

ELITE WOMEN SET FOR ANOTHER BATTLE IN QUEENSTOWN

Victoria Beck and Mel Aitken will return to once again battle for honours at the 2016 Air New Zealand Queenstown International Marathon on November 19, with Beck looking to make it three in a row and ensuring she continues to be the only women's name on the winners list at the hugely popular and fast growing event.

Formerly from Dunedin, the now Australia domiciled Beck has been busy and in good form, finishing third at the Melbourne Marathon (Australian Champs) and was 8th overall and second in the Oceania Champs on the Gold Coast earlier this year.

The 'Running Orthodontist' will once again make the trip across the Tasman to take on an event that she has quickly fallen in love with.

"Queenstown holds a special place in my heart, I am from Dunedin so it is right on my doorstep, plus I love the off-road nature of the race," said Beck from her home in MacKay.

"I am definitely in much better shape than last year, I have had a much bigger year of mileage plus I am finally over the gastritis I was suffering from at the race last year – it took nearly ten months though! I am keen to re-set that course record (2:55:21 set in 2014) too so can't wait."

Aitken meanwhile has enjoyed a busy year as she manages her training and racing schedule while concentrating on a work related move to the West Coast back in January (Aitken is Police Area Commander for the West Coast). Her CV this year includes Buller Half Marathon (win), Big Easy Mountain Marathon (win), Motatapu Marathon (win), 2nd female Christchurch Marathon, Winner Otago Half marathon champs, 1st Dunedin Full Marathon, 2nd New Zealand Masters Cross Country Champs, Abel Tasman Coastal Classic (winner).

"Winning in Queenstown would be awesome, but what really brings me back is the race itself, I love the course, the atmosphere over the weekend and being able to race in perhaps my most favourite place in New Zealand. Queenstown was an annual holiday spot growing up as a kid, so I feel a real connection with it. My parents will be meeting up with us in Queenstown so having family support and being able to make them proud on the side line is a huge motivator."

Aitken is conscious however of the threat that Beck poses and will stay focused on her own race and see what unfolds.

"Vic is a Machine! She has had a sterling year this year with some pretty mean results. For me, I have set my own goals. Last year I went into the race injured after completing the Auckland Marathon two weeks prior, so I lacked confidence in even being able to finish. I have had a really good build up going into this year's race, and I'm feeling strong, I have raced less but been really focused on training smartly. I am pretty excited to see what will happen on Saturday."

“I just want to send a huge high five to all the organisers and volunteers who make this such a special event. Regardless of where I end up, I will be giving it my all and loving every minute of it. Bring it on!”

The men’s race is a completely different story, with last year’s podium not returning, opening the door for a new winner in the elite men’s race, won last year by Tony Payne (Napier) in a race record 2:30:29, a time that will be tough to challenge in this year’s event.

The New Zealand Sotheby’s RE Half Marathon always has the potential to throw up some surprises, but leading contenders in the men’s race include Adam Jacques (Christchurch) and Chris Dunell (Christchurch).

Jacques won the inaugural race and was second last year to Mike Phillips, but with Phillips not returning Jacques has the chance to add another win to his CV, but can likely expect a strong challenge from Dunell, a Christchurch Police Officer.

In the women’s race Hannah Wells (Te Puke) might be one to watch, the talented multisport athlete is hoping for a time well under the 90 minute mark for the 21km distance.

One name not featuring on the start line is Olympic track cyclist Pieter Bulling. The 2015 World Championship winning team pursuit rider has been working towards the New Zealand Sotheby’s RE Half Marathon post his Rio campaign, but has had to withdraw with injury.

“I am gutted at having to pull out of the Half Marathon, I have been working towards it in training and it has been something different after the Olympic Games. But I have injured my foot, it is ligament problem and has left me with a very tight calf muscle and I just can’t do the training necessary and can’t risk making it worse. I am really disappointed as the Queenstown Half Marathon is a great event and I like to base myself here in Queenstown when I can and I will still be there for the weekend. I will definitely tick it off in the future though, it might have to wait until after the Commonwealth Games now.

All races at the Air New Zealand Queenstown International Marathon take place on Saturday November 19, with some road closures affecting areas of the course at specific times (see maps at traffic info below).

Air New Zealand Queenstown International Marathon Key Maps and Information:

Event hub map: [CLICK HERE](#)

Traffic info: [CLICK HERE](#)

Spectator map: [CLICK HERE](#)

Course maps: [CLICK HERE](#)

Air New Zealand Queenstown International Marathon – By the Numbers

- Male –38%, Female 62%
- Average Age 42 years
- Youngest – 5 years
- Oldest – 81 years
- Total entries – 9,544
- Kids fun run – 154
- AIA 10km – 2,148
- NZ Sotheby's RE Half Marathon – 5,306
- Air New Zealand Marathon – 1,936
- 90% entrants from out of the Queenstown Lakes District
- 49 countries represented
- 16% of entrants are international visitors (1,598)
 - Australia 885, China 225, USA 148, Hong Kong 57 GB 40, Singapore 40
- Extra Air New Zealand flights – 18 (3,078 seats)

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