby Withinlee Road – the most expensive street outside of southern England, with an average house price of £1.65 million – we did speed past a preposterous number of massive cast-iron gates guarding driveways that were so long and winding the houses at the end of them were not visible to us.

Trying to work out which mansion might belong to which celebrity (would Noddy Holder go for lion pillar tops?) served as a distraction only for so long, because at the halfway point the first of two climbs hove into view. Some hills rely on a short but brutal incline to wreak their havoc; this one took a more patient approach. We must have run steadily up a five per cent gradient for over a mile before cresting the top, where I looked eagerly for a glimpse of Jodrell Bank, the space

THE RUNDOWN

Macclesfield Half Marathon, Cheshire
2016 stats

First man: Steffan Sayer, 1:15:21
First woman: Hayley Ashby, 1:26:35
Last finisher: 2:52:58
No. of finishers: 562



Finishing stats
● 1:00-1:29 7%
● 1:30-1:59 57%
● 2:00-2:29 33%
● 2:30-2:59 3%

Like this? Try these three other hilly northern halves

SHEFFIELD HALF MARATHON

An up-and-down experience. Starting in the city centre runners have a long climb out of the town into the country before a long downhill from halfway. As well as prizes for the first three runners there are crowns for the 'King/Queen of the Hill' and the winner of a 10K 'sprint' section. South Yorkshire, April 8 2018, runforall.com



EYAM HALF MARATHON

Eyam is a beautiful Peak District village 'that was ravaged by bubonic plague in 1665 after its residents quarantined themselves to limit the spread of the disease. This race offers a gorgeous but rollercoaster route, with the most notable climb being the 429m Sir William Hill. Derbyshire, May 2018 (date tbc), eyamhalfmarathon.org.uk

HUDDERSFIELD HALF MARATHON

Another race that claims to be the toughest of its kind (in this case, UK road-based 13.1s). You'll need to grind out the opening miles as you climb 350m out of town towards Pole Moor, the highest point on the course. The second half also features some sharp inclines, so save some of your strength. West Yorkshire, June 2018 (date tbc), whiterosemarathons.co.uk