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Dennis Nish and Jim Hopkins participated in the very first Melbourne Marathon in 1978 and will be taking part in the 40th edition of the event on October 15. Picture: Tony Gough

VIC News

## Melbourne Marathon: 1978 participants relive the event

Claire Burke, Herald Sun  
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IF SOMEONE had suggested to Dennis Nish when he was on the start line of his first 42.2km run at the inaugural Melbourne Marathon in 1978, that he would still be running in it 40 years later – he would have given them one recommendation: “Off to the funny farm with you”.

Dennis, like Jim Hopkins, was one of more than 2500 runners to make the early morning journey to Frankston for the start of what has become an iconic Melbourne event.

Neither Dennis, 67, nor Jim, 68, comprehended the physical challenge of what they were about to endure.

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Jim said the longest he had run before the marathon was 15km in training. Dennis thinks the idea to enter was probably raised around the bar one night.

He considered himself more of a footballer and felt since he had once run "five mile" (8km) surely this wouldn't be too much different.

"I truly had no idea how far 42.2km was to try to run," Jim said.

Jim recalled he wore cheap casual shoes, while Dennis said his footwear was probably "a pair of some sort of weird and wonderfuls bought from the Dandenong market".

Both men toughed it out on the Nepean Highway and eventually finished in front of the Melbourne Town Hall.

While totally spent from the effort, the experience sparked something in Jim. "I thought, 'I can do this better,'" he said.

Dennis finished the course vowing never to do another marathon, but as it turns out, he too had caught the running bug.

That gruelling initiation blossomed into a lifetime enjoyment of running for both.

Jim's family holidays are often planned around where he can do a run, while Dennis's Sunday runs with a mate usually finish with a beer and have become a 40-year social ritual.

"It's been built into my lifestyle," Dennis said.

Dennis has run in every Melbourne Marathon except 1979, when he was overseas, and illness forced Jim out of the 1981 and 2008 events.

Jim has run marathons on five continents, while Dennis estimates he has run about 80 marathons, and both recorded impressive times under two hours and 50 minutes in their prime.

They have slowed in recent years, but their enthusiasm for the Melbourne Marathon has not. They are looking forward to being part of the 40-year celebrations on October 15 and many more beyond.

Early bird entries for the 40th Melbourne Marathon close this Friday.

For more: [melbournemarathon.com.au](http://melbournemarathon.com.au)



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