

In the majority of triathlon races, it's simply a case of beating the clock. Very few triathletes are good enough to be in contention for a win or top three place so everyone is concentrating on trimming a few minutes or seconds off their personal best (PB) times, instead.

This doesn't always make for a great spectator sport as the triathletes are all engaged in their personal battle so the BTA National Club Relay Champs held earlier this month at Holme Pierrepont, Nottingham, was a welcome chance to watch a true team event where individual performance was definitely less important.

The format for this race was a four man/women/mixed team with each competitor completing the swim leg in sequence, followed by the bike and finally the run. To fit this within a reasonable timeframe, the swim was a 400m loop around part of the rowing lake followed by a 3 lap 15km bike around the circumference of the lake and a 1 lap 5km run around the same route but in the opposite direction. This meant that each of the competitors crossed in front of the main grandstand 4 times, to be roared on by their team-mates and other supporters, armed with whistles, cowbells and anything else to drown out the opposition.

Stratford AC was competing for the first time and was well represented with both a women's and men's team. Debbie Cooper, Dawn Davies, Sarah Bland and Yvonne Caswell drew the short straw and had the pleasure of an early morning start and made a good start. They were well in contention when the swim was interrupted, unfortunately, by the sudden illness of another competitor as they finished their leg which resulted in the race being stopped as they were given emergency first aid. Happily they later made a full recovery and the race was restarted with the race now being decided on a shortened 10km bike and 5km run legs only.

The Stratford AC team competed hard and finished in 2:05:08 (1:06:52 bike, 1:32:15 run) for 17<sup>th</sup> position in the senior women category and 76<sup>th</sup> in the morning wave.

It was the men's turn in the afternoon and Cornelius Quilligan, Pete Evans, Jeff Titmarsh and Steve Kirk had some tough competition in the shape of bigger triathlon clubs from all over the country. They stuck to the task in hand though and made up some ground on the bike and run legs especially to finish 79<sup>th</sup> in the senior men category in 3:33:29 (2:05:13 swim & bike, 1:28:16 run) and 106<sup>th</sup> in the afternoon wave.

As a team event, it was a great success and will no doubt be a fixture in the club calendar for many years to come.

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By an unfortunate piece of timing, the London Triathlon also took part on the same weekend and Stratford AC triathletes Jenny Armitage and Dave Knight made the trip to the capital rather than Nottingham to join thousands of other competitors in the largest triathlon in the world.

As regular viewers of BBC Grandstand will be aware, this race is based at the EXCEL centre in London Docklands and has the rather bizarre feature of an undercover transition area that is accessed via steps from the swim leg in the docks outside. The bike course for the elite and faster club triathletes is a fantastic opportunity to cycle around the (closed) streets of London past Canary Wharf to Westminster on a two lap route and the run consists of two laps around the edge of the docks before finishing back inside the EXCEL centre.

Jenny was competing in her first Olympic distance race (1500m swim, 40.4km bike, 9.8km run) by missing the start of her wave by a few seconds and in her rush to get to the start, losing her timing chip. The adrenaline must have been flowing though, as she made up a lot of time in the swim and went into transition with the leaders. Although she lost a few places on the bike and run she still finished with a (manually recorded) time of 2:33:28 for a magnificent 16<sup>th</sup> position in her category.

Dave was competing in the fast and furious sprint event on the Saturday with a 750m swim, 21km bike, 5.2km run) that stayed within the confines of the Docklands. In only first second race, he was delighted with a solid 96<sup>th</sup> position and a time of 1:24:42 (15:08 swim, 41:20 bike, 22:42 run).

The winners of the elite race on the Sunday were Andrea Whitcombe (GB) in 01:57:38 (00:20:03, 01:01:47,00:33:51) and Hendrik de Villiers (RSA) in 01:45:35 (00:18:23 00:55:58 00:29:20).

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Just to prove that triathletes never know when to stop, Debbie Cooper followed up her strong showing at the club relays by competing the next day at the Worcester sprint triathlon at Droitwich Spa.

This 400m pool swim, 20km bike and 5km run attracts competitors from many of the local tri clubs including BRAT and Black Country Tri, so competition was fierce and Debbie's 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the senior female category was an outstanding result. Her overall time of 01:08:26 (00:07:37 swim, 00:35:59 bike, 00:24:50 run) was also good enough for 21<sup>st</sup> overall and put many of the men to shame as well.

The winner of the women's race was Michelle Parsons (Worcester Tri) in 01:07:11 (00:08:21, 00:36:03, 00:22:47) and the mens race was won by James Gillfillian (Primera Bournemouth) in 00:56:37 (00:05:34, 00:30:57, 00:20:06)