

## **QUEENSTOWN TURNS ON A STUNNER FOR FIRST TIME MARATHON WINNERS**

A first time winner and a third time grinner were the stories of the day at the Air New Zealand Queenstown International Marathon today, with Donal Sheehy (Dublin via Auckland) winning the men's event on debut over the distance, while Mel Aitken (formerly Dunedin now Greymouth) was thrilled to see the finish tape after twice previously finishing runner up over the Queenstown Lakes District Trails.

Close to 10,000 participants set off over various distances on a crisp but beautifully clear morning, with a record 1,936 having registered for the full Air New Zealand Marathon distance, making it the largest Marathon in New Zealand in what must surely be the most stunning setting, with Queenstown in picture postcard form today.

Sheehy found himself in a tense battle with veteran multisport and endurance athlete Richard Ussher (Wanaka) and Simon Green (Queenstown) through the early stages of the race, but managed to break clear before the halfway mark to run to collect first place in his first attempt over the distance, and then with the cheek of the Irish had a little dig ahead of the rugby test match tomorrow morning.

"That was my first one that's true. I'm from Dublin so don't hold that against me, and I have to say best of luck to my boys in the big match tomorrow morning.

"It is a beautiful day and we enjoyed blue skies but the wind was a factor and add to that a couple of the climbs out there and it was a tough day. Maybe about 15km in near an aid station the race broke up and I was on my own from then and was able to hold on for a nice win.

"I want to say a big thanks to the volunteers and marshalls out there, they did a great job, as did all the people around the course, it was very well organized. Right now I have to find a pub, maybe for later today but certainly for the morning to watch the rugby, but yes, I'm looking forward to doing a few more marathons now for sure."

Richard Ussher was full of praise for the course and his opponent.

"I am not as fit as I was a couple of years ago but I have done some running for this and am stoked to get through, second is a bit of a bonus as Donal was in control of that the whole way I reckon. The course is stunning, the head wind made it tough along with a few little hills that can wear you down. But it is a fantastic event and it is great to see so many people out enjoying it."

It was a popular win for Aitken in the women's race, the former Dunedin resident is now living and working on the West Coast and has finished runner up twice to Victoria Beck in Queenstown.

"I am on top of the world right now - that is the best feeling to win this race, this means everything to me so I am stoked. At about the 21k mark Liza got ahead of me but on the last 5 or 6k I could see myself closing in and powered away and she acknowledged me as I went by which was nice and I was off."

Aitken spoke of the challenges in balancing a busy life and a new job with the Police on the West Coast with her love for running.

“It is tough but it is easy in a way, work is stressful so running gives me that balance and if I can’t run I am not a happy person, if I get my run in, get my work done, life is good. I have worked so hard for this – it is my first ever win in a big race, I have a new coach and have trained so hard, I am just so happy.”

Air New Zealand not only partner with the Marathon that attracted 1600 international runners (and their families and supporters on top of that) from 49 countries, as well as thousands of other Kiwis from outside the region to the Queenstown Lakes District, but they walked the walk (so to speak) too, with 120 of their staff taking part in events throughout the day.

“We’re incredibly proud of this world-class event which we believe sits alongside the world’s best destination marathons and has gone from strength to strength over the past three years”, said Air New Zealand Chief Revenue Officer Cam Wallace.

“I’d like to extend my congratulations to the more than 9,500 who participated in today’s incredible race, one of the most scenic on offer.”

Earlier in the day the New Zealand Sotheby’s Realty Half Marathon titles were taken out by Jason Hall (Queenstown) and Hannah Wells (Te Puke) with the AIA 10k events won by Kirk Madgwick (Dunedin) and Phoebe McKnight (Lower Hutt), with Madgwick holding out Rio Olympic triathlete Tony Dodds in a close duel.

Minister of Finance Bill English took time out from his busy schedule to enjoy the weekend with his family and take part in the New Zealand Sotheby’s Realty Half Marathon, along with two of his sons – not that he saw too much of them.

“That was beautiful, I ended up doing a bit of a walk run but that is okay in this scenery. It is amazing, the support and the beauty of the area just carries you along. I saw my boys briefly at the start, one of them gave me a little pat on the head and took off and that is the last I saw of them!”

Race Director Nicole Fairweather described a brilliant day and thanked the many who made it possible.

“That was such a great day and it is thanks to the local community, our sponsors, and stake holders and in particular I want to thank the hundreds of volunteers who make the event possible and through their encouragement make it so memorable for everyone, in particular our international visitors.”

The event is made possible thanks to the support of Air New Zealand, New Zealand Sotheby’s Realty, AIA New Zealand, the Queenstown Trails Trust and the many community groups and individual volunteers who look after the safety and welfare of the 9,544 runners taking part throughout the day.

## **Air New Zealand Queenstown International Marathon Results**

### **Air NZ Marathon**

#### **Men**

- 1 Donal Sheehy, Dublin/Auckland, 2:39:39
- 2 Richard Ussher, Wanaka, 2:45:43
- 3 Simon Green, Queenstown, 2:47:10

#### **Women**

- 1 Mel Aitken, Dunedin/Greymouth, 3:00:48
- 2 Liza Hunter-Galvan, Christchurch, 3:02:52
- 3 Sasha Antunovic, Taranaki, 3:15:53

### **New Zealand Sotheby's Realty Half Marathon**

#### **Men**

- 1 Jason Hall, Queenstown, 1:12:22
- 2 Chris Dunell, Christchurch, 1:14:58
- 3 Mike Phillips, Christchurch, 1:15:50

#### **Women**

- 1 Hannah Wells, Te Puke, 1:28:59
- 2 Alexandra Williams, 1:29:55
- 3 Katherine Reardon, 1:30:21

### **AIA 10km**

#### **Men**

- 1 Kirk Madgwick, Dunedin, 34:28
- 2 Tony Dodds, Wanaka, 34:38
- 3 Ioan Fuller, Dunedin, 35:57

#### **Women**

- 1 Phoebe McKnight, Lower Hutt, 37:14
- 2 Lizzie Spencer, Christchurch, 41:02
- 3 Charlotte Crean, Invercargill, 43:26

[CLICK HERE](#) for full results