

After all the excitement of last weekend's London Marathon, and the expectation associated with this weekend's Stratford equivalent, it may be easy to forget that other events are going on all the time; many of them variations on the standard running theme.

A good example of this is the Chedworth Roman Trail 10 - a scenic 10-mile run through the Cotswold countryside on the Stowell Park estate and around the Chedworth Roman Villa. It has all the ingredients of a classic multi-terrain course over footpaths, tracks and roads, plus the much loved three crossings of the River Churn, and runners definitely wouldn't be able to keep the same rhythm or pace that they could do on the road. The single-lap race through the Coln Valley started and finished at Chedworth Village Hall, about 6 miles north of Cirencester, and there were half a dozen Stratford AC members present to test themselves against nature.

On a day when conditions may have been dry underfoot, but a freezing wind and intermittent heavy showers made sure that competitors didn't enjoy themselves too much, Mark Francis (79:58 minutes, 71st) used his well-known strength and resilience to be the first of these 6 back. It was Lynn Sherren (86:14, 128th, 9th female) who really stole the show though, as an excellent performance got her another well-deserved prize for winning the female O45. The hills, as usual, were a mere nothing to this little powerhouse but the stream crossing, knee deep to most people, proved a little more tricky! Chedworth is one of the regular events on the rather busy racing calendar of Allan Coldicott (88:58, 150th), although he does seem to have lost his sparkling form of a couple of months ago and was a few minutes slower than his last couple of years here. Chasing Allan down hard were the equally prolific Karen Holmes (92:29, 195th) and Michael Oliver (92:58, 200th), both doing well to finish well up in the field of 341 finishers. John Butler (126:21, 339th) continues to defy age as he gets out there to compete each week, but this time he had to accept second-best behind Vito Graffagino (61:59) and Cheltenham's Laura Kent (76:21) who pipped him for the placings, whilst it was also good to see Jason Duffey still performing well.

Running after a swim definitely provides some variation, without the added complications of doing a full-blown triathlon, and the Warwick Aquathlon provided 2 Stratford AC athletes with an enjoyable test. Shipston's Edward Caswell was one of the younger entrants in the Tristart 1 Boys event (9-10 year olds), but this didn't stop him from gaining a fantastic win as he proved too strong for the older lads in both the 100m swim (2:04 with transition) and 1200m run (6:17). Edward's mother, Stratford AC's Yvonne Caswell, then almost emulated her son by getting a terrific 2nd place in the senior ladies competition. Yvonne had a fairly average 400m swim (6:57 with transition) in a choppy St Nicholas Park pool, but an excellent 2-mile run (13:55) put her right back in contention as she finished with the 3rd quickest swim and 2nd quickest run. Edward then continued his good form at the Warwickshire Children's Aquathlon, finishing 3rd behind 2 older competitors. The event was being held at Edward's home pool, Shipston's shiny new leisure centre, and a fine 150m swim (2:59 with transition) and a strong run on a tough course (5:14) saw him grab his place on the podium.

Certainly a more standard test of running prowess was the Reading Half-Marathon, another provincial event that has grown enormously with the running boom of the last couple of years. With 8,842 runners completing the 13.1-mile route it certainly gives those thinking of doing a large marathon like London some experience of running in large crowds, and rewards them with a finish at the football club's impressive Madjeski Stadium. Phil Howell (1 hour 28:36 minutes) took his place on the start line, despite suffering from a bad back, and battled away as he always does to record a very respectable time in the circumstances. It remains to be seen whether Karen Holmes (1:45:55, 2,231st) preferred the roads of Reading to the tracks near Chedworth, but a strong performance and a much flatter course saw her only 13 minutes slower for this half-marathon than for the 10-miler.

This Sunday's local running spectacular begins at 10 a.m. from Waterside, outside the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, when both the marathon and half-marathon participants will be sent on their way.