

Easter Athletic Festival

A Unique athletic festival and a unique experience

The Isle of Man sits in the middle of the Irish Sea and boasts outstanding natural beauty and diversity of scenery; it is also blessed with majestic headlands, rocky bays and creeks along its attractive 100 mile coast line with fine sand and pebble beaches. Every Easter the island plays host to an athletic festival that offers runners something a little bit different. Whether you are an international athlete, club, fun or social runner the Isle of Man will give you a truly memorable and pleasurable experience.

The Isle of Man athletic festival is more than 40 years old, during that period the festival has built up a very good reputation attracting runners and clubs from up and down the country. The friendly nature of the event and the fine ales the Island proudly produces has attracted a good number of universities such as Loughborough, Liverpool and Leeds, the event also lends itself for an old boy's reunion.

During the height of the road running 'bloom' in the mid 1980's the festival attracted well over 350 competitors and athletes of the stature of Hugh Jones and Ron Hill were regular visitors. Through the hard work of the organising team from the host club Manx Harriers the festival has continued to attract good numbers although in recent years the event has had to deal with the same problems as similar races in the UK where races are just not attracting large fields. However, through the continued support from the Department of Tourism and Leisure which allows the festival to offer generous cash prizes, to the extent that the leading runner can walk away with several hundred pounds.

So what makes the Isle of Man athletic festival so attractive? It is made up of three events, a road race on Good Friday, a hill race on Saturday and culminating with a relay on Easter Sunday. For 2005 the road race has been changed from a hard 5 mile race to a fast 10k starting at the National Sports Centre and then following a flat route around the Islands capital Douglas. The Hill race takes place in the West of the Island following an ascent of the legendary Peel Hill and after 4 hard but enjoyable miles finishes outside a local pub! The final event is a fast 5k, four led relay around the perimeter of the National Sports Centre, for individual runners visiting there are always local teams looking for runners to make up a composite team.

The Island is renowned for its hospitality and friendly residents so when the running has finished you can sample the Islands delights. For the family there are a good range of restaurants, parks, local landmarks and a 20 million pound National Sport Centre. For those wanting to sample the local night life, Douglas enjoys some very lively bars and clubs open to the early hours and if drinking beer is your 'chosen subject' you will not be disappointed by the fine array of local ales.

The festival is brought to a close with a prize presentation and a fiercely contested beer drinking competition that the majority of the university runners take more seriously than the running element. The prize presentation reflects the mood of the festival with new friendships being struck and memories shared helped along the way by the local brew.

The Isle of Man athletics festival has it all, fantastic scenery, fantastic people, good racing and a unique experience that will want to make you go home and tell you friends and club mates just how good the Island and the event is.

For further information regarding the Isle of Man Easter Athletic Festival you can visit www.manxharriers.com or e-mail paul.jackson@manx.net or contact Colin Halsall on (01624) 852187