

With Stratford AC's juniors cross country and endurance running often appears to be an overlooked area, but this season looks like it could be their best ever. Zoe Chandler, the female XC runner of the year, has already showed her form this season by winning the County Schools' Trial and running for Warwickshire in the Inter Counties Schools races in Shropshire, where she finished 5th in the Minor Girls race against strong opposition from all over the country. Not to be outdone Jonty Wilson, who won the male award, had a strong run in the Cheltenham Schools races finishing 4th, as did Jack McMullen in his race, and both will be looking forward to the Gloucestershire Schools' County Champs later this month. Meanwhile, the club's squad have dominated the local schools' races as may be expected; for example, in the recent races at Charlecote Park the Year 6 girls led by Clemmie Holden took the first six places.

The club's main team target for the season though is doing well in the West Midlands Young Athletes Cross Country League, and in the second fixture at Perry Park in Birmingham it was encouraging for the team to continue their strong form by scoring the highest points total that they have ever achieved. Many of the team had competed in schools races the day before but still ran well at the league meeting. The U11 girls' team were the first to race and, despite losing Molly White through illness, the team finished 4th on the day and held onto 2nd place overall. Clemmie Holden led the team in 10th place, followed by Ellen Scholes in 26th, Chloe Connor (34th), Trisha Cooper (improving by twenty places to 37th) and Hannah Taylor (another big improver to 53rd). It may be early but it would be extremely rewarding to see the girls in the medals at the end of the season.

In the U11 boys' Stratford couldn't fill a full team but the two athletes both ran well. Edward Caswell was not quite at his best after both a cross country and a swimming gala the day before, but still came in a strong 19th, closely followed by Ciaran King in 31st place amongst a large field.

The U13 girls' race saw Becky Young make her debut, and after a comparatively easy first half to the race she ran very strongly in the latter stages going through the field to finish 33rd, and demonstrating her potential for the future. Katie Taylor showed her consistency in 55th, followed by an improving Georgie Evans in 86th. The U13 boys also had new recruits to strengthen the team and could be challenging at the front in the next couple of meetings. Jack Allison ran a very strong race to lead the team in at 18th place, and was well supported by Michael Suren in 39th, Fraser Weetman finishing very fast on his debut in 53rd and Chris Bowyer, another in his first race for the club in 67th.

The U15 boys' team usually consists of Sam Taylor on his own, but this time he was joined by Charlie York. Charlie had a nervous start, since he was just recovering from a knee injury, however once he had got into a rhythm he gained in confidence and ran a good second half to come 28th, with Taylor close behind in 48th.

Finally the U17 boys' team had the pleasure of running the longest distance of the day. Jonty Wilson, fresh from his school successes, had a steady start in his first race in this age group to come 23rd, just ahead of Dan Wright in 28th, who was looking much stronger than in the previous fixture, and Troy Tomlinson, also improving to 39th.

Overall, after the first two matches Stratford are in 15th place with a best ever points haul at this stage of the season, ahead of local rivals Leamington and some much bigger clubs such as Leicester and Birmingham Rowheath. There are several clubs

well within reach just above Stratford, so the rest of the season could prove very interesting.

There are marathons and then there are marathons. A lot of races these days give themselves a trendily tough title to emphasise the challenge - the National Trust Snowdonia Marathon has no need to. Its 26.2 miles are all actually on the road, saving the paths of the mountain for the thousands of walkers, but that didn't make the slopes any easier or the scenery any less spectacular for the 1,500 sell-out field. In complete contrast to the driving rain of 2005 this year saw a perfect Sunday morning for the 24th staging of the event, much to the relief of the 2 Stratford AC members taking up the challenge. The race basically circumnavigates Snowdon's lower slopes in a clockwise direction starting at Nant Peris (300ft), climbing to the top of the Llanberis Pass (Pen y Pass 1,100ft) before a reasonably steady middle section to Beddgelert (200ft) and Waunfawr alongside the lakes. The fun in most marathons is all about the last few miles but Snowdon takes it one step further: at mile 21 begins an horrendous climb up to Bwlch y Groes (1,200ft), and at this point the competitors can hear the loudspeaker 2 miles away at the finish in Llanberis. Plenty of black toenails though will bear testament to how tough running this last uncomfortable downhill section can be with tired quads.

Wales' highest peak could have been made for the two Stratford competitors, Kim Johnston and Karen Holmes, since they have as good stamina and mental strength as anyone in the club. Both had terrific runs, with Kim (4 hours 29:03, 690th) a few minutes faster than the previous year and Karen (4:51:28, 852nd) getting in well under 5 hours on her debut. She had been unable to do much training for the event, but her slow start paid big dividends in those interesting last few miles, while Kim is starting to have some twisted thoughts about next year – Beachy Head Marathon on the Saturday, Snowdon Marathon the next day and then Dublin Marathon on the Monday! Both the male and female winners were comfortably impressive, with Dennis Walmsley (2:39:55) and Adela Salt (3:05:53) well out in front.

Another one of Stratford AC's stamina men, Chris Seeney, took on the same distance but over the slightly different surroundings of Benidorm in Spain. On a two-lap, reasonably flat course Chris recorded an impressive time of 4 hours and 4 minutes.