

GREAT BIRMINGHAM RUN & MARATHON, OCTOBER 15

BIRMINGHAM RUN FESTIVAL

POPULAR HALF-MARATHON AND NEW MARATHON HIT WEST MIDLANDS CITY

THE SECOND-biggest half-marathon in the country takes place on Sunday in

Birmingham alongside an exciting new marathon in the same West Midlands city.

The Simplyhealth Great Birmingham Run is second only to the Great North Run in size and stature when it comes to 13.1-mile races.

On the same day, the new Birmingham International Marathon gives runners an opportunity to tackle 26.2 miles on home soil in what will hopefully be marathon-friendly autumn weather.

The 26.2-mile event is the inaugural run in the new Great Run British Marathon Series and will start at Alexander Stadium, the home of British Athletics and Birchfield Harriers.

From Alexander Stadium, participants will pass Villa Park, home to Aston Villa FC since 1897. Just past Villa Park is the Grade I listed Aston Hall and as runners leave Aston and continue to the city centre, the



Andy Vernon gets last year's race under way

DAVID TYRELL

home of famous gunsmiths Westley Richards is the next famous landmark to look out for at the heart of Birmingham's Gun Quarter.

Marathon runners will then pass the start-line for the Great Birmingham Run half-marathon and the iconic Selfridges building before heading out towards the Irish Quarter of Digbeth and Peaky Blinders territory and Cannon Hill Park. World-famous Bournville is next, before participants begin the journey back to the city centre, passing Edgbaston cricket ground. Then it's on to the city's 'Golden Mile' of Broad Street and out again for one more lap to complete the 26.2 miles.

The Simplyhealth Great Birmingham Run, meanwhile, is a well-established event which in the past has staged the IAAF World Half-marathon Championships.

The marathon runners get going in various waves from 8:30am onwards on Sunday

with the half-marathoners starting from 1.30pm in waves.

In addition to this, the Simplyhealth Junior and Mini Great Birmingham Runs take place at Alexander Stadium on Saturday October 14 with the Mini Run open to children of all abilities aged 3-8 and the Junior Run for 9 to 15-year-olds.

Organisers hope that the new marathon will help to raise the standard of marathon running in the UK. Britain was the dominant force in marathon running in the 1960s but standards have been largely in decline. From 229 sub-2:25 performers in 1983 to 11 in 2007, there has been a small revival in recent years which shows that the time is right for a big addition to the calendar to further boost it.

Aside from the over-subscribed London Marathon, there are a lack of world-class marathon events in the UK and organisers have an aim of making the Birmingham

International Marathon the country's leading autumn event.

Both half and full marathon events this weekend have a number of aspiring club-standard runners. They include Laura Kyte of Bromsgrove & Redditch, who will be aiming to break 80 minutes for the first time, plus Michael Kallenberg of Cardiff – a 66:48 man.

Tsegegab Woldemichael of Shettleston also runs – he has a 63:00 PB but from 2009.

In the marathon, entries include 2:25 man Andrew Savery of Leamington, 2:29 runner Tony Banks of Jersey and Martin Williams of Tipton Harriers, who has a 2:17:36 PB but is now an M40.

Prize money is generous too with the overall individual men's and women's winner receiving £2000, with £1000 for second place and £750 for third, with awards stretching down to £50 for 10th, plus cash prizes for leading masters and prizes for the clubs as well.



Michael Kallenberg is a half-marathon contender

MARK SHEARMAN