



### The SMART Tunnel Run – March 11<sup>th</sup> 2007

It took me 2 months to kick-start my 2007 at the races, and 6 months since I ran more than twice a week and even longer since I really put a training program to serious work. With my weekly mileage hovering about 70% of my max planned, my approach to this run was that of training, just to lock up the week's workout before the start of a fresh one. I was deliberating up to last night on my run plan when I finally decided to adopt a conservative start and if physical conditions permit, will run at LT pace.

I've been sprinkling a number of LT runs into my workouts, so I know that my legs will have no problems with the distance or any climbs the course can throw at me. I've not entered the speed-strength portion of my training program to be too optimistic of my speed and my endurance should be just to the 15K distance. With that in mind, I intended to work around an average pace of 6 minutes per K.

I drove around the start area twice to scout for the best parking and decided on the Pasar Rakyat parking which was just 400 meters to the starting line. I had downed 2 slices of peanut butter coated bread, washed down with a little green tea. After changing into the race attire and walking to the staging area, I exchanged greetings with Azwar who 2 weeks ago conquered the Langkawi Ironman, Chen and a host of other familiar faces. The crowd wasn't that large since the organizers wanted to have a controlled number of participants. Then I saw how dumb the setup for the start was. There was no one to collect the registration card prior to entering the quarantined area. Many like me had to force our way to the front of the waiting runners to hand over our cards to the official who was foolish enough to stand at the starting line! It was a futile attempt for me to make my way to the front while the FTAAA officials were barking orders to the crowd. Finally a kind Samaritan helped to gather up some cards from a few of us to pass it to the official up ahead. Thanks dude!

I then made my way back into the midpack area to wait for the start which were held up while waiting for the TV Crew and VIP to get into position (since this report will be read by many, I will dispense with the expletives), some runners provided entertainment by jumping over the cordoned area to relieve themselves next to the trees in full view of the rest. Naturally they were given the catcalls and whoops. A few cheeky folks even made the "sheeing" sound! After holding position for the cameramen, the VIP finally fired the starter gun. The slip road leading to Jalan Tun Razak was narrow and I couldn't run from the get-go. The runners even jeered at a rotund Indian runner who illegally cut across a field. I'm not sure if he was disqualified.

I think I maintained a 6-minute pace until the entrance of the tunnel. You can see how narrow the tunnel is from the photos (courtesy of [Seecube](#) and [Runwitme](#)). The ceiling is also quite low at about 2 meters.

I was surprised to see Uncle Sonny who ran in the open category! Anticipating yet another bungling job by the race organizers, I carried isotonic in 2 bottles of my Nike belt. That decision paid off as I ensured that I was getting my body salt replaced. More on that later. I entered the tunnel entrance in 12:25. Conditions was cool, literally, until about 150 meters into the tunnel, beyond the range of the ceiling mounted ventilation fans. I had steeled myself for a hard





run but it was still an experience once the full blast of the heat and humidity hit me. Many immediately slowed to a walk in the sauna conditions. Most adopted a safe and conservative pace, while I maintained a 5:50 to 6-minute pace. Jackie was pacing with his friend just in front but I've no urgency.



I kept my spirits up by thinking about the worse conditions that the athletes endured at the recent [Langkawi Ironman](#) or what the redoubtable [Ngae will be facing at the Marathon Des Sables](#) later this month. I kept repeating the "This discomfort and heat are nothing" mantra inside my head. Everyone was soaked in sweat. Before long, I reached the first water station. The station was manned only by 2 poor souls who obviously couldn't cope with the tasks. Desperate to clear the runners they resorted to giving out bottled water instead of pouring the fluid into the paper cups. I grabbed 2 bottles but after realizing that the slower runners will be deprived of fluids, I gave back an unopened one. Pouring water occasionally down my head, I kept up the steady pace until the exit.

Coming out from the tunnel was a relief even though the morning sun was up and it was certainly getting hot as well. I'd take being on the surface anytime. My watch showed 28:19 when I negotiated the U-turn in front of the Sungei Besi Airbase. Just after the turn, I saw Steven on the other side. The other Pacemakers were already about 2K in ahead of me. It was getting more challenging as I entered the tunnel again for the return trip. Physically I was still in quite a good shape, so I was able to up the



tempo and hold it. To my surprise, I saw Jackie again about 100 meters ahead and made him my target to slowly reel him in. He picked up pace on the downslope but I was able to respond without much problem. I drained one bottle of isotonic and continued to concentrate on the task at hand. I knew I had to quickly clear the tunnel stretch to avoid prolonged discomfort.

I passed a Klang Pacer runner who told me this was akin to a sauna. With 200 meters to go I caught up and chatted with Rizal, a runner from my Beginners program but who have since



trained well on his own. My pace was definitely sub-6 then but again I surprised myself that I was able to hold conversation.

As soon as I saw the yellow lights I knew the exit was close by, so I turned on the pace even more and stormed ahead of Jackie just after the Time building. Just then the local top runner (OK, used to be top runner – Yuan Yufang) cut across the grass while taking a corner. The FTAAA official shouted something about that being illegal, which I fully agree.

I pressed the pace until my finish of **1:14.54**. Overall, I was very happy about my performance. I maintained a disciplined pace throughout and raced smart. More importantly I now know that my comeback is on the right track. I'm never one who is blessed with the ability to retain fitness and race performance after a lengthy absence unlike some of my Pacemaker friends. So it was comforting to note that my hard work over the past month has paid some dividends. I coped with the pace and tough conditions well and finished strongly. Over the 13.3K route, my pace was **5:37** (3:57 marathon). I've next week to complete my base phase before moving on to the harder stuff, where I'll be doing more or less the same things except for longer period and higher intensity. On another note, what I saw this morning was disappointing in terms of race organization. The start was messy, some of the officials were downright rude, the refreshment stations inadequately manned and by inexperienced volunteers at that, the late start obviously set to accommodate the VIPs and not the runners from other categories who were baked inside and outside the tunnel.



Just about to enter the finishing chute. Photo courtesy of [Tey](#)

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