

Vasaloppet 2024 – Anniken



As a Norwegian, people often assume that I am a great and experienced skier, but the truth is that I have never been very good or particularly interested in cross-country skiing. When my dad challenged me to join him for the 100th Vasaloppet, that had to change - quickly. From signing up in March 2023, I had just under a year to become fit and technically good enough to get through a 90 km ski-race.

I had a separate goal of running a marathon in 2023, and the preparations for this event helped me build endurance, but it did mean that I was not able to fully focus on skiing until late autumn. This is when I joined MCCSC and started attending coaching sessions at the UCLAN Sport Arena. With the excellent coaching I received there, my technique went from completely useless to sort-of OK, and my confidence increased as my skills improved. Outside of the coaching sessions, I was able to rollerski between 10-20 km once a week, and I kept running regularly in an effort to maintain my fitness. My training plan was far from ideal, but I did

the best I could with the time and daylight I had. During December and January, I was able to make two trips to Norway and spend a few weeks skiing on real snow, which was invaluable.

When race-day finally came around, I had skied close to 300km on snow and another 200km on rollerskis, yet I felt ill-prepared and incredibly nervous. On the day of the race, my dad and I got up at 3am to make our way to the start. We had to start in the backmost group as I was a first-time racer, and we wanted to get there early to secure a place as far ahead in the group as possible. We managed to start with around 13000 skiers in front of us, and another 3000 behind.

The weather in the week leading up to the race had been wet and warm, and the race conditions were the worst seen in decades. By the time we set off, we were already soaked and muddy. Due to starting so far back, we had to queue a lot throughout the race. The first 3 kilometres took us a whopping 1 hour and 40 minutes, and it didn't get much better from there. There were no tracks to speak of, very little visibility, and we were constantly held up in bottlenecks. My back and shoulders cramped up, and pushing onwards was a mental challenge.

Still, we did have some fun along the way. Reaching each of the seven checkpoints felt like a great accomplishment, and gave us extra motivation to keep going. We were offered water, vegetable stock, blueberry soup, and coffee to help keep us nourished and energised, and I even got a slice of orange at one point. Never has an orange tasted so good! Eventually the rain paused, and the pain and discomfort dissipated. Finally, after 12.5 hours, we crossed the finish line in Mora, exhausted and elated all at once.

Now that we are a few weeks out from the race, I am left feeling very proud and positive about the experience! A record-breaking number of racers, around 2500, were not able to complete this year, so having managed to finish feels like a big win for me! Although it was incredibly challenging at the time, I am very happy that I did it. Without the excellent coaching from Ros at MCCSC, it definitely would not have been possible. Now, I feel very inspired to keep skiing and training, and in a few years, I'd like to try Vasaloppet again – hopefully in better conditions!