

The Great Eastern Pacesetters **30K 2008 Race Report**

I was afraid that all the foundation work done the last 2 months would come undone on race day. In a week that I was to clock 66K, I achieved only 36K, and that was inclusive of the 30.64K for the GE race. The entire last week was a mess, in terms of work stress, rest and fueling and I expect this week to be the same before hopefully recovering to a more manageable level. My target mileage of 66K was made even on a race week as the GE30K was merely to be the first long run in the buildup to the KL Marathon. The race goal was downgraded from a 30K time trial

With the fueling plan shot, there was a bit of trepidation the night before. Completing 25K isn't a problem but add 5 more Ks and things could change for the worse in an instant. As if the planning isn't bad enough I completely forgot the bottle of "energy drink" I left in the fridge to cool off while getting ready on race morning. I arrived at the parking lot at 5am with no means of hydration and with a wad of toilet roll tuck into my waist band with no toilets opened. Unless you're willing to brave the long queue at the toilet near the start and the added pressure of getting your "business" done quickly with the waiting horde outside. So I held on and by the time the race started, the urge disappeared.

I lined up somewhere in the middle of the pack and was ideally placed to see that the 30K crowd is more that 2 years ago (I didn't participate in last year's event). Coupled with the 150 reported travellers from Singapore this increase is really encouraging for the organizers and sport. One Klang runner gave me a sip of water and very soon we were off. I was so calm, no jitters whatsoever, reminiscent of my feelings at the starting line of the KL Marathon PR a couple of years back. As expected, the start was congested and some short stretches were spent walking - why waste energy dodging and weaving? The result? 7:32 first K.

First Third

The early morning was nice and cool and I didn't sweat as much as during the training runs. A few runners clapped in support of the placard wearing, flag bearing runner. His protest placard read something like - "Fuel price is up, corruption level is up, flour price is up, what's next?" By the time we reached Central Bank, Choi was already running up ahead. I bumped into Shine and Khoo Yit Kiat (KYK) a moment later. The 3 of us would be running close to each other for the next 8 to 10K. The longer I paced with these fellas, the more confidence I gained. Checking my splits gave me a shock as even the uphill were run at a very crisp pace. I tried to slow down, but the pace didn't drop and I was still covering the distance very comfortably at about the LT pace. A beefy Caucasian asked me a perplexing question about how many laps we're doing. I told him we're not running laps. Then he rephrased his query by asking how many loops to which I replied 2. I hope that he realized that there's the Hartamas portion to be run as well. Met Shirlyn who travelled up with a contingent of Singapore SAFRA runners, near the Tijani homes and we chatted a bit - she looked really trim and fit. Too bad I didn't get to meet her at the finish.

Second Third

Exiting the dreaded Double Hills (a misnomer really, as there are more climbs than 2!), I was still in the game, running alongside Shine and KYK. They would surge ahead and later drop back or I'd pull nearer. It was getting fun and I told KYK that the race has just begun. We've still to run Kenny Hills the 2nd time before to Hartamas. I checked my splits again and thought the later stages of the race would be very painful. I hadn't slowed down and had fears that I'd crash and burn after 20K. I appreciated the fact that we didn't need to slog over the IRB hill but the climb at the Wilayah Mosque wasn't that appealing either. Thankfully the water station was just at the top and I took the chance to slow down to a walk and took a few extra seconds to savour the fluids. From that point onwards I tried to focus on my breathing and form but every once in awhile I'd wave or shouted across the road at the returning 20K and faster 30K runners. Saw Wan and Kim

then, Jessica, Loke and Lawrence who wasn't far behind, running well. Choi was about 70m ahead of me while Shine and KYK had pulled further ahead until I could no longer see them.

Just before reaching Plaza Damas, spotted Sharuddin, Don Khor, Ronnie, Barry, Chen, Lisar and other familiar faces in quick succession. Before I knew it, I'd passed the killer Damas climb and well on the way around the Petronas gas station. I wobbled a little going up the short but steep turn and then rolled downhill towards the Powergel station where I grabbed 2 packets - one I consumed, the other I saved for later.

Final Third

The sun was up and the cool air was warming up as if to kill off the flagging spirits of the runners. There were still 10K to go and if logic held up, it'll be soon before I crash and burn. But my effort was still consistent - all systems still green. My momentum downhill took me past Choi until the Mosque climb again. I thought to myself that I needed to endure just another hour to the finish. Just another hour! I struggled up this very challenging spot and squeezed off the remaining gel and downed the Endurance drink.

I remembered feeling very relieved to clear the hills even though there were a couple more to negotiate. At least until the torturous Tijani and Padang Merbok climbs, I'd have a somewhat flatter course to grind through. I kept the spirits up by thinking repeatedly that I could surely bear another 5K of pain to the finish. It was a mental game then. There was no lack of inspiration all round either. The slowest runners were just approaching the spot I covered more than an hour ago. These people had oodles of mental steeliness and determination and I admire them greatly. Those with water bottles offered these strugglers much needed fluids to tide them over until the next water stop.

As expected the Tijani climb was a torture. Very nearly did I succumb to the temptation of walking up. The fact that everyone else was added to the urge. In that moment of truth, I somehow had a little sense left in me. I focused on the remaining distance - only 4K to go. "Less than 24 minutes of pain.

Push, push!" I was less concerned about making it back below 3 hours than clearing each K. I knew that I would be cutting it close to 3 hours but walking would definitely destroy that bonus target.

After getting over Tijani at no more than a shuffle, it became simpler and I made up for lost time by once again rolling down the hills. I passed Zul's Putrajaya Runner friend and Loong who was hit with cramps. The last struggle came at the long Padang Merbok climb to the Lake Gardens. That was when I felt a brief tightness in the back but luckily that went away. Legs were still OK except for some discomfort at both big toes. I focused on the form and kept up with the cadence but try as I might I couldn't draw near to Ultraman Yip. 30Ks are walks in the park for this man of steel.



Photo courtesy of Tey

Finally comes the 500m downhill to the finish. I upped the pace and increased the strides and felt good when suddenly out of nowhere Sam, the Japanese Ironman passed me on the right with 250m to go. I felt at that point to have some fun and risk a sprint with him. What a thrill even though I finished just 3 strides behind him.

There were no other runners except the 2 of us approaching the finish line and things froze - I saw the photographers, the timekeepers at their desks with their laptops and someone shouted my name to slow down (so that my photo could be captured for the certificate).

Highlights: Pacing with Khoo Yit Kiat and Shine (who were both running "slow") which got me running at a faster pace, and all out 200m sprint finish duel with Sam the Japanese triathlete (I lost!).

Good: The organization, crowd, mind games, race fueling and hydration, gels at the 20K mark, shoes, tights. Training on hilly grounds paid off.

Bad: Stomach problems at the start and end, a couple of blisters at the big toe (must remember to lube those spots, slight albeit brief twinge in the back, uneven pacing (probably caused by the hills)

Splits:

7:32 > 5:44 > 5:41 > 6:04 > 5:29 (5K - 30:30) > 5:38 > 6:07 > 5:50 > 5:27 > 5:47 (10K - 59:18) > 5:44 > 5:21 > 5:44 > 6:02 > 5:25 (15K - 1:27.34) > 5:36 > 5:57 > 5:38 > 5:40 > 5:39 (20K - 1:56.05) > 6:01 (21K - 2:02.06) > 6:09 > 5:20 > 5:14 > 5:52 > 5:38 > 6:16 > 6:02 > 5:14 (2:47.50) > 6:00 > 4:36 (2:56.47)

Average Pace: 5:46

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Photo courtesy of PACM