

The North Face Ultra Trail du Mont-Blanc 2008

Report by Brian Linton

The race was simply the toughest, most spectacular, thrilling and best organised race that I have done. It was a daunting experience standing at the start line in Chamonix on Friday night with some of the fittest ultra runners in the world.



Entrants are limited to 2500 and to qualify for an entry you have to have finished the event in the last two years or have completed two ultra marathon events that have enough elevation gain to be recognised by the race committee. After that you have to be quick to get one of the non French/Italian/Swiss allocated places as this year's online entries were filled within ten minutes!

At 18:30 on Friday evening 2377* competitors lined up in the centre of Chamonix village to attempt the 166.4km (103 miles) ultra marathon around the Tour of Mont Blanc through France, Italy and Switzerland with a total elevation gain (and loss) of 9400m. Out of those 2377, only 1263 would finish within the 46 hour time limit.

* Some competitors would have dropped out due to injury and some were excluded as they could not validate their qualifying credentials.

This years event was much tougher than I expected. With living in Ireland at sea level, it is very hard to prepare for the altitude and the searing heat from the cloudless and windless alpine weather than greeted us during the event. It took a supreme physical and mental effort

to keep going, especially after my training / running partner dropped out after 90km due to heat exhaustion. The pre-dawn hours of Sunday morning were by far the most difficult as I found myself very alone on the mountain having the odd hallucination due to the lack of sleep.

I completed the event in a time of 40 hours 3 minutes and 46 seconds to come 561st (223rd in age category) to finish at 10:35 on Sunday morning. During the event I only slept for a total of 15minutes between the two kit bag stops (10mins at Courmayeur & 5mins at Champex-Lac) and according to my heart rate monitor computer, I consumed 20,719 kcals. From a 'team Ireland' (ROI & NI) point of view, I managed to finish 1st out of the 10 entrants, of which only 4 finished.

If you are interested, there are also some photos from the event professional photographers on http://www.maindruphoto.com/advanced_search_result.php?cPath=1360_1361&language=en&numbercompetitor=2720



As for next year, if my brain can remember how I felt on the early hours of Sunday morning, I won't be doing the event! However, in some months time after a couple of pints some evening, someone will suggest entering and somehow it will again seem like a good idea.

Next year's entries will open in December and only those that have completed the necessary qualification races will go forward into a lottery for a place. For next year's entry rules and qualifying races, click on <http://www.ultratrailmb.com/page.php?page=Inscriptions2009>