

Margaret River Ultra Marathon 2023

Competitor Profiles

Nicole Virant

- Solo Runner
- Winner of the 2022 Surf Coast Century 100km

We caught up with Nicole for a Q&A...

How long have you been racing ultra marathons for?

My first Ultra Marathon was suggested to me 7 weeks before the Surf Coast Century 2021 event. I was prompted to look into the 50km event and ended up agreeing to put myself out of my comfort zone and entered this race. I came in second to Kellie Emmerson and everything about the event felt so good, from conversations with other runners to the beautiful views along the way! Following this race I jokingly said I would love to do the 100km the following year. I had no expectation that I would even make it through the training blocks to get to the race line of a 100km event. It was truly a goal that I thought was unachievable.

Prior to running I played local footy and have now well and truly swapped out the footy boots for trail shoes. I have taken the role as the runner on Sundays for the women's games down in Barwon Heads!



What is your preferred type of ultra course and what would you say are your strengths?

I am relatively new to the Ultra scene so am still getting to know what is out there. There are so many epic places to explore and living down on the coast I have easy access to the trails from Torquay to Aireys Inlet. I would say this terrain is what I am familiar and therefore comfortable and prefer to run on.

A strength that comes to mind is consistency, I rarely miss a training session. Running gives me so much so I never view it as a chore to get out the front door (even in the middle of winter down south). I see each run as an opportunity to explore, get the endorphins flowing and also use it to socialise with others who have a similar interest. It is how I start each day and being so excited for my runs confirms that I am still loving the sport!

You may have heard that the course includes some sand in the later stages of the race – does this concern you? How will you try and prepare for it?

I have only recently looked up the course and been made aware of the sand. In the coming weeks I will be prioritising getting out on the sand down on the surf coast and doing what I can to build up my strength, endurance and understand how my body responds to sand when I am fatigued. I have also put in more effort with my nutrition, I didn't make a plan for SCC and this backfired to a degree. Going into sand sections fatigued will be hard enough so being well fuelled is important! Also, I think not disrespecting or downplaying the distance is important to keep in mind.

Anna McKenna is also competing - she is also a winner of the Surf Coast Century (2021) like yourself, then came over to WA for the Margaret River Ultra Marathon, and won! (2022). What are your thoughts on Anna as an elite ultra runner too, and is the pressure on?

I actually have not thought about the competitive side of racing. I will be over the moon to make it to the finish line and feel good! My plan is to go out and run my own race and not let myself worry about where others are in the race. Getting through an ultra itself is a huge accomplishment for anyone, no matter if you come in first or just make the cut off time.

I have definitely heard about Anna and seen her amazing achievements so it will be great to run in a field with such an elite athlete and hopefully get the chance to meet her!

What other racing plans have you got for the next 12 months?

It is important that I allow myself to have time to recover and reflect after each big event to ensure that I am absolutely still loving Ultra running. It takes up a huge part of my life and I want to continue to do this long term so if that means being in tune with my mind and body to hopefully be a part of running Ultras ongoing. I loosely have plans to enter the Blackall100 and complete this with my training friend, James, who I trained with for the SCC and ran the first 20km with.

Ideally, I would love to link in my love for exploring and travel and hope to head overseas, possibly starting with a trip to New Zealand early 2024 if my body responds well to my training and events this year.



IMAGE: Nicole at the Surf Coast Century course – Leg 1 along the beach.