

the CANINE CORNER

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www.balanceddog.co.nz / www.doggymom.com

On 22 September 2019, Christchurch hosted the first-ever 4 Paws Marathon (www.4pawsmarathon.co.nz). As a sponsor, I was lucky enough to be present in the massage tent at the start/finish line to watch the runners. After racing, they would come to our tent for couples massage — humans massaged by Rachel from Bodyworks Massage Therapy and the dogs by me.

First, a bit of background. Dr John Molloy, a local sports medicine physician and avid runner/dog owner, came up with the idea of the race event when running with his two dogs, Summer and Walter. He credits his two furry training companions for sharing his enthusiasm for running; they have accompanied him on countless runs. Yet, the dogs were never welcome to participate on race day with him.

The idea of the 4 Paws Marathon was born.

Unlike most running events, the 4 Paws Marathon was designed to encourage participation rather than competition. It wasn't as much about finishing times, but rather to get out and enjoy moving with your dog. That is why there were 5km, 10km, half marathon and full marathon length courses offered to registrants.

"Being sedentary is the new silent killer," John has said. "It kills more people in the USA than smoking, diabetes and obesity combined."

There's also plenty of research which shows that dog owners are more active than the majority of non-dog owners and this activity has benefits for both physical health and mental well-being.

In my sponsorship role, I wrote the training plans for dogs to ensure all were match-fit and ready for whatever course length their mum/dad had opted for. I also agreed to work together with sponsors Further Faster, hosting a series of Walk 'n' Talk preparation events over the three months leading up to race day. For us, although not as deeply involved as Dr John, event day seemed almost bittersweet after months of build-up.

A total of 180 people with 140 dogs congregated at Bottle Lake Forest on race day. In my opinion, the start line was a joyous place, even if somewhat chilly with passing showers, overcast skies and a persistent easterly wind. Good weather conditions for the dogs, but not as comfortable when standing around at the finish line!

I know the race organisers had some hiccups in the 24 hours leading up to the event, but none of these was apparent to the runners, walkers and spectators. The mood was buoyant.

And it was great to see each runner crossing the finishing line and awarded with an Olympic-style paws medallion and a dog tag with their dog's name on it.

The consensus: a great day, a great success and will we do it again next year? The answer: yes. John and his wife, Courtney, have said there will be two more years of the 4 Paws Marathon before they make a decision about its continuation. By then, it is hoped that the event will break even. John has always said that the event was about passion, not profit. As you can imagine, the costs for publicity, signage and services required to conduct an event of this size are huge.

I'm certainly looking forward to next year.

PS. The best therapist (and personal trainer) has fur, four legs, and a wagging tail. 🐾

From top:

Gathering at the start line.

Anne Sissons ran 10km in 53 minutes 18 seconds with her Irish Setter, Katie.

The massage tent ready for action.

Holding hands during a post-run massage.

