

Courts' 2017 Melbourne Marathon Race Report

THE SUB 3 MONKEY'S GONE TO HEAVEN



The sub 3 bus at about the 15km mark — look at the Miler red...

Feeding the monkey

This was to be marathon 16 (with 5 ultras in there). There were a large number of attempts for sub 3 in there only 3 (including 2017), with proper Miler training. My first marathons were done off truly inadequate training. The 3 hour attempts tended to have ended up slower than existing non-3 hour attempts. We can argue about how long the monkey lived on my back. What is clear is that there was a monkey habitat there for at least a matter of years.

My previous PB was done at Melbourne Marathon 2016 (3:02:03), opting to run it at the last moment off only about 3 x 30 km runs, lots of taper, but also lots of "fresh". The howling 40-60km winds took their toll though. It was a hard, hard run, bit I was unlikely to face such bad weather again.

The training

2017 was a great year of training. This was under the watchful coaching eye of Bermuda who, to give the game away now, did a great job. I started with Bermuda in about June, but had done runs like Two Bays 56km earlier in the year (5:12, which was about an 18min PB), as well as my normal weekly km of 50-60km, mainly commutes.

In the marathon block of training, I did less speed training than in other years which meant often doing different/modified sessions from normal Miler sessions. Most sessions were long by comparison to Miler program sessions. There were lots of Canova "specific marathon pace" blocks to cement this, normally run on a Wednesday. These were run every two weeks with the Wednesday session being

the only hard session, but then being backed up by a long run with marathon pace, meaning those weeks were high in terms of weekly totals. This format allowed me to stay a bit fresher in the campaign. There were Tuesday and Thursday sessions in the other week with a long run without marathon pace on the weekend. Bermuda's primary focus for most sessions was getting me to push hard but to always have a little something left over.

There were sessions like:

- 3 x 6km at marathon pace with floats between; and
- “alternations” — 1km on and 1km off at 105%/95% of marathon pace (3:57/4:25) for various total differences, including 16km — by the end of the 95% reps you were champing at the bit to get back up to speed. It made marathon pace seem very achievable and even the “getting up to pace” was good psychologically.

Sri Chinmoy half marathon (in mid-September) was a great test run with an 11km float followed by the event itself which was 21km at 4:07. I had run 83:03 (3:55 av) at Burnley half marathon the week before that without pushing too hard and without a taper. I had basically hit or exceeded my targets in the Canova runs.

The 2017 tale of the kms, without getting out a calculator, reveals at least 6 weeks in the 90's from June, and most other weeks in the 70's or better. There were, I think, about 9 runs of 28km or longer. Those included long runs with marathon pace, the biggest being 33km with 12km at about 4:10.

The specific marathon pace lunch sessions attracted some great company. Slips was a regular attendee. With commutes from and to work, many were around 20km in length. Some were done in horrible, windy conditions. There were a few that I ran alone or ran the last rep on my own. These were good psychological training for race day.

I went in with a super, cruisy 3-week taper and felt about as good as I could before race day. There was a cold threatening to strike the day before there marathon (it held off). Everything else was going my way in terms of preparation and weather.

The plan was to run with the 3 hour pacers and then consider making a move sometime after 32km. The pacers were Bermuda and Duff. The coach was not going to be far away throughout. They were going to run a flat 4:13 throughout, to make up for the slow run up Birdwood Avenext to the Tan (projected to be 4:40). That translated into 5km blocks of about 21:05. I had been formally ordered by Bermuda to turn off the 1km auto lap on my watch (it felt a bit like switching off my guidance systems...). I had tried to run 2:55 in 2015 — the Bermuda option seemed like the best way of stopping me tripping over the doormat on the threshold of the place where success lived.

The race

Seb, Malibu and I got to the line together. We all had preferred entry (I felt like a roadie). Seb and I moved back to the pacers before the gun went off. Daniel Hall and Smoore, among others, were there. As was Scott Smith. There were Milers aplenty in the 3 hour bus, many of whom would arrive over the line in under 3 hours. The bus was big one, even aside from Milers.

We took off. Duff paced for the first 5km. The first km was predictably slow (4:25), but then Duff picked it up. The first 5km block was 21:45 (4:09 av). A bit quick but it felt okay. Daniel Hall was looking strong and so was Seb. I could not see the others really.

There were uniformed Milers out and about. There were plenty of plain-clothed Miler supporters in evidence at this stage, too, together with 3 hour bus supporters. There were some great “ooohhs” and “aaahhs” and people calling out to the bus or saying “there it is” as we strutted along. This continued the whole way.

The first Miler drinks came and went at 7km. Racer was running my drinks and did a great job, later on perhaps, *despite* me, I think.

We cruised around Albert Park for a bit. The bus was still huge. A runner next to me took a massive fall on a traffic island. People were running a bit manically. Some of us at the start of the pack, and Duff/Bermuda, started to call out the hazards and also call out at drink stations to remind people to talk to each other if they were diving in for drinks etc.

The second 5km block was done in 21:16 (4:15 av). 10 km done.

While I was running with the bus throughout the marathon, I was running at the front of the pack. Into St Kilda and along heading to Station Pier, there were the first of at least 6-7 episodes people stepping on my feet. I was bang on pace when each occurred and it seemed to be dudes drafting me and just zoning out. After one dude stepped on my feet at least twice in the space of about 5 minutes, I invited him to “work it out” with a French word at the start. He seemed to speak French. It was still a bit too busy to just go into running mode. We saw a person dressed as Elmo, basically Miler red, along Beaconsfield Pde which lightened the mood.

When I switched the auto lap off before the race, I accidentally switched the total time data screen off. I was only getting splits when I did them manually at each 5km pad and no total race time, unless I clicked through to the normal “clock” function and did some mathematics. I really was using the force. The third 5km block was done in 21:18 (4:16). From memory, Bermuda was the front pacer from here to the end of the marathon. The fourth 5km block was done in 21:07 (4:13 av). We hit 21km at about 1:28:27.

From 10-25km I really was not feeling the love much — I was not feeling bad, but just not absolutely smashing it like at the 33km session at Sri Chinmoy. I kept telling myself it was the carb loading and the taper. I told myself to stop bleating until I reached the same 33km point.

There were Milers everywhere. Just fabulous. The bus runners tended to have people running drinks, but we had people everywhere. Running alongside the bus for a bit, riding on bikes etc. And further undercover Milers. And the people in front and behind us on the switchbacks who were regularly calling out to and being encouraged by. It really was a case of the other runners shaking their heads with each new person and this is even though most had their own support crews. At one point late in the run, someone was heard to ask, "Do you Milers have like 40,000 members..?" When someone in the bus (who had already asked about the Milers) asked me about the 3 hour pacers, I got to say "the pacers — they are ours". There will be some fresh recruits when the marathon legs subside.

The fifth 5km block was done in 20:35. 25km done.

At the 28km mark, I nearly missed Racer. The bus was less crowded but still busy. I was in the zone and was not even thinking about drinks. Racer gallantly dived in front of the whole bus to get me my drink and narrowly missed taking someone out. Racer is dedicated! Alas, it was the first of two coke pop-tops which I had insufficiently shaken when I filled them so they were still fairly fizzy. A few sips and it was hurled away. Bermuda chastised me, telling me to get behind him for the next drinks. I think I told him just grab the bottle for me if it happened again. Bermuda resisted the urge to expel me from the stable and from the bus.

Bermuda, as front pacer, was going into a good crowd pleaser/teaser mode from the front of the bus — encouraging the crowd to clap and waving his arms like he was lifting an empty cardboard box, palms out and facing the sky (aka the international signal for "bring it"). The man has flair, but I never realised how much, nor did I realise it could be deployed in tandem with pacing duties. Bermuda was clearly loving it and the enthusiasm was infectious.

Up until here I had been cracking jokes, talking French and generally chatting with the other runners. From here on, I was not giving much back to anyone. We headed up Fitzroy St in St Kilda. That is a bit of a hill by marathon standards. Partway up, someone warned Bermuda that we were doing about 4:00 (my Garmin told me later that that lap was 3:57). Funnily enough, I hardly noticed that we had speeded up. My mind was starting to drift, but into a good place.

Onto St Kilda Rd, there were hordes of half marathoners and they were, as usual, making limited efforts, at best, to allow us through. Bermuda was doing some tidy crowd control work with the half marathoners.

The sixth 5km block was done in 20:18 (4:16 av). 30km done.

At around 35km, the crowds and the terrain meant that the bus was speeding up and slowing down a bit. We were properly along St Kilda Rd which had temporary fences and curbs and so on. Bermuda kept warning us to give each other space so as to not risk a trip at this late stage. At this stage, I saw Seb and Smoore starting to drift forward in front of me and wondered whether they were taking a risk. I was in front of the pacers myself there but behind them. I had been zoning out and drifting forward myself. This meant that I had to keep looking around to check I was not

running too fast, particularly with the bus changing speeds every now and again. Seb and Smoore got swallowed by the bus again.

The seventh 5km block was done in 20:19 (4:16 av). 35 km done.

I had not been stepped on for a while, but was worried about the speeding up. I was also wondering whether the bus was going to be a better, or a worse, option for going through the bottleneck of half marathoners at the Arts Centre/City Rd. I also started to think that my drifting pace, even if it was slightly faster than the bus, would just carry me along with me brain firmly in a happy place. I would not need to keep looking around.

So I just drifted off further in front of the bus without looking back and did not see them again until after the marathon was over. I thought about checking with Bermuda, but that seemed a bit weird, besides, he might tell me not to do it. The hard, windy Wednesday sessions (on my own or with the last rep on my own) did their work, psychologically speaking.

Under the Arts Centre was mayhem with half marathoners listening to personal devices. There was a bit of friendly shouting by me, blessedly without any French. It made no difference anyway so I just dodged and weaved. The bus really must have struggled through there

Around the corner and onto Birdwood Ave, Racer must have been looking for the bus and not me because I saw him and he was looking past me into the distance. I got his attention and his quick hands made the hand-off. Half fizzy coke again. A few sips and I threw it away. I had my last gel and some endura drink from a drink station.

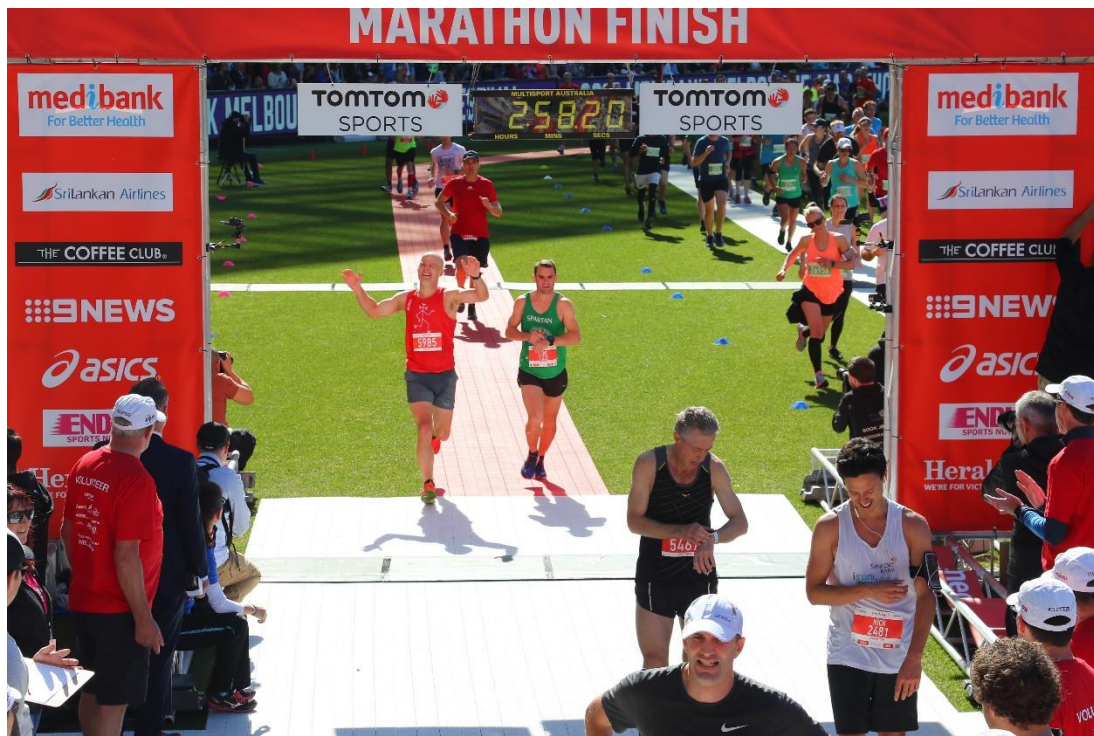
I saw Dozer who enthusiastically reminded me that this was the home ground and that I owned it. He has said this in previous years and I reckon there is something in it. I am not sure if I gave much back, but I kept plugging up the hill and quickened the pace. I think I did about 4:25 up the hill. House floated by and I yelled to him. Smurf powered past. Licka did the same and yelled back, followed by Rob. I saw Hutz. Some of them were yelling out that "sub 3 is on". I went down the Domain and up the new mini-hill and back onto Birdwood Ave.

That was about at the 39km mark. At that stage, I looked at my watch and worked out that even just faster than 5:00 per km would get me close to home under 3 hours. I was running fine and told myself I would push on at a good pace and that time would cover a blow out. I was still feeling pretty good, anyhow. Down Birdwood Ave, past Racer and some of the crew (with me not giving much back). The eighth and final full 5km block was done in 20:35 (4:19 av). 40km done.

Turning onto Flinders St (2.2km from the finish line), my watch ticked just on 2:50. I was going to do sub 3 properly.

I ran down to the MCG. I overtook one Spartan on the mats and then saw another further in front who I knew I could catch. But would that ruin his photo over the line? Would it ruin mine? I kind of treaded water for a few moments then just ducked in front of him over the line for 2:58:13 net time and the sub 3 monkey on my back had

been well and truly sent to heaven. The last 2.2km was done at 4:03 av. I had done it and just like Bermuda had told me to do all my runs — feeling like I still had something left the whole way.



Dist	Split	Race Time	Pos	Div	Gen	Speed/Pace
5k	00:20:45	00:20:45	292	53	273	14.46 / 4:09
10k	00:21:16	00:42:02	296	53	278	14.11 / 4:15
15k	00:21:18	01:03:21	301	51	283	14.08 / 4:16
20k	00:21:07	01:24:28	294	51	276	14.21 / 4:13
21k	00:03:58	01:28:27	292	51	274	15.13 / 3:58
25k	00:16:37	01:45:04	284	52	265	14.44 / 4:09
30k	00:21:18	02:06:23	275	52	260	14.08 / 4:16
35k	00:21:19	02:27:42	241	45	226	14.07 / 4:16
40k	00:21:35	02:49:18	212	44	198	13.90 / 4:19
42.2k	00:08:54	02:58:13	203	41	189	14.83 / 4:03