The 2015 London Marathon is the 35th edition of the event. Some 20,000 people wanted to run the first race on 29 March 1981; 7,747 were accepted. There were 6,255 finishers, led home by the American Dick Beardsley and Norwegian Inge Simonsen who staged a spectacular and fitting dead-heat at the rain-swept finish on Constitution Hill in 2:11:48. Joyce Smith, 43 years old and a mother of two, broke the British record to win the women’s race in 2:29:57, then the third fastest time ever by a woman.

However, fewer than five per cent of all the runners in 1981 were women, while there were no wheelchair athletes at all, no fancy dress runners, no Mini London Marathon races, little significant fundraising for charities, and the race was broadcast by the BBC only to viewers in the UK.

How things have changed:

• These days, more than 36,000 runners are expected to cross the finish line in The Mall every year, and in 2015 the total number of London Marathon finishers will reach around 960,000. A record 36,705 crossed the line in 2012 after 37,227 had started, the largest field so far.

• The London Marathon course records now stand at 2:04:29 for the men’s race and 2:15:25 for the women’s, improvements of more than seven and 14 minutes respectively. There have been six world records set in London, one in the men’s race and five in the women’s, the last of which by Paula Radcliffe in 2003 still stands, while the event has witnessed six IPC world records by para-athletes.

• More than three-quarters of all runners at the London Marathon now raise money for charity, and more than £50 million is raised every year. The event itself holds a Guinness World Record for one-day charity fundraising, a record it has broken each year for the last eight years. The 2014 record total was £53.2 million while the total raised over the last 34 years stands at some £716 million.

• The proportion of women runners has gradually increased over the years and in 2015 approximately 37 per cent of runners will be women.

• In 2015, the wheelchair fields will be 70-strong, while some 30 world class para-athletes will compete in six other events – all of them racing for medals as part of the IPC Athletics Marathon World Championships.

• The Mini London Marathon – which has uncovered talents such as Mo Farah, the Brownlee brothers, David Weir and Shelly Woods – will celebrate its 30th anniversary in 2015 with more than 2,000 young people from all over the UK competing in official British Athletics Road Race Championships.

• Hundreds of runners will wear fancy dress costumes, covering every conceivable possibility from animals to superheroes to tall buildings, while more than 100 will attempt to break official Guinness World Records for their chosen outfit. Thirty runners set records in 2014, while a record 35 did so in 2011.

• BBC coverage of the 2014 race was shown in 196 countries worldwide, while each year, around 750,000 people line the route to cheer on the runners.

• In the 35 years since it was founded, The London Marathon Charitable Trust has used profits from the race and other London Marathon events to make grants totalling more than £56 million to more than 1,000 organisations, and saved nine major playing fields and sporting facilities from developers.

• Research in 2010 found that the London Marathon generated £110.1 million of economic activity in the UK while spending in the capital by marathon runners, spectators, organisers and visitors was worth £31.7m, a 60 per cent increase in the event’s economic importance to the UK economy since it was measured 10 years previously.
A Brief History of the London Marathon in 35 Steps
Some wonderful (and weird) facts, figures and incidents from the first 35 years of the London Marathon:

- The London Marathon was first dreamed up in 1978 in the Dysart Arms when Chris Brasher and John Disley heard Ranelleigh Harriers clubmates chatting about the the New York City Marathon. They checked it out and less than three years later had organised the first London Marathon.

- A record 36,705 people completed the race in 2012. The 30,000 barrier was first broken in 1999 and it has remained above that figure ever since.

- The hottest marathon day was on 22 April 2007 when the temperature at 12 noon was 21.7°C. Thirteen years previously, on 17 April 1994, runners had to cope with a record low of 7.6°C at midday.

- The first London Marathon finished on Constitution Hill, between Wellington Arch and Buckingham Palace. From 1982 until 1993, it finished on Westminster Bridge and since 1994 the finish has been on The Mall.

- Less than 5% of finishers in 1981 were women, while in 2014 nearly 37% were women.

- Joyce Smith, was the oldest winner of the London Marathon when she triumphed for a second time in 1990 aged 44. The oldest men’s winner was Britain’s Allister Hutton, who won in 1990 aged 35 and 278 days.

- The youngest men’s champion was Kenyan Sammy Wanjiru, who conquered the capital in 2009 aged 22. Tragically, he was found dead only two years later after falling from a balcony. The youngest women’s champion was Małgorzata Sobanska. The Pole was 25 when she won in 1995.

- In 2008 Deriba Merga finished in 2:06:38, less than a minute and a half behind winner Martin Lel’s then course record of 2:05:15. Merga’s time would have won every 20th century edition of the men’s race, plus those in 2001, 2003, 2005, 2006 and 2007, but the quality of the 2008 race meant he could only finish sixth.

- In 2011, a football freestyler called John Farnworth completed the marathon while keeping a ball up in the air between his right and left foot with every step. He finished in 12 hours 15 minutes and did not drop the ball once. Now there is a time limit of eight hours for runners to complete the race.

- Since 2007 Guinness World Records has officially ratified records broken at the London Marathon. 2011 was the most successful year yet when 35 were set.

- Former 10,000m world record holder and future London Marathon race director Dave Bedford ran the first race for a £250 bet he accepted sometime after midnight the morning of the race while merrily downing beers in the Mad Hatter club in Luton, which he owned. Four pina coladas, a phone call to race co-founder Chris Brasher, a king prawn curry and another pint of lager later, Bedford finally got to bed at 4.45am. Just 75 minutes later he was woken by a friend heading for the start. Despite vomiting into a drain on BBC TV, Bedford completed the race before falling asleep in a pub. He never received his money.

- Ingrid Kristiansen is the only runner to have tasted London Marathon victory four times. The Norwegian triumphed in 1984, 1985, 1987 and 1988, setting a world record of 2:21:06 with her second victory. However, British Paralympic legends Tanni Grey-Thompson and David Weir have both eclipsed that feat with six wins apiece in their respective wheelchair races. Weir is aiming for his seventh win this year.

- 924,741 people have finished the first 34 editions of the London Marathon. The 500,000 mark was passed in 2002 and the one millionth finisher is likely to cross the line in the 2017 edition.

- The slowest ever London Marathon was five days and eight hours in 2002 by Lloyd Scott, wearing a 110lb deep-sea diving suit.

Paula Radcliffe & Lloyd Scott
• Since the London Marathon started in 1981, its runners have raised £716 million for charity – making it officially the largest single annual fund-raising event in the world. For eight years in a row it has broken the Guinness World Record for fundraising at a one-day event, with £53.2m raised in 2014.

• The London Marathon has had six headline sponsors starting with Gillette which helped fund the first three races before Mars took over in 1984. ADT was race sponsor from 1982 until 1993 when NutraSweet started its three-year spell. Flora backed the event for 14 years from 1996 while Virgin Money took over in 2010.

• Reverend Steve Chalke MBE holds the record for most money raised for charity at the London Marathon – indeed at any marathon worldwide. The Londoner, now 59, raised a jaw-dropping £2,330,159.38 in 2011.

• The most popular occupation for participants who entered the 2014 Virgin Money London Marathon was teaching/working in education. 1,408 people came from that profession, with accountants (1,357) and administrators (1,108) close behind.

• The build-up to the 2010 race was badly affected by ash clouds from the erupting Icelandic volcano Eyjafjallajökull which meant air space over northern Europe was closed for six days, disrupting many runners’ travel plans. The organisers used £150,000 from the event’s contingency fund to charter a private plane for elite athletes, but Britain’s Mara Yamauchi made her own way, taking six days to get to London from New Mexico using train, boat, taxi and plane, travelling via Colorado, New Jersey, Lisbon, Madrid and Paris.

• Following the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami, the Nagoya International Women’s Marathon, the final selection race for Japan’s women’s team for that year’s World Championships, had to be cancelled. The London Marathon stepped in to help, giving nine Japanese athletes a place in the London elite field. Azusa Nojiri and Yukiko Akaba both earned their place on the world stage in Daegu.

• Fauja Singh, from Essex, is thought to be the oldest person ever to complete the London Marathon. He was 93 when he took an impressive 6 hours 7 minutes in 2004. Singh carried on running until he was 101, while his appearance, aged 100, at the 2011 Toronto Marathon made him the oldest ever marathon runner. Jenny Wood-Allen is believed to be the oldest woman to finish in London. She was 90 when she took 11 hours 34 minutes in 2002, despite injuring her head in a fall during training.

• The London Marathon’s first wheelchair races took place in 1983 when Gordon Perry won the men’s race in 3:20:07 while his fellow Briton Denise Smith won the women’s in 4:29:03. Standards have improved vastly in the intervening decades, with Australia’s Kurt Fearnley setting a phenomenal men’s course record of 1:28:56 in 2009 and USA’s Tatyana McFadden winning the 2014 women’s race in a record 1:45:12.

• Hugh Jones, the 1982 London Marathon winner, is now the course measurer. Jones has assisted with the London Marathon’s ‘blue line’ painting operation since 1985, and has measured the London and Berlin courses annually since 1994, as well as many Olympic and World Championship courses. Jones uses a special bicycle to measure courses – much more reliable than GPS tools, he says.
• 56 past or present MPs have run the London Marathon. The fastest was Matthew Parris, then Conservative MP for Derbyshire West, who finished in 2:32:57 in 1985. Doug Henderson, Labour representative for Newcastle upon Tyne North, is the only other MP to dip under three hours. He finished in 2:52:24 in 1989.

• Chris Newton is the quickest ever celebrity runner to finish. The world champion cyclist clocked 2:45:10 in 2014. Model Nell McAndrew is the fastest female celebrity, running 2:54:39 in 2012 at the age of 38.

• The first couple to get married during the London Marathon were Mick Gambrill and Barbara Cole in 1999. The Croydon pair got engaged during the Disney Marathon two years previously. They stopped at Charlton House near Greenwich to be married by a registrar.

• Fourteen men have completed every single London Marathon to date. Chris Finill has recorded the fastest PB of the ever-presents – an impressive 2:28:27 in 1985.

• A suspected gas leak at the Old Rose Pub on the Highway briefly threatened to disrupt the elite women’s race in 2008. The leading nine women were swiftly directed to the far side of the carriageway for a few hundred metres while engineers investigated. They found no leak and Irina Mikitenko went on to win.

• Current race director Hugh Brasher has run the marathon a number of times, but his first experience of the event was in 1981, aged 16, when dad Chris, the race co-founder, persuaded him to sell train tickets to runners at 50p a journey from Charing Cross to the start. These days race day travel is free for runners.

• Olympic champion Tiki Gelana was embroiled in drama in 2013 when she cut sharply across the road to reach her drink, unaware of the men’s wheelchair racers approaching on her inside. Canadian Josh Cassidy collided with the Ethiopian, effectively ending either’s chance of victory. Luckily, neither was seriously hurt, although Cassidy suffered damage to his chair.

• With 10 and eight victories respectively, Kenya is the most successful nation in the men’s and women’s races, although there was only one Kenyan victor in the men’s race before 2004, and none in the women’s between 2001 and 2010. Kenyans have now won nine out of the last 11 men’s races and the last four women’s contests. Britain is the next most prolific nation with 13 wins, the last of which was Paula Radcliffe’s 2005 triumph. Runners from 16 nations have tasted triumph, while athletes from 23 countries have won wheelchair events. South America is the only continent yet to produce a London winner.

• Sports Aid Foundation (now SportsAid) was the first official charity in 1984. The charity helps young British athletes meet the costs of their careers, and was a major source of support for the likes of Steve Redgrave, Daley Thompson, Jonathan Edwards and Linford Christie. This year’s official charity is Cancer Research UK.

• Runners passing the now closed City Pride pub at mile 18 often see runners on the other side of the building three miles behind them on the course. A new skyscraper – set to be the second tallest residential tower in the country – is planned for the site, and will also be called ‘City Pride’.

• Mo Farah won the Mini London Marathon three years in a row between 1998 and 2000. The event for young runners aged 11 to 17 is held over the last three miles of the course. Other famous winners include 2013 world triathlon champion Non Stanford and wheelchair stars David Weir, Hannah Cockroft and Shelly Woods.

• The biggest alteration to the London Marathon course took place in 2005 after Evans Rutto and Sammy Korir both slipped on the wet carpeted cobbles near the Tower of London in 2004. Rutto eventually won in 2:06:18 but the offending section was replaced by a fast stretch of road along the Highway and Tower Hill. The fact that Radcliffe set her world record on the old route makes her achievement even more impressive.
Celebrating the 35th Anniversary

“What does it matter who wins anyway? As far as I’m concerned anyone who finishes this thing is a winner.” Those were the words of Dick Beardsley on the day of the first ever London Marathon in 1981. The American had just been crowned joint winner of the inaugural race after crossing the line hand-in-hand with Norway’s Inge Simonsen and his quip summed up the spirit of the event which has survived ever since.

Here are a few more thoughts on the London Marathon from some of the key figures who have been part of its history:

**John Disley**, the 1952 Olympic steeplechase bronze medallist, who founded the event with Chris Brasher: “We put the thing on with the help of our friends and people we knew, and it was a great success. That encouraged other people to come and help us and we did very well from there.”

**Hugh Brasher**, son of Chris and current race director, on the first event (he was 16): “The first realisation of what had been achieved was probably the following day where the front page of the Daily Mail had the famous picture of Simonsen and Beardsley crossing the line hand-in-hand. You had a unique situation where two runners had raced against each other for 26 miles then decided at the very end that really this was about unity and enjoyment and it was more fitting to cross the line together.

Brasher adds: “It was unchartered territory, no one knew what it was going to be. Marathon running used to be done by slightly mad people but now running’s the second most popular recreation in Britain. In the first marathon less than 5 per cent of finishers were women, now we are close to 40 per cent. The marathon really does inspire people.”

**Mel Watman**, athletics journalist, who ran in the first London Marathon: “The first London Marathon was a fantastic occasion. You have to remember that before that, no marathon in Britain really had more than a couple of hundred runners. It was very much for the dedicated runner.

“Here hadn’t been a history of mass marathon running. Looking back now it was still only 7,000 runners, a fifth of what it is today, but it was an incredible experience because there’d never been anything like it before. To be part of that was wonderful. Now it really is a national institution.”

**Roy Webber** of the 23rd Camberwell Scouts, who is the only person to have volunteered at every single race: “I remember putting the last sign up at the beginning of Westminster Bridge [in 1981], just as the gun went off to start the race. Then we had to return to the beginning to start taking them all down again. It had taken us nearly half the night. We started at 11 o’clock on the Saturday and finished at nine on the Sunday morning.”

**David Bedford**, former race director and current elite athlete coordinator: “What makes it a great event is that there’s something for everyone. There’s an elite field at the front stronger than the Olympics or World Championships and a street party behind it that has every person who is running in the event feel that they have also won the Olympic Games when they cross the finish line. Add to that 700,000 people cheering them along on the streets and you’ve got an amazing cocktail of elements that make up the greatest event in the world.”

**Paula Radcliffe**, women’s world record holder and race winner in 2002, 2003 and 2005: “It means so much to me. I’ve grown up with it, watched for so many years in the ‘80s. I remember watching Joyce Smith, going to see my dad run, seeing Ingrid Kristiansen setting a women’s world record and thinking ‘Wow, I really want to do this one day.’ To have the really special memories I’ve got from 2002, ’03 and ’05, and then to have not been able to do it in later years because of injuries…

For all those reasons it’s really special and emotional. I’m really grateful that the organisers have given me this opportunity [to do it again]. It will be huge, I never thought I’d be back here. I get emotional talking about it.”

**Joyce Smith**, winner of the first two women’s races: “Nobody knew if it was going to be a success, and that was a bit of a worry but the crowds came out and it was obviously a success. I was really expecting to win it as I had won in Tokyo for the previous two years.”

These quotes are all taken from interviews by James Phillips for the London Marathon’s Marathon News magazine. Some of the interviews will be available on the London Marathon website: www.virginmoneylondonmarathon.com
Born to Run

Marian Shasanya and Mat Gilliard were completely oblivious to the sporting achievements of Joyce Smith, Dick Beardsley and Inge Simonsen, and 6,252 other runners on the streets of London on 29 March 1981. That’s because the pair were born on that very day. As chance would have it, they are both running the 35th London Marathon this year.

Marian is an ICT teacher at a school in north London, and has lived in the capital her whole life. She told us: “I’ve done lots of 10ks and one half marathon, but never anything like this. I’ve been sticking to the plan from the first magazine you sent and I want to do it in under five hours.

“I went last year to support my friend and the atmosphere, it’s like ‘Oh my god!’ I just want to make sure I finish it. I’ll make the decision after if I want to do any more marathons. Never say never, but I’ll decide after this one.”

She is running for the Sickle-cell Society. She lives with her sister who suffers from the disease.

Mat is a civil servant from Worcester who now lives in Aberdare, South Wales. He first started running in 2007 after losing an incredible 10 and a half stone. He started with a 5km race for a local charity and made his full marathon debut at the Shakespeare Marathon in Stratford-upon-Avon.

“T”He said: “I’ve done a marathon every year since, including London in 2013. It was different to any others I’ve done as there were people everywhere. I’ve never experienced crowd support on that scale. It’s alive, they’re all cheering you on. I was overwhelmed by it to be honest. It was brilliant. “My personal best is 3:50 but this year I’m trying to beat my London time of 4:12:39 from 2013. I want to do well on that front. My next challenge will be an ultra – the Brecon to Cardiff Ultra, it’s about 42 miles, and takes place a month after London.”

2015 Race Starters

The 1981 London Marathon winners, Dick Beardsley, Inge Simonsen and Joyce Smith, will be the official starters of the men’s race and mass race at the 2015 Virgin Money London Marathon. Smith will also start the women’s race.

All three will attend a 35th anniversary press conference at Tower Hotel on Wednesday 22 April. See page 7 for details.