

PENANG BRIDGE RUN 2006 – HALF MARATHON

RETURN OF PENANG “KIA” (son)

I'm writing this after some considerable toil this morning. My legs are tight and a little sore but it could've worse. At least I get to put in nearly 2 hours' worth of sleep this afternoon. The Penang Bridge Run (PBR) has that effect on you. It has to be the earliest starting road race in the country. The Marathon kicks off at 4:30am and the Half (22.3K in this case) starts at 5:30am. So you really have to be a hardened creature to be still standing post-race afternoon.

The trip up to my birthplace the day before was smooth. The anticipated traffic nightmare didn't materialize, much to our relief. Some of my friends had already left KL on Friday night – I suspect because of the gastronomic lure of the Northern state. Only when I stopped to refuel at the Bukit Gantang stop did I realize that one of my credit cards were missing from my wallet. After calling the Bank to cancel it, I spent the remaining part of the journey fretting and irritated about my carelessness. I must have neglected from collecting the card on Friday night. At least there were no unauthorized transactions since the loss.

I managed to grab some pasta lunch at Gurney Plaza while catching up with my brother (who was down to run the Half as well). Then I popped into the GNC outlet and was surprised to see that they stocked [GU gel](#). I'm curious to try it out. At a price of RM8 a sachet, it's very expensive. After that it was back to the house to catch a nap and at about 5pm I joined some of the gang at Swatow Lane for some real Penang food. Of the large group anticipated, only Justin and Jeanne, Adam, Chin and I made it. Ronnie had bailed out unwilling to incur the wrath of his sister – eat with her or risk being eaten! Nevertheless Justin assaulted the hawker fares and wolfed down whatever they dished out. The bowl to human ratio was high. I wanted to record the feasting but it was then did my camera decided to call it quits. The CCD had screwed up for the second time and this time it's no longer warrantied.

It's turning into a trip of attrition. This year's PBR was to be the swansong race of my excellent 2005 Pegasus. Unfortunately my credit card and my camera had decided to join the list. After a dinner of home-cooked food, it was lights out. My son thankfully decided to call it a day too, which meant that all of us could have a good rest.

RACE DAY

I set my alarm for 3:50am and was out in a jiffy. Everything has been laid out the night before, so there was little I needed to do except to get to as near to the start at USM as possible. Major access roads leading to the place has been closed as early as 3am for the marathoners and with the narrow Penang roads and countless cars, it can be difficult to navigate and search for a parking spot. I settled for one about 10 minutes' walk away. Nearing the main USM gate, someone shouted at me and turning I saw my running friends sitting on the road, grinning away. It was nice to see familiar faces in the sea of humans. A quick survey showed that most are recreational participants. Meanwhile the marathoners passed by us on the other side of the road.

Before long we were let into the campus ground and made our way to the field towards another exit gate where we again waited. Finally the crowd applauded which meant that we could exit the campus and head towards the starting line. I walked to Justin and told him that hopefully it won't turn out into a running start for us. Soon enough, the crowd starting easing up around us and started running. True to our fears, the race had started and we were still about 200metres from the starting line! We didn't hear the bang of the gun! Thus began our scramble to make up for lost ground. I didn't even notice the well-known VIP who did the flagging off, but I did say “Hi” to [Runwitme](#).

Shuffling at a brisk pace (too brisk in fact), I passed [Dinesh](#) just before we entered onto the bridge but was soon overtaken by [Haris](#) (who would finish in an excellent time). There was quite a strong head-wind blowing which made proceedings rather challenging especially near the mid-span. It wasn't too fun in the other parts too since the bridge authorities had erected 6 ½ feet dividers. That meant we couldn't see the opposite side and the returning runners and marathoners. This was a bummer but my spirits were lifted whenever I chanced upon the

marathoners. I was envious yet inspired of those guys but I had to play the pragmatic card – with no training, it would've been suicide for me to attempt the full distance!

It was turning out to be a little boring for me as I crank out a reasonably quick pace. I reached mid-span in 30 minutes, which meant that I ran at a sub 5:15 pace. I hit the Prai-side water station in 1:01. I would later pay the price of that folly. I'd been running steadily but what hit me, besides the head-wind was the humidity (the wind wasn't that cooling) and the extreme thirst! I was so darn thirsty no matter how many cups of water I gulped down. I even grabbed a full bottle of ice-cold water but still I wasn't satiated. There was sufficient water provided but no isotonic.

The return trip was fine up to the 17K mark where I had to alternate slow jogs and running. Eventually, even that deteriorated into running and walking! Up until that point running a sub-2 hour race was a possibility but my endurance was hardly up to par. I limped to a 2:11.31 finish (per marathon.com pace chart, 5:53 pace) for one of my worst attempts in this race. After mulling it over for awhile, I was satisfied with my performance since I met my downgraded target of 2:15 finish. The afternoon was spent napping and later on feasting on the island's delicacies.

Next events: Putrajaya Half and Mizuno 10K, both in September.