

JAALA VAN DONGEN

2025 MRA FEMALE MASTERS ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

In high school I remember thinking there's nothing I'd rather do less than run, much to the dismay of my gym teacher, Mr. Babb. Later in my early thirties, I struggled through a couple halves, but I didn't really get into running until 2017, about 6 months after my son was born.

Then in 2017, I suffered a broken tailbone and fractured spine and soon realized how much I missed running. I decided to run the Police Half in 2018 and if it went well, I'd try a Full (thanks to a nudge from my friend Kayla). Things quickly escalated from there when I met Greg Penner and began training with Arete Endurance. Now at 45, I've now raced distances from 1500m to 24 hours and everything in between, trying to become the best athlete I can be (I do have a quietly competitive nature, especially against myself).

I love volunteering at races, especially with my oldest kid, Ash, who is well known as being amazing at crewing and cheering! Balancing running with life as a wife, mother of three (Ash-20, Nessa-18, and Kees-9), and working as an Educational Assistant can be busy and challenging, but I use running to help prioritize my mental health and well-being, after the loss of my big brother Jon to suicide in 2021.

2025 BEST TIMES:

5k: 19:26

10k: 40:11

10 Mile: 1:06:11

Half Marathon: 1:28:57

Full Marathon: 3:11:19