

Published based on [The London Marathon Is Considered One Of The Best Known Events On The Global Sporting Calendar. It's Quite Incredible To Think That It Only Started Around Thirty Years Ago Thanks To The Inspiration Of Just Two Men](#)

**The London Marathon Is Considered One Of  
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Just Two Men**

It's almost that time of year when many thousands of enthusiastic participants hit the streets to take part in the annual London Marathon. The race is now such a big event in the sporting calendar that a lot of people would undoubtedly be surprised to discover that the first ever London Marathon took place in 1981.

The notion for the race came from two ex-athletes, Chris Brasher and John Disley. Chris Brasher is famous for his role as pace-maker in the first four minute mile, and for achieving a gold medal in the Olympic steeplechase in 1956. Pictures show him taking part whilst wearing a pair of glasses – maybe if he was alive and participating today he would opt for much safer contact lenses or Laser eye surgery!

In any case, the two runners had heard people enthusing about the New York Marathon, and wanted to find out why it was such a popular event, so they decided to enter themselves for the race the next year. The event had such an impact on them that when they returned to Britain, they decided to investigate whether they would be able to organise a similar event in London.

Through powerful contacts a discussion was organised with representatives of all of the interested parties who had to approve the idea if it was to go ahead. It seems that, once a suitable route had been suggested, agreement was reached fairly quickly and the first ever London Marathon happened in March 1981. For that first race, about 20,000 people applied to participate, and around 7,700 were accepted of which 6,255 finished the race.

One of the stipulations when the plans for the event were agreed was that no public funds should be used to pay for the overheads of arranging the event, so sponsorship was necessary to be sure that all expenses could be met. The organising committee was very lucky with the timing, because Gillette had just stopped their cricket sponsorship and were trying to find a new sporting sponsorship deal. That first race was sponsored to the princely sum of £75,000. Since that time, sponsors have changed a number of times with this year's sponsors Virgin taking over from Flora in 2010 having agreed a five year sponsorship contract.

The event route has changed little during the last thirty years. The only major change from the early days is that the race now finishes in The Mall instead of on Westminster Bridge. There have been one or two little changes, but apart from that it has stayed much the same over the years since the very first race. On the other hand though, technology has come on in leaps and bounds since then. Precision timing making use of a beam similar to that given out by a Laser eye gives spot on timings for the elite runners as they cross the line and break the beam. Ever increasing television coverage from every conceivable angle means that nobody watching needs to miss a thing, though after many hours of seeing thousands of runners storming or staggering along the roads, you may reach the point when you feel that you are a candidate for corrective glasses or [Laser eye surgery](#) to get your eyes functioning properly again!

Anyone who has watched the race will know only too well that many of the runners are involved in the race to make money for their favourite charity. Three quarters of those who participate do so to for charitable causes and it is estimated that in excess of five hundred million pounds has been raised by participants during the last thirty years. Some charities are signed up to a scheme via which they are guaranteed a specific number of places in the race, and they can then allocate them to their supporters in exchange for a guaranteed amount of sponsorship funds.

The race is also great publicity for London as a city as countless viewers all over the globe watch on their television sets as the runners pass by great London landmarks such as the Cutty Sark, Tower Bridge, Canary Wharf, Parliament Square and Buckingham Palace. It often seems unfortunate that the event can't be planned to coincide with some other big London happening – perhaps combine it with a huge firework display and beams of light flashing across the sky from [Laser eye](#) equipment. Who knows if something along those lines will occur sometime in 2012 during the Olympic Games though?

More than anything else though, the race is about the thousands of entrants. Naturally, there are the international athletes who treat the marathon as a proper world class race, but the great majority are just everyday people who decide to attempt to run just over twenty-six miles in order to help other people. Anyone who has seen the event will recall only too well the hundreds of costumes, the selection of charities printed on clothing and the joyous

camaraderie enjoyed by all of the participants and by the crowds along the route. Here's to another successful race this year!

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