

Full Throttle at the Daytona 100

The Mission:

The Daytona 100 is a fast flat 100 mile race hugging the Atlantic coast to the East on Florida's A1A Highway and tracks Southbound from Jacksonville to the Ponce Inlet Lighthouse just to the South of Daytona. It is held in December for a very good reason and has the reputation for giving a great opportunity for fast times due primarily to cooler temps and being flat. And quite simply my challenge and mission were to break into that sub 20 hour barrier for a 100 miler.

I am no stranger to running in Florida having previously run a 20 hour and 54 minute race there back in May in the savagely hot and humid, [Keys 100](#), not forgetting those 40 bridges I had to cross enroute to the Key West finish line.

Both the Daytona 100 and the Keys 100 are run by the legendary Race Director and Ultra Marathon runner, Bob Becker. Bob is an inspiration to us all and at 80 years young became the oldest competitor to run the Badwater 135 in July this year. His fourth finish there and also mine too.

My husband and I love attending his races as he is such a lovely man and makes us feel so welcome.



Travel:

Matthew (my solo crew chief) and I flew out to Orlando on Monday and spent three nights in Flagler Beach (mile 70 of the course) acclimatising to the time zone and topping up on some supplies. I also did a few easy training runs on parts of the Ocean highway A1A. On those days I enjoyed beautiful blue skies with the highest temperatures around 19°C / 66°F with the nights a quite chilly 8-12°C / 46°-53°F.

Whilst at dinner on Tuesday night, Matthew and I received messages from our friends, Caryn Lubetsky (elite ultra marathon runner with wins at this race and an amazing running resumé) and Chief Course Marshall (and Badwater 135 finisher) Mark Cudak, asking us if we would both like to be on the team "Experts Panel" at Registration on Friday, talking about how to run 100 miles and crewing. This was a first for us and made us both reflect on just how far we had both come in our experiences of running and crewing. It was an honour to be asked. My imposter syndrome did go

through the roof at this point!! How was I even being asked to take part in an experts panel?!! We then spent some time preparing for this with Matthew writing out his top ten crewing tips and myself some bullet points on things I've learnt over the years on Ultra marathon resilience etc.

Admin & Preparation:

Race preparations continued on the Thursday before the race as we drove up to Jacksonville, taking in the course through Matanzas Beach, the famously historic St Augustine, the Guana Tolomato Matanzas (GTM) Reserve and the exclusive Ponte Vedra Estate until we hit JAX. I ran this race in 2023 but it was great to re familiarise ourselves with the route and we spent a lot of the journey studying the race guide (the bible!) and remembering different parts of the course. It really is beautiful and so flat!



Friday was "Packet Pickup" day at the Marriott Courtyard Hotel on Jacksonville Beach. It was great to catch up with lots of running friends that we had met at the Keys100 and Badwater 135. Then at 3:30pm we took our seats on the experts panel on the long table at the front of the

conference room alongside our fellow experts of Bob, Caryn, Mark and Mike Melton who is a timing hot shot from MCM Timing and Results. A lot of the participants were running this race as their first 100 mile race and they were soaking up all the information on offer and listening intently.

I spoke a little about mental resilience and not giving up and gave an example of my first attempt at running 100 miles at the NDW100 where I quit at 76 miles because I mentally gave up and I really tried to get that across to the audience that running 100 miles will hurt a lot at some point, and it will suck, and be awful, but the lows will pass and then the glory of crossing the finish line and getting your buckle will outweigh all of that. Matthew, however, was the star of the show. He had the audience laughing at some of his crewing anecdotes and hopefully people found it useful as well as entertaining.

Friday early evening was spent transforming our bright red and festive Jeep Sahara into a fully operational crew support vehicle both inside and out! In less than an hour our crew vehicle was race ready. We had decided on just one ice cooler for the race as temperatures were not going to be hot and also adopted a "less is more" strategy on food and drink supplies. Throughout the course there were numerous gas stations, Publix supermarkets and other stores in addition to the 10 aid stations.



This is very different to running through Death Valley and the mountain of supplies and coolers!

The support car looked great and quite festive with our Union Jack flags,

Team Laura Watts decals plus a few other signs including "Run Like a Beast" from CurraNZ whom I have been working with this year and using their amazing magic berries. I definitely had a run like a beast attitude going into this race.

The night before a big race I really like to zone out and focus on the race. I was feeling apprehensive at what lay ahead. This is normal for me. I just want to get on with it at this stage and convert my nervous energy into performance. We had planned a very good strategy for this race; in fact, we had 3 variations of it based on pace in the four quarters of the race. Food, Nutrition, hydration and supplements were also meticulously planned out. My race clothes and accessories were laid out on the bed ready for the early start. I was out of the door at 0515 and had a short 5 minute drive to the start line. I was on the 5:30am start. It was a chilly 8°C / 46°F.

I didn't want to get cold so I stayed in the warm car as long as possible with Matthew before the race. I had my hot hands handwarmers doing their thing in my gloves, heaven. From the top down had my Shokz headphones on plus a Petzl Bindi, my mini but powerful head torch as it would be dark for at least the first hour. I was wearing a long sleeve De Soto Badwater Finishers top and a Salomon Hydration pack was worn over. My middle section I wore my favourite OnRunning Performance shorts which have three pockets and are the best running shorts I've come across. Then my Versus Classic Crew socks and Nike Alphafly 3s to help propel me along the course. Armed with a croissant and a can of Celsius Peach Vibe energy drink, the National anthem was sung by a brave volunteer runner, this was impeccably honoured as is customary in the USA. Then followed a couple of minutes of nervous anticipation under the clear but night sky of early morning Jacksonville. The start line digital clock counted down.... with seconds remaining on the clock, my brain switched modes.... and I was on a mission to break that 20 hour barrier.

5...4...3...2...1 Go! And I headed off into the unknown!

Miles 1-7 JAX BEACH

The first 3.5 miles of the race actually run north up through the residential areas of Neptune Beach and Atlantic Beach and I was entertained with some spectacular Christmas illuminations outside some of the houses. Crew aren't allowed to support in this part of the race until 7 miles so I took this time to settle into a running rhythm, gather my thoughts and get the first 7 miles ticked off. I ran through the equally spectacular Jacksonville Christmas illuminations called "the Lights of the World" and flew through the first Aid station which was back at the start line on Beach Blvd and 1st Street. Matthew was waiting for me at the first Crew point at mile 8 on the side of the road and all I needed was a new application of my Lucas pawpaw ointment which he smeared over my lips for me as I was still wearing my gloves and didn't want to take them off! My primary strategy for running this 100 miles in sub 20 hours was to break the race down into 4 x 25 mile sections. The aim was to run the first 25 miles in 4 hours, the next in 4.5 hours, then 5 hours and the last 25 miles in 5.5 hours. This would give me a 1 hour buffer for crewing, and medical issues. My pace for the first 8 miles was 9 minutes 23 a mile. So far so good... but it was very early days!

Miles 11-16 MICKLER'S LANDING

The next section of the race is an 8 mile stretch through the very exclusive Ponte Vedra estate full of magnificent homes and a perfectly manicured

golf course. The sun was rising and I knew it was going to be a beautiful day. Crew aren't allowed in this section either. Here I shared some miles with another runner called Darryl and the miles went by very fast as we shared running stories along the way. I gave Matthew a half a mile call that I was almost at Aid station 2, Mickler's Beach but I caught him off guard as my pace was faster than we had planned and when I got to the point where all the crews were he wasn't there. He came rushing over to me and crewed me through a wire fence. It worked well. I had the top of a blueberry muffin (delicious), some rock salt and a cup of PH carb drink and more lip lube. One element of my strategy was to use liquid calories for this race in an attempt to prevent the usual sickness that I get in races. PH Carb drink, and it was very mild and quite tasty for now! It was still a cool 8°C/ 44°F. We swapped out my water bottles for a new water and a new PH1500 electrolyte drink and I was gone.

Miles 17-29 GTM PRESERVE

It was a left turn and then the Ponte Vedra Blvd took me through the Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve (aka GTM Research Reserve). When I looked ahead, the road was so long and straight, I couldn't see the end of it! Here I had a boost from Chris Kostman (Badwater 135 RD) and his partner Erika who were on their way to working at Aid station 7 (mile 72.4) who stopped the car and gave me some whooping and took some photos. Matthew met me at 21.8 miles for more of that delicious unfinished muffin, another cup of the PH carb drink and a S-Cap. It was time to lose my gloves as the sun was starting to warm me. I decided to keep wearing my race pack instead of switching to my handhelds.

Aid station 3 at Mile 26.3 was opposite the Exxon Gas station and I remembered this aid station as being one of the most picturesque! A gazebo on the beach. Here I took advantage of using the toilet, a bit more of the muffin, more carb drink and 2 x CurraNZ capsules. My CurraNZ strategy had been 4 capsules pre-race and then I was aiming to take 2 every 4 hours to help with my performance and prevent any GI issues.

Matthew was doing a brilliant job of solo crewing me and was getting into his crewing groove. I went through the marathon mark in 4 hours exactly and felt great at this early stage. I was on schedule and actually a little ahead of it.

MILES 29-36 St. AUGUSTINE

I hadn't put any suntan lotion on before the race but it was now warming up and there wasn't a cloud in the sky. I was warming up! At Mile 31, Matthew sprayed me down with my favourite Hawaiian tropic sport SPF50. This crew spot is near The Reef restaurant on the Ocean side of the course and there are strict crewing instructions on the notes about where you can and can't park. This one was an absolute no parking spot. Crewing took place opposite and along the highway. There are only 2 areas of the Daytona 100 course where crewing is not allowed, unlike its sister race, Keys 100, with multiple non crewing sections.

It was now 16°C / 61°F and warming up nicely. I felt strong mentally and physically. Pace was on target and the carb drink seemed to be working well. I was happy to be close to the historic town of St Augustine. The oldest continuously inhabited town in the USA. I crossed the beautiful Vilano Bridge and was excited to have some elevation on my legs and enjoy the great views of the Intracoastal waterway and the ocean. A few miles later I had reached Aid station 4 at 35.5 miles, The Church of the Nazarene where Matthew was waiting with our truck reversed right on course crewing me right out the back of the vehicle. This is a major plus point, as walking any distance off the race course to a crew vehicle is a big no when putting 100 miles on the legs! He's really good at finding or making close by parking. Here we had another Formula 1 pit stop. This time I had a yummy slice of M&S Iced Christmas cake with some rock salt sprinkled on it!

Miles 37-43 St. AUGUSTINE BEACH

It was really busy and I was people dodging as I ran down San Marco Avenue until I hit the Fort of Castillo de San Marcos which was built by the Spanish to defend Florida and the Atlantic trade route back in 1695. Then it was a sharp left turn onto the Bridge of Lions which has a drawbridge and opens and closes to both a schedule and on demand for boats so I was so pleased to run straight across it. After the race I heard of some runners getting caught when the bridge opened and this added 15 minutes to their race time.

I felt like I had been taking in a lot of carbs, so at Mile 39.6, a crew stop in a small parking lot at the base of a billboard, I decided I didn't want any food here. I was feeling a bit bloated and requested a nutrition break. It was getting warm. The car's thermometer had now hit 21°C / 70°F. My overall pace was still 9m 35s per mile. The Daytona 100 course is so easy to navigate, it literally follows the A1A the whole way and any deviations were well marked with Ultra sports signs directing you. I also had the GPX file on my watch. One of the only turns was in Anastasia, where the course turned left onto the A1A Beach Blvd rather than staying on the main A1A. More miles went by in a residential area full of beach restaurants, houses and businesses and soon I was at Mile 43 and Aid station 5, outside Publix supermarket. The staff had a full on barbecue on the go for the runners and I was impressed (as I was in 2023) how the Americans can make this happen on the side of the street! Matthew bought me over a cup full of Ruffles salted potato chips as I fancied something savoury.

Miles 47-60 MANTANZAS

We were keeping the crew stops tactically quick and efficient as possible so we decided 5 miles was a perfect gap between them at this point of the race. I was excited that I was nearly half way and after a warm 7 mile section which was more scenic as I was running right alongside the water's edge of Florida's East coast plus over a few bridges full of people fishing, I reached the Southeast Intracoastal Waterway Park in the Matanzas Beach Area and Aid station 6. Mile 51. Just over half way. I had gone through 50 miles in 8 hours 10 minutes, 20 minutes ahead of my pace plan. This was going so well and I was still feeling great! Here it was wonderful to see my friend, Mario Lacerda, Race Director of the Brazil 135 Ultra Marathon. Mario was inducted into the Badwater Hall of fame this year and we have known each other for many years. He is one of the nicest guys and it was a shame I was on a time constraint as I really wanted to stay and chat. Whilst I was catching up with Mario and just standing on the sidewalk, Matthew promptly removed my two bottles and switched them out, gave me two cups of my carb drink, smeared some more lip balm on my lips and then sent me off with a ginger biscuit. People

around were amused by this level of crewing!

Since running with Darryl earlier on in the race, I had run most of the race alone. I was now leapfrogging the same crews for quite a few miles now and there was a team of girls in the relay race called the "Grittery Gals" who were so supportive and enthusiastic, that every time I saw them, were whooping and cheering me on by name. They were so lovely! A lovely boost. Thank you Gals!

At mile 54.8, I was starting to need to use the toilet. This was communicated to Matthew on phone. We have a routine of contact on the top of every hour and 1 mile before approaching aid stations with special requests. Matthew said there was a nice clean indoor one at Marineland which he had checked out for me. Mile 54.8 was also one of the uncrewed water stops for non-crewed runners where water is left in a strategic place for a help yourself system. Here Matthew met Ben, a fellow Brit who was running uncrewed and couldn't find the race water location, so Matthew sorted him out with some of our supplies. This is great crewing from my crew chief and he has done this many times to runners in distress for either medical, food or hydration. Ben of course was eternally grateful but unknowingly for Ben, he was now my new target to hunt down and gain a place! AKA roadkill.

Miles 61-73 FLAGLER COUNTY

It was now mid-afternoon; I was very happy with my progress so far. A couple more crew stops continued with water bottle switch outs, one with PH1500 electrolyte and one of plain water. I was still having a cup of PH carb drink every hour plus 2 x CurraNZ every 4 hours. At mile 64, Varn Park in Flagler Beach, I took some night items including my head torch and attached a blinky light, front and rear to the mandatory neon yellow / green reflective vest that all runners had to wear. This included all crews as well when outside the vehicle. These sort of rules are there primarily for safety and are mostly demanded for by highway agencies to allow the race to take place on the open highways. Violators can face a first (or second strike) through their race number if not following the race rules resulting in a potential 1 hour time penalty or even worse, a DSQ!

My average pace had slowed to just under 10 and a half minute miles, not bad for 64 miles and I hadn't sat down once so far. Matthew had told me to slowdown as I was a long way ahead of Plan A and to save myself for the long night that lay ahead!

I was excited to reach Flagler Beach as we had stayed there in the days before the race. I had done some training runs along it so it was nice to run somewhere that was so familiar. I was also excited to get to Aid station 8 at Gamble Rogers State Park that was being run by Chris and Erika and I had heard about their famous cheese quesadillas that they were cooking. Matthew had gone ahead and had offered his 'quality control' assistance to the quesadillas and consumed a number of these and reported back on the phone that they were indeed good. I worry about my crew as much as they worry about me. It made me happy that he was being fed hot food. This is rare for a crew. As I ran through Flagler Beach at sunset, it was buzzing with people going out for dinner and I was getting lots of support from the locals out on the streets. I was still feeling and running strong although feeling slightly nauseous. I arrived at Gamble Rogers in the dark and was greeted by the most festive aid station with fairy lights. It was almost too welcoming, the chair was beckoning me and I resisted. I had a job to do. I could see people not wanting to leave! Not only were there fresh quesadillas on the hot plate, there was also a slow cooker full of warm salty broth and lots of other goodies. The aid station was the busiest I had been to so far in the race and here I finally caught up with Ben from the UK. We had a brief chat. Matthew sorted me out with what supplies I needed and it was time to head South again. Sadly, I didn't get to try a quesadilla as I felt queasy. Gutted as I would have devoured them!

It was now time for the night shift and the toughest part of the race. I was having an amazing race so far. 72.4 miles in 12.5 hours. And I had 7.5 hours to run just over a marathon. My mind was constantly doing the maths; I could get sub my 20 hours if I ran at an average speed of 3.6 mph

from this point. My strategy had me at 75 miles in 13.5 hours, I was pretty much on course for this. Dreamland. I set off into the darkness.

MILES 74-83 GAMBLE ROGERS TO ORMOND BEACH

This would be a long 9 mile section with not much to see. There was the occasional leapfrogging of other runners and support cars driving past. We had dropped the 5 mile crewing strategy and Matthew was, as always, my shepherd, pulling into all the allowable pull ins and checking in on me. Pre-race I was worried the night section would be very cold and had a bag full of my UK winter gear in the car ready but it was still a mild 18°C / 64°F and I was still feeling warm and didn't need it. There was a crew stop at mile 78.9, the Circle K gas station. I asked Matthew if there was a toilet in there and when I got there he was saving it for me so I didn't have to queue up. These minutes can add up at the end of a race. We are both running and crewing far smarter now than even last year at ultras. I managed half a cup of the carb drink but felt my eating and drinking was almost over as I was most definitely feeling queasy. I hadn't stopped running between aid stations, since the start line, my legs felt good, my mind was positive, annoyingly my stomach was the least happy of the three and needed to be managed.

The route became more built up with large seafront homes, some restaurants and shops. I could see the lights of Ormond Beach in the distance. At 8:20pm Aid station 9 appeared at the Ormond Beach shopping centre and I had my first ginger ale of the race with a caffeine tablet dissolved into it. I needed a hit of caffeine and Ginger Ale to settle my nausea. I leant on the back of the Jeep, first time in the race, and had a reset for a couple of minutes. I had run 84 miles in 15 hours. Reset complete and I was off again with just 16 miles to go.

Miles 84-97 DAYTONA BEACH

The route now crossed to the Oceanside of the road and it was a long straight slog into, through and beyond Daytona Beach. The sidewalk was undulating, in various states of disrepair, I was really having to concentrate to not trip up. Daytona is famous for its International Speedway and some

of the drivers on the multi lanes of the A1A seemed to think they were on the speedway! I was digging deep now and gritting my teeth. For the first time in the race I was throwing in some sneaky walking breaks and I said to Matthew I was just going to put my head down and listen to my music. I kept seeing our red Jeep driving around or parked up looking out for me, it was so easy to spot. I was just on water now. The eating game was over. And I was running with my heart.

With 12 miles to go I kept thinking to myself, this is just 3 hours of your life that you are going to be suffering in the pain cave, that's all, just 3 hours. Just suck it up and grit your teeth and keep moving forward. I kept repeating this to myself. Over and over. It was really hurting but I knew I could get my sub 20 hour goal now and that was spurring me on. Plus, Matthew told me that I was currently 6th female and that the girl who was in 7th place wasn't far behind me. He was also trying to play mind games to spur me on. A risky strategy as it had backfired in the past with a 'I don't give a s*&t' from me, but this was Laura 2.0 and I did.

We both continued with the calculations, mine in my tired brain and Matthew's accurately calculating that with 2 hours 35 minutes to run 6.6 miles and make a sub 20 time I only had to do 22m 43s miles! 19 hours was looking good. We chatted and I was fired up.

This section really did go on forever. The last Aid station, number 10, at Edwin W. Peck, Sr Park, at mile 92, came and went as I went straight through and declined the kind hospitality of the lovely volunteers. I just wanted to get this done. The scenery was now high rise hotels, restaurants and bright lights.

This soon, and happily, changed to the quieter Wilbur-by-the-Sea, which was quiet and residential. Step by step I was getting closer to the finish line. It was a warm evening and still 65°F. Matthew called me and said he could see the white rotating beacon of the Ponce Inlet Lighthouse. I knew the finish line was getting closer.

Miles 98-100 PONCE INLET

After miles and miles of running on Highway A1A it was time to make the hard right turn onto the short section of Lighthouse Drive then another right turn onto the shorter South Peninsula Drive where I met Matthew. With my Union Jack flag now with me held aloft behind, I was escorted and filmed by my Crew Chief extraordinaire the final 100 meters into Davies Park and to the finish line. I was loudly applauded in by the race staff and some other runners and their crew's.

I had done it.

I smashed my 100 mile PB by 2 hours and it felt good.... really good!

Chief Course Marshall and friend Mark Cudak presented me with my medal. Mike on Timing told me I had won my age category and after a couple of photos with Matthew on the finish line I sat down on a nearby bench for a few minutes to rest, reflect and savour the moment. It was my first sit down!

My fastest 100 miles in 18:45:38

6th Female.

13th overall.

1st in my age category.

What a race. What a personal result. And what a year of running.

- April: Boston Marathon 2025 – marathon PB 3h 24m 29s
- April: My 200th marathon at the London Marathon PB 3h 29m

- May: Keys 100 PB 20:54:14 quicker by 9 hours than previous
- June: First female at Sikhs in the City Summer Samosa Marathon
- July: Badwater 135 PB 33:49:45 (fastest time of the 4 x I have run it by 3 hours)
- August: North Downs Way 100 PB 23:53:58 (first time sub 24 hours at that race)
- September: 50 mile PB at Track Wars by Phoenix Running (7:59:16)
- November: 40 mile Ultra win at Roly's Run
- and my fastest ever 5K! 20m 30s

Big thanks to [CurraNZ](#) for their support throughout the year. Since I have discovered the purple power of the magic berries I have run faster, more efficiently, had less GI issues and my recovery has been significantly faster.

Thank you also to Race Director Bob Becker and his superb team of Marshalls and race staff for putting on another fantastic race.

Finally, to Matthew, for his unwavering support for me being out there on this incredible running journey. I really could not do this without him.

If you want a fast, flat 100 mile race to help you get that PB put the [Daytona 100](#) on your list.