



The Gingerbread Run Race Report



While the Portarlinton 10k & half marathon is probably not an event that makes the Irish running magazines top 10 events list it bloody well should do. I'm a big fan of this event and the ethos behind it. It's a no frills (hence relatively low cost),

locally ran, all profits for charity event that combines a nice flat countryside route with a friendlier (less competitive) atmosphere than many others. It's chipped and also has some nice bling with a great novelty medal and beanie hat this year. To those who purchased the event T-Shirt, all I'll say is kudos for donating a little extra to the charity.



I did this race for the 1st time last year using it as a "negative split" test run (all the rage at the time - still is apparently) given the course is really flat; with a subtle 15m incline in the 1st 9km and a lovely flat/slightly declining 2nd half. I do like a flat course. The route is nothing but



countryside roads and green surrounds heading out from Portarlinton for 5k before starting an 11k loop and back home the way ya came for the last 3 or 4k. It's very well marshalled and while roads are open there are very little traffic concerns along the route.

My tiniest of grumbles (and I do try and find them) is the kick off

time of 12pm is a bit late for my liking. I prefer to do events as early as possible, mostly to limit time away from home and I find late starts like this limit what you can do for the rest of the day (family wise). Particularly given this event isn't a spectator friendly route (bar the start/finish line). Not a criticism, just an observation and big thanks to all the marshals and volunteers at aid stations. Not a morning to be standing still!

So back to the day itself, the late kick off actually favoured the approx. 840 participants (450 doing the half & 390 doing the 10k) to some extent because of the weather. It was damn cold. According to Garmin the temperature at midday hit -1.1 degrees. I'd usually race in the standard ATC gear of short sleeve cycling top and shorts. Today there was full head to toe coverage with an extra pair of socks, jocks n gloves to keep the extremities from freezing 'n falling off.

There was a great turn out from ATC members too so plenty of pre-race banter and catching up with club mates and friends. Participants huddled inside the registration building (at McCann Park) as long as possible and I've never seen so many people do pre-race Jumping Jacks and on the spot running in an attempt to warm up before the off. For most this is a season closer event, certainly for me anyway and as such was approached with caution in terms of fuelling & pacing. For less technically minded readers that simply means I'd a big auld breakie and took it handy on the run. It's easy to get carried away on this course though given the flat route and the

secret club member competitiveness (hidden in all of us) which tends to be revealed when a potential PB course opens itself up to you on a cool dry day.

Without too much of a delay the race was a go and the speed demons went away like the clappers, with those looking for specific times followed the big green pacer balloons. It was nice to see the event organiser actually take the time to introduce the pacers pre-race. I think these lads/lassies are an essential ingredient to a good road race and their volunteering shows the spirit of the running community, particularly on these seriously cold mornings.

The route itself takes you from Station road (just off McCann Park) and away from Portarlington through the townlands of Co. Laois. Reaching Walshtown at 7km, then Lansdowne at 12km, before briefly tipping in to Co. Offaly between the 13k – 16km markers, back over the River Barrow and on through Chapel Cross before re-joining the original route at 18km and back to McCann Park for a really well supported and vocal final few hundred meters. There are no landmarks of note or sightseeing on this course just beautiful, quiet countryside. Sure what else would ya be doin' of a Sunday lunchtime!

Personally (performance wise) I didn't have a great race, one race too many this year I think and this seasons efforts (along with the laziness and indulgences of the last few weeks) finally caught up with me. I struggled in the 2nd half but made it to the finish line (sub 1.50) for a nice cuppa & gingerbread biscuit before heading home to a steaming hot epsom salt filled bath and a day of ice/heat packs on the couch.

Others fared much better and it's always nice to hear the positive experiences of others, especially when there's PB's being celebrated. Congrats to all those who posted one or just had a good day or celebrated their debut 10k/half marathon event. I'm sure this race will be just as well attended in 2017 and beyond. Some of the ATC crew on the day:

