

DEREHAM

# Marathon dad vows to repay 'first class' hospital

By STEPHEN PULLINGER

He is a former professional triathlete and a born winner – but when Rob Joy tackles the London Marathon on April 13 the finishing line clock will not for once be the first thing on his mind.

The postal worker is still intent on being the first Norfolk athlete home, in a time of about 2hr 19min, but the figure that really matters will be the amount he raises through sponsorship for the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital's special care baby unit.

Mr Joy's priorities changed dramatically on December 14 – after he had already been accepted to run in his first marathon – when his wife Pippa, 27, gave birth to their first child, Amelia, at home in Foxglove Drive, Dereham.

The couple opted for a home delivery and were oblivious to any impending problems through a trouble-free labour during which the baby's heart rate was normal.

But there was panic the instant the baby girl was delivered and placed across his wife's chest by the midwife – and Mr Joy, 30, noticed she was not breathing.

He said: "The midwife immediately tried to resuscitate her but without success. She was then rushed to hospital in an ambulance but would not start breathing until she was put on a ventilator."

Over the following anxious hours the couple were dreading the worst as Amelia stopped breathing again on one occasion and then started to have fits, suggesting possible brain damage.

Even after she was able to start breathing unaided she was not out of the woods as doctors detected brain swelling caused by lack of oxygen and had to put her on a special cold mat to bring her body temperature down quickly.

But showing the battling qualities of her father, who finished among the first British athletes in last year's Tyneside Great North Run, Amelia has made such good progress the couple are hopeful of bringing her home in the next few days.

Mr Joy, who has just switched from Norfolk Gazelles to Notts AC to



**SPECIAL CARE:** Baby Amelia Joy stopped breathing when she was born and has been cared for at the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital since. Her proud dad Rob is to run the London Marathon in April to raise money for the special care baby unit at the hospital.

“ They have looked after Rob and me as much as they have Amelia and are on hand to answer any questions we have

Pippa Joy

progress his elite ambitions, said: "We still have to feed her through a nasal tube and the doctors are still playing with the drugs to stop her fits.

"They want to do another MRI scan on her brain and have said it may not be until she is two – as her body develops – that they will be able to tell us if there are going to be any long-term problems or not."

But Mr Joy, whose wife has maintained a long vigil at the hospital through Christmas and the new year, said he was determined to

raise money for new equipment for the hospital unit because the care offered had been "first class".

His wife, a Royal Bank of Scotland worker, said: "They have looked after Rob and me as much as they have Amelia and are on hand to answer any questions we have and to reassure us when necessary."

Mr Joy is training twice a day for his London debut, doing many sessions with fellow elite runner Darren Fowlie, from Norwich, but his big priority now is the same as the thousands of fun runners – to finish.

He said: "If I had just been running for a time, and I found myself struggling, I might have considered dropping out. But now I am determined to finish even if I have to walk or crawl."

Anyone wishing to sponsor him is asked to send cheques – payable to Robert Joy – to 1 Foxglove Drive, Dereham, Norfolk. The money will then be passed on in a lump sum.

■ Follow Norfolk expert Neil Featherby's training schedules for the London Marathon on the EDP24 website.



Picture: SONYA BROWN

STOKE HOLY CROSS

## Bombs were a wake-up call to change

For years, Sue Atkinson was a regular armchair London Marathon watcher who would often say to her family: "I'd like to run that one day."



But it was the July 7, 2005 terrorist bombings in the capital on her 60th birthday, one of which exploded near to her pregnant daughter, that prompted her finally to get her running shoes on.

The 62-year-old, who is married to the Bishop of Thetford, the Rt Rev David Atkinson, is now gearing up for her third London Marathon after turning her life around through running.

The writer, teacher and lecturer, who has written several children's fiction and educational books as well as some self-help books based on her own battle against depression and the haunting memories of child abuse, is hoping to raise more than £1,800 for the NSPCC – a charity close to her heart.

The mother-of-two and grandmother-of-four, who lives at Stoke Holy Cross, near Norwich, has suffered bouts of depression since she was a teenager, triggered by the sexual abuse she received from her stepfather from when she was just a baby.

But Dr Atkinson now says her nightmares have receded and all suicidal thoughts have disappeared after becoming a marathon runner, which has also helped her to become healthier and lose weight.

She said: "Every year I sat down and watched the London Marathon on the television and I wanted to do it for a couple of decades and I thought if I didn't do it on my 60th birthday year I probably would never do it."

"The London bombings brought home to me how fragile life can be and I promised myself that I would do my best to be healthy enough to see my grandchildren grow up."

■ To sponsor Dr Atkinson, visit [www.justgiving.com/sueatkinson](http://www.justgiving.com/sueatkinson).

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