

Kindness of Strangers and Friends:  
“The Backwards London Marathon in Aid of the  
Lord’s Taverners”



“A big Thank you to everyone who contributed to my  
Backwards London Marathon!!”

Most people thought I was completely mad when I shared my plan to complete the London Marathon facing backwards to raise money for the Lord's Taverners. For those who are unaware, The Lord's Taverners is a charity committed to giving young disadvantaged people – particularly those with disabilities – a sporting chance. Having completed the task – I could not agree more.

On the day – wearing a pack weighed down with food, extra water bottles and signs warning people that I was indeed stupid enough to be running backwards – I was overwhelmed by the outpouring of positive energy at the start. What a great day for it - the weather conditions sunny and cool and as we worked our way to the start line – it takes longer than you think to actually reach it – there was a fair amount of “really you are going to run it all backwards!” lots of hand shaking, high fives etc.

Crossing the start line c 10:20 am and doing a steady and dare I say it rather respectable backwards jog, I soaked up all the banter, positivity and encouragement and foolishly started thinking “this not that bad after all.”



A delightful lady struck up a more detailed conversation with me wondering why I had committed to such a silly task – fair question so I tried to explain. While extolling all the wonderful things the Lord's Taverners do for kids with various disabilities, trying to do the backwards thing and high five people as they rushed past me in a tsunami of rainbow outfits it proved too much and the inevitable happened – I fell head over heels and crashed into a lamppost! Yet more evidence to prove that we blokes are not naturally built for multi-tasking.

This was a slight blow to the body not to mention the ego. At this point one of my friends whizzed past me only later telling me how awful I looked!!! – I slowed down and went into survival mode which actually allowed me to experience the whole event at a sedate pace. The

impromptu fan clubs like these terrific girls (picture below) from one of the charity cheer points were a great boost to the endeavour too.



Being at the rear of the London Marathon looking back at the start and realising that it is not disappearing nearly fast enough is a somewhat surreal but fascinating experience. It was not long before I was overtaken by the back marker car and the army of tractors, road sweepers, artic lorries with teams of people packing up the road barriers and mile marker stations. For all of you who wondered why I dropped off the Virgin tracker app after 10 km that was the reason.

Then there was the truck spraying the blue road markings with a white smelly solvent designed to get rid of graffiti, which was later erased by a truck with a man walking in front of it operating an industrial whirly scrubbing machine. To add to this increasingly complex assault course there were reversing road sweepers, mounds of plastic water bottles and other detritus as well as other vehicles adding to the organised chaos.



So there was I at the back of a rapidly disappearing marathon event with my new friends; a man doing his 25<sup>th</sup> London Marathon in a bear suit – a very dejected bear at times with his drooping head more Eeyore than Winnie the Pooh in demeanour, Kelly the Rhino and a brave but unfit fairy and other assorted stragglers and battlers with what was in reality a long urban assault course to navigate. It all added to the sensory overload and some might say uniquely British, randomness.

That said, all the guys who were part of this unsung marathon army were terrific. About half way round they challenged me to beat them round the course as we had developed a rhythm where they would overtake me and while they packed up that section, I would shuffle past them half an hour later. This game of leapfrog continued all the way round until I surged past them along Birdcage Walk with only 500 m to go to a terrific cheer from them – hurrah!!! To be honest that was the best bit of the day even better than getting the medal, although I did

appreciate the medal team still being there to present me with one as I finally staggered over the line.

Anyway, back to the course. In East London it was tremendous exchanging banter with lots of locals who had clearly been “on the sauce” all morning and had spilled outside the pubs onto the street or were still celebrating in their gardens or in street parties. They would cheer “go on backwards man”, “put your back into it” and other such comments. There was every conceivable type of band, who all got massively into the backwards spirit. I tried to reciprocate with some backwards dancing!



This kindness from strangers was incredible and a tribute to their local communities and the sense of fun of your average Londoner was very evident. More enthusiastic cheering, more high fives, lots of photographers and people joining me for a while running backwards all of which was such a tonic as the long day ahead started to sink in and the muscles started screaming and we were not even half way round!!

Another high point was at the half-way 13 mile mark where the amazing Gill Carrick was waiting with lunch, TLC, chocolate and a brilliant cheery demeanour – I find out from her the next day that she said I looked awful but thought it best to keep that to herself. For that I am ever so grateful.

For those that have taken part in this most wonderful event – and for those that have not it is never too late – turning right after Tower Bridge while you watch everyone on the other side of the road heading back towards Westminster is somewhat depressing.

Gill was just the tonic and the fact that she teamed up with me for the next ten miles to see through Wapping, Canary Wharf and back along to Tower Bridge was a game changer for

me. She deserves a medal as she was also my guide doing the Silverstone Half Marathon backwards – thank you London marathon risk managers for that one!

Once I got on the Embankment it was mentally all downhill and the course was thankfully clear so I could pick the pace up a bit! Finishing at around 6:55 pm it had been a long day. Thankfully the loyal and patient Lord's Taverners' team whisked me off for a big dinner and a reviving glass or three of red wine!

I want to thank all the amazing people of London who cheered and wished me well all-round the course. The marathon brings out the best in this wonderful city. It reminds me that despite all the bad things we see in the press or on our various screens, there is so much more good in people than bad when it comes down to it.

The event is an epic outpouring of goodwill that London should be proud of and I for one, am glad I have seen the guts of it and experienced the race from the backwards perspective. Even though I am unlikely to repeat the experience, it will linger in my memory for a very long time.

And last but of course not least, thank you Ladbrokes who sponsored my fund-raising dinner for the second year and everyone who supported the Lord's Taverners and wished me well. I have been extremely touched by the generosity of both friends and strangers.

# NEVER AGAIN!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

