

ULTRA-TRAIL

AUSTRALIA

UTA22 - Tim Hoar

Every race involves the confronting and (hopefully) conquering of a succession of unknowns. For me, the UTA Pace 22 presented an above average number of these. Only my third half marathon and my first on the trails. First time I had ever run more than 18km without my go-to running buddy. And of most concern was an achilles injury that had left me unable to run trails or hills for four weeks leading up to race day (the race features hills and trails rather prominently). Would I be able to make it? Would this be at all fun? What was the likelihood my right leg would tear clean off and clatter to the bottom of the valley? My physio assured me it was unlikely, but by the time Eye of the Tiger played at the start line, my mind had bumped the probability up to at least 75%.

How to approach this situation full of unknowns? I'm not sure what the smart decision would have been. But I decided to go out really hard and see how I felt. And after about 4km of going out hard, I felt totally rubbish. My calves were ablaze and I could tell that my left big toenail was bright purple and unlikely to survive the race. For all my efforts, I had not been able to condition my body in the right way for this race. So I adjusted. I dialed it right back. I kept my pace relatively high to the bottom of the valley. Then I took kilometres 8-16 extremely slow. I walked all the hills I had intended and a lot more too. I nursed my calves and toes through the rare respites of the downhills. And then I was able to finish strong through the beautiful final 6 kilometres or so of forested single trail.

As for that earlier question of whether I would have fun? I sure did. Not the normal kind of fun, the sipping a beer while watching a bad horror movie kind of fun. This was a strange kind of fun that involved much physical torment. But fun with like-minded fools, organised by passionate & capable people and with an ace sense of community. Where the dude at the aid station runs out to grab your bladder to help you out, and you chat to the owner of Pace for 5 minutes before he gracefully lopes into the distance, leaving you lumbering up the hill after him.

Reflecting on the race, the thing that I am most proud of is the way I ran my own race. I was able to mentally adjust during the race to get the best result possible out of the day. A massive amount of people passed me in those middle kilometres. People hiked straight past me, seeming to not have a care in the world. I have been running for less than 18 months. The old me - a middling hockey player - was not mentally strong. I drifted in and out of the game and often allowed my attitude, or other players to break me mentally. But in this race I was able to recognise my limits and make sure my mind pushed my body right to the edge of them. I was able to acknowledge those going past me with a smile, knowing that I was going as fast as I could at that point in time. Of all the physical benefits the running life has given me, it is the mental strength that is much greater.

It is comforting that when I line up for the 2017 UTA Pace 22 I will know that this race can't break me (ok the Furber Steps can probably break me a little bit). No matter what happens physically or tactically, I have the resolve to push through, readjust and finish. Assuming my leg doesn't literally fall off.