

## Return of the Champions

Two previous champions over both the half and full marathon will go head to head over the half distance at this year's ASB Christchurch Marathon.

With less than two weeks until race day, the ASB Christchurch Marathon is again shaping up as New Zealand's premier road race with two former female winners amongst the thousands who will take to the flat, fast streets of the Garden City on June 3rd.

In 2015 Hamilton's Alice Mason surprised even herself when winning the full marathon on her first outing over the classic 42.2k distance. The 31-year-old doctor has gone on to other major marathon wins in Wellington and Rotorua, but steps down to the half marathon distance in Christchurch this year.

Mason has raced the half distance in Christchurch before, when finishing behind the woman she will face again this year. That was 2016, when Auckland's Olivia Burne put up a surprise win of her own to take out the half marathon in a personal best time 1hr 15min 31secs.

In a very competitive field Mason was less than two minutes behind but claimed only fourth place. Burne, who is coached by 1960 Olympic marathon bronze medalist Barry Magee, raced again last year but had an off day to finish third behind triathlete Andrea Hewitt. Mason, meanwhile, is fresh off winning the New Zealand marathon title in Rotorua just six weeks before the Christchurch race.

Mason and Burne, however, will need to keep a wary eye on a handful of women waiting in the wings for the favourites to falter. One woman who rarely falters is Katikati super-vet, Sally Gibbs. The 55-year-old won world titles in her age group last year and regularly upsets younger runners on the national scene. As recently as 2014 she won overall national titles in both the half and full marathon. In Christchurch she has finished 2nd (2013), 5th (2015) and 6th (2016).

Others expected to feature include recent imports, Sabina Piras and Margie Athrow. Athrow is an Australian currently based in Dunedin and has run 1hr 20min for the half Marathon, while American-come-Aucklander Sabina Piras has run 1hr 19min.

Alice Mason



Olivia Burne

Race director, Chris Cox, is thrilled to see the women's race shaping up so well.

"We work hard to make the ASB Christchurch Marathon New Zealand's premier road race," says Cox. "Athletes like Alice Mason and Olivia Burne acknowledge this by lining up here when they could be racing overseas."

Cox is also quick to point out the ASB Christchurch Marathon is more than merely a footrace. With options including the Full Marathon run, Half Marathon run and walk, the 10k run and walk and the Kids' Mara'Fun, this is a festival of fitness with something for everyone.

"We challenge everyone from individuals to schools, businesses and community groups to be a part of a great occasion," says Cox. "Businesses like The Press newspaper traditionally put in large teams and there are several schools training for it as part of their NCEA exercise science studies."

"This year ChristchurchNZ have helped us create a corporate challenge where workplaces can enter groups and we'll donate \$10 from every corporate entry to our charity partner, Ronald McDonald House."

City host ChristchurchNZ General Manager of Attraction Linda Falwasser says the Marathon is a great opportunity for people all ages to participate in a renowned running event.

"Christchurch is the perfect location for events like these - we have an accessible city surrounded by mountains all the way to the sea," Ms Falwasser says.

Entries for the 2018 ASB Christchurch Marathon are still open. Race day is Sunday 3rd June.

Full info at : [www.christchurchmarathon.co.nz](http://www.christchurchmarathon.co.nz).