

Baldock Beast Multi-terrain Half Marathon 2012



First Run Review by Ashley Hawkins, the man behind the Baldock Half Marathon.

I N T R O — M I L E S 1 T O 5

As one of the organisers of the Baldock Half Marathon, I thought it was only right that I should try out the course and let people know what they can expect on Sunday 18th March 2012.

So far I have ran 6 half marathons and the first thing I want to tell you all is that the Baldock Half Marathon is a beautiful course which takes in some wonderful scenery.

I travelled over to Baldock on Saturday 21st January to sample the Baldock Beast for myself. I have been round the course numerous times in the car but this was my first taste at running it – and it wont be my last!

The race will be graded with runners on the day lining up in terms of their predicted finishing times. The run starts on the old Wallington Road. This is a slightly narrow path but wide enough for 4-5 runner abreast The path itself is flat and well maintained but be advised there is some uneven ground so please do not try and pass people on the right hand side. The first mile of the course is a long the narrow path which takes you up a number of small hills and then across the bridge over the main road.

After about a mile, the route picks up the main Wallington Road which takes runners on a mile and half climb up to the village centre. Whilst hilly, the ascend is gradual and not steep. At the village, runners turn left on a downhill section which leads them to the first water station. By this stage the field will probably be beginning to stretch out. After the water station, runners have a short section across open fields to contend with before joining the Rushden Road. This section is thankfully flat but this does not last long as runners are soon faced with a small hill climb up to the village of Sandon. Thankfully at the top of the hill the run levels out again and there is the second of the four water stations at around the 4.5 mile mark.

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At around the 6 mile mark the terrain changes again with runners taken on a wonderful yet muddy section of around 800metres through woodland. All I can say to runners is pray for dry weather or invest in some black trainers. This section of the race can be slippery so take it easy on race day.

The woodland section is followed by a gentle hill that leads runners back to the village of Sandon. This is one of the most scenic sections of the course with Sandon Church on your right and the duck pond on your left. If your legs are tired by this point you will soon speed up if the grumpy swan is around. Watch out for the swan as you pass the red telephone box!

Runners will then pass the village school were hopefully residents will be out on force to cheer on the competitors. At around the 7.5 mile mark is the third water station which is located next to the football pitch by Sandon Sports and Social Club.

At this point the road narrows as it moves from Sandon down to the Rushden Road. This section of the race is slightly down hill and is an opportunity to set some fast mile times. The road is narrow so runners on the day will need to keep to a maximum of 2 abreast.

Next up is the small village of Redhill before runners face the biggest challenge of the Baldock Beast which is the $\frac{3}{4}$ mile climb up to the village of Wallington and thankfully the 4th water station. Runners then pass a second duck pond – thankfully minus the nasty swan before running the final two miles mostly downhill to the finish line.

My Finish Time: 1h 55 mins

Course Verdict : This is a lovely course which takes in plenty of North Hertfordshire Countryside. Yes it is challenging with a few hills but it also has several relieving downhill sections. It is a varied course taking in gravel tracks, open fields ,muddy woodland and road running. I will definitely be running the course again before race day and I don't say that after many of my half marathon runs.

If you have any questions about the Baldock Beast do not hesitate to contact me by e-mail at Ashley.hawkins@north-herts.gov.uk

Rating: 9 out of 10