

WINCANTON MONTFERLAND RUN

A SHORT HISTORY

The Wincanton-Montferland Run is one of the best attended and fastest 15-K road races in the world. The course record belongs to 'the most popular athlete worldwide and the best long-distance runner of all-time' Haile Gebrselassie (he ran it in 42.36 minutes, last year). The event has had some 'great winners' such as Kenenisa Bekele, Felix Limo, William Kipsang and Richard Yatic (now known as Mubarak Hassan Shami). Khalid Khannouchi, Sileshi Sihine, Luke Kibet and Richard Limo have already graced 's-Heerenberg. In 2007, there was only one race in the world – the Seven Hills Run at Nijmegen – with a faster male result at 15K for the winner.

However, there is more to what has made this race a special event in its 12 years. Regardless of their level or age, the participants always comment on 'the unique character' of the Wincanton Montferland Run. This can be attributed to the small scale of the event (maximum 3,500 runners at the starting line), the professional organisation, the rustic surroundings and the superb course with its challenging climbs. The starting line is close to Huis Bergh (one of the Netherlands' largest castles), and the finishing line is in the historic centre of 's-Heerenberg (8,000 inhabitants, 25 kilometres south-east of Arnhem).

A course with character

The course (1 large circuit of road or hard paved paths) winds through the hilly landscape of the Montferland Woods. The first village encountered after 2 kilometres is Stokkum (one of the 11 church villages of Montferland municipality). The first real climb – Peeskes Bult – comes after 5 kilometres, where a difference in elevation of 42 metres has to be surmounted. This is followed by a long descent, after which the runners reach the village of Beek (approximately 2,500 inhabitants). The second climb follows after more than 8 kilometres (with a difference in height of less than 30 metres, this climb is less steep), and after about 10 kilometres –just in the Montferland Woods – the going is once again downhill. The Drieheuvelenweg (Three Hills Way) – close to Zeddam (famous for the Netherlands' oldest windmill, the 'Grafelijke Korenmolen' or Earl's Cornmill) – has a few small climbs, but the last one-and-a-half kilometres are an easy descent. The finishing line is directly in front of 's-Heerenberg's town hall.

The Wincanton-Montferland Run is regarded by both visitors and the invited top athletes as a 'course with character', challenging, varied, with a few difficult hills, but also fast due to the descents and the paved surface. The course has been officially measured and is 'of length', which means that it is exactly 15 kilometres long, and that the top running times achieved on this course can be included in the record books. The Dutch Athletics Union has therefore granted the organisation of the Montferland Run Foundation the necessary certificate, with which the requirements for the recognition of possible records can be fulfilled.

Philosophy

The Wincanton-Montferland Run was first organised in 1996 (there were 365 participants then), and since then this race (2,567 athletes participated in the most recent run) has been held annually on the first Sunday in December. The organisers' aim is that all participants – young and old, men and women, experienced and inexperienced runners – can fully enjoy the '15-kilometre course through the wooded and rural surroundings of Montferland'. This can only be achieved if this running event does not become too large or massive. For this reason it was decided to allow a maximum of 3,500 runners.

With regard to the top athletes, the organisation annually determines the best Dutch top athletes (both men and women). In 2006, almost all of the top Dutch athletes were at the starting line in 's-Heerenberg. Kamiel Maase finished in 5th place, Greg van Hest was 8th, Jeroen van Damme was 9th, Koen Raymaekers was 12th, and Hugo van den Broek finished in 16th place. In 2007 Sander Schutgens and Merel de Knecht were the best Dutch performers. Where foreign top athletes are concerned, race director Carlo Jansen does his utmost to contract about 10 of the world's top athletes. In particular, he looks for one or two runners with a proven 'track record'. Due to his good contact with, amongst others, Global Sports Communication (the management bureau of Jos Hermes), he has managed to contract the best long-distance runner of all time. On Sunday 2 December, the 34-year old Ethiopian Haile Gebrselassie has proven to be an outstanding athlete in 's-Heerenberg!!

The course record for the Wincanton Montferland Run is – since Sunday 2 December 2007 – held by Haile Gebrselassie (the best long-distance runner of all-time for 24 world records, four world titles at the 10.000 meters and two Olympic gold medals at that distance). He smashed last year – in pouring rain – the old course record by Kenenisa Bekele (the current world record holder at the 5000 and 10.000 meters, and already honoured with 11 individual gold medals at the World Championships Cross Country, three world titles at the 10.000 meters and one Olympic gold medal at this discipline). At the women's all-time list of the Wincanton Montferland Run the name of Bizunesh Bekele (not related to Kenenisa) is first mentioned; she has been the fastest woman in 's-Heerenberg so far.

The ten fastest athletes in the history of the Wincanton Montferland Run are:

MEN

01.	Haile Gebrselassie	(ETH)	2007	42.36 minutes
02.	Kenenisa Bekele	(ETH)	2001	42.42 minutes
03.	Ali Mabrouk El Zaidi	(LBA)	2007	42.42 minutes
04.	Deriba Merga	(ETH)	2006	42.48 minutes
05.	Sileshi Sihine	(ETH)	2001	42.51 minutes
06.	Hailu Mekonnen	(ETH)	2005	43.09 minutes
07.	Richard Yatich (Mubarak Shami)	(KEN)	2003	43.20 minutes
08.	Kiyara Kamzee	(KEN)	2000	43.26 minutes
09.	Tadesse Feyissa	(ETH)	2004	43.28 minutes
10.	Wilson Kipsang	(KEN)	2007	43.30 minutes

N.B: In 2000, at the age of 18, Kenenisa Bekele ran the Wincanton-Montferland Run in only 43.09 minutes (a world junior record at that moment). As mentioned above, he improved this course record a year later to 42.42 minutes.

WOMEN

01.	Bizunesh Bekele	(ETH)	2005	48.32 minutes
02.	Deribe Alemu	(ETH)	2007	48.50 minutes
03.	Amelework Fikadu	(ETH)	2007	50.16 minutes
04.	Peninah Arusei	(KEN)	2007	50.26 minutes
05.	Fatiha Baouf	(BEL)	2004	50.41 minutes
06.	Ayelech Worku	(ETH)	2003	50.58 minutes
07.	Nadja Wijenberg	(NED)	1999	50.59 minutes
08.	Irma Heeren	(NED)	2000	51.03 minutes
09.	Hilda Kibet	(KEN)	2006	51.10 minutes
10.	Petra Drazjlatlova	(CZE)	1999	51.12 minutes

N.B: In 2004, Bizunesh Bekele won in 48.35 minutes. This is the second-best time for women, as Bizunesh Bekele ran 3 seconds faster the following year.