

Join this madcap annual race in Burgundy for tipples galore – and a gourmet feast

By Anna Richards

THIS is a marathon in more ways than one. Sure, there is the running itself... but then there's the gourmet French cuisine, no less, and quite delicious it is too.

Beef bourguignon, snails, garlicky sauces and plenty of pinot noir are set on a trestle table and we're all tucking in as a band plays jazzy tunes.

My partner is dressed as the chef Alfredo Linguini from the Pixar film *Ratatouille*, while I'm sporting a natty Remy the Rat outfit. But it's pouring down and my fluffy rat onesie is fast getting heavier and heavier.

Welcome to the madcap and enormously fun Marathon des vins de la Cote Chalonnaise in Burgundy. We've opted to take on the half-marathon – 13.1 miles – and we're only six miles in. And, I shall admit, I'm on my fifth glass of wine.

With a dining experience roughly every two miles, this makes our run a seven-course affair, with accompanying wine pairings, of course.

Wine marathons have been around for four decades now – the original was held in Medoc, south-west France – and there are now about 30 all across Europe.

Getting tickets for Medoc is nigh on impossible, though – its 8,500 places fill up in around half an hour. Meanwhile, the Beaujolais version, half an hour's drive from my home in Lyon, is an enormous party, with more than 30,000 runners.

I'VE completed that four times, but this year I'm doing something different: a wine and food marathon.

It's also cheaper than many of the others. Burgundy's Marathon des vins de la Cote Chalonnaise costs £51 (£31 for a half-marathon) and includes a free bottle of wine. This compares to £96 and no bottle for the Medoc race.

The race starts in the town of Givry – and it's like a carnival. Lots of people seem to have gone for group themed costumes. There's a squad of disco balls, another of sunflowers and a school of slippery-looking sardines. We quaff free shots of a Bourgogne chardonnay and munch free macarons near the starting line, awakening our taste buds.

Then we each order two more glasses of wine to accompany this unusual breakfast. For hardened wine runners such as myself, this is *de rigueur*.

Nicely warmed up, we set off for our ambulant seven-course meal – the race rules give us three-and-a-half hours to get around.

Through vineyards and



My wine marathon in France (dressed as a rat!)



villages we go. Our first stop, 2.5 miles in, faces long rows of vines sprawling down a hill – and we happily tuck in to pains au chocolat, croissants and mulled wine.

One of our friends had spray-painted her hair blue. The rain has turned it into turquoise veins forming rivulets down her forehead. Another friend dressed as an astronaut appears better off – his suit appears semi-waterproof. But we are all becoming soggy... and a bit tipsy.

At mile four I devour

gougeres (cheesy choux pastry in puffed-up balls) accompanied by rosé and a live band.

From this point onwards there's live music at each stop, mostly playing 1990s French rock classics, we note.

The snail stop is next, with wafts of garlic rising from the runners. In the little town of St-Martin-sous-Montaigu, the beef bourguignon is first-rate, while two miles later, in the village hall of Mellecey, terrine, pate and pizza slices are on the menu.

Well fuelled, we keep on going. Just over a mile before the finish

line, little grilled slices of steak and lamb await, and we become bolder with our wine refills – when you've come this far, what's another glass?

Running 13.1 miles in a semi-intoxicated state makes you feel as though you're flying over the finish line, although the reality is more of a lolling plod, with splatters of wine down your outfit.

Here, the largest tent of all awaits, packed with cheeses, pickles, more pate, apple tarts, brioches and cakes.

The rain hasn't dampened

FUN RUN: Anna during the event alongside her partner Val, set among Burgundy vineyards, top

anybody's spirits – and we remain ensconced in the wine tent long after the race is over, where awards are handed out for the best times and the most creative costumes.

At just nine years old, Marathon des vins de la Cote Chalonnaise is much younger than the Medoc or Beaujolais wine marathons, but it's very much full of its own charm – not unlike a glass of burgundy.



TRAVEL FACTS

THE Marathon des vins de la Cote Chalonnaise is held every March, with four distances: 8km, 12km, half-marathon and marathon. Le Creusot TGV station is 30 minutes from Givry – to reach Le Creusot from Paris is 90 minutes by train. More information: marathondesvinsdelacotechalonnaise.fr

MERRY WAY: Runners and, right, the treats on offer included macarons

