

Last Sunday saw the 26<sup>th</sup> staging of the now world-famous Flora London Marathon, an event so well-supported, well-organised and uplifting that it actually played a significant part in attracting the 2012 Olympic Games to the capital. The 2006 version was no different from that point of view as 34,000 runners of all abilities strode, jogged or hobbled their way round the 26.2-mile route and past some of the city's best known landmarks. Many participants appeared highly enthusiastic at the Cutty Sark (7 miles) but then looked distinctly less so at Tower Bridge (13.1), Canary Wharf (19), the Tower of London (22), the Embankment (24) and Big Ben (25), and were more than happy to see the finish at The Mall! The conditions were perfect for fast distance running, with no wind and a slight drizzle, and this was reflected in the host of impressive times from amongst the 14 Stratford AC members competing.

The peak years for long-distance runners are in their 30s so for Steve Marshall (2:55:39, 816<sup>th</sup>) to make such an impressive marathon debut in his early 20s is of great credit to his dedicated training. Steve was badly blocked in for the first few miles, but the advantage of this was that he ran almost perfect split times, overtaking most other members of the club somewhere along the route! At the other end of the age and experience scale is Malcolm Bowyer (2:57:11, 951<sup>st</sup>) who achieved a fantastic PB in his 13<sup>th</sup> London Marathon, breaking the 3-hour mark rather more comfortably than his previous PB of 2:59:59. Going through halfway in 1:25 was too fast, but Malcolm dug deep and having reached 23 miles in 2:26 he knew he was going to do it, and didn't even mind being overtaken by Steve Marshall at 24 miles! Richard Dobedoe (3:10:54, 2,128<sup>th</sup>), given his limited training and travelling down on the day, always knew that he wasn't going to get near his 2:51 of 2004, and will therefore be pleased to get under the over-40s 3:15 'good for age' qualifying mark which gives him automatic entry for the next 2 years. Richard kept a good pace up for much of the course, running with Steve Marshall for the middle 10 miles, before understandably fading a little in the last 10K.

Phil Goodchild (3:19:46, 3,199<sup>th</sup>), having deferred from last year due to injury, belatedly made his London appearance and suffered from being too honest with his starting position. Despite advice to the contrary he had to then dodge and weave for much of the first-half of the race, costing him valuable energy, so to still get such a fine time will have easily justified him his first alcohol since New Year's Eve! Phil was followed across the line very closely by Lesley Kirk (3:20:17, 3,283<sup>rd</sup>), Paul Hawkins (3:21:53, 3,491<sup>st</sup>), despite their different starting positions, and Douglas Waddell (3:22:44, 3,981<sup>st</sup>) and Kate Wright (3:22:53, 3,612<sup>th</sup>), who started off a bit later so didn't appear at the end for a few minutes. Lesley, who caught Paul at the same time that she was caught by Phil, has become an expert at pulling performances out of the bag when they're required and lowered her own PB and club record by another minute and a half. In her 5<sup>th</sup> consecutive London she may not have felt great as she ran, and may not have quite beat Mark Francis' Majorca time, but a combination of the kind conditions and her inbuilt stamina and determination gave her another fabulous result. Paul, who was very prominent on the BBC TV coverage, had his best marathon run for a few years despite now having turned 50 and setting off a bit quick and having had a hernia for the last few weeks. Many people might have been put off if they'd had previously difficult marathon outings, but Kate Wright is not one to be put off easily and when she got her second wind at 20 miles there was no looking back as she produced a time that she can be proud of. Kate's stomach actually managed to behave itself this time until she was sick one yard over the

finishing line! Douglas Waddell somehow manages to combine a very busy life with quality running so should be an inspiration to Pete Plimmer (3:25:35, 3981<sup>st</sup>) as he approaches his forthcoming nuptials. Pete may have been slower than last year, but with his reduced training anything under 3:30 was always going to be a bonus, especially with stitch and cramp coming on in the latter stages.

There was then a bit of a gap back to the next cluster of Stratford runners as Sarah Odell (3:53:27, 9,682<sup>nd</sup>), Tracey Bailey (3:53:49, 9,792<sup>nd</sup>) and Tony Hunt (3:54:42, 10,034<sup>th</sup>) all recorded very similar times. Tracey is another one who can take tremendous satisfaction from her first outing at this cruel distance, pacing herself perfectly, whilst Sarah, fresh from her age category club record at Ashby 20, had yet another sparkling run in what has been a fantastic 12 months since her 3:58 debut last year. In his 6<sup>th</sup> London appearance Tony Hunt, running this year for Save The Rhino (but not as a rhino), proved yet again that he can churn out 9-minute miles in a remarkably disciplined manner, running an even split and replicating his time of 2005 in the process. This just left Pete Law (4:08:45, 13,690<sup>th</sup>) to complete a tremendous set of results from the club, although he could never quite stride out as he felt quite tight all the way round, being overtaken by Tracey Bailey at about the 20-mile mark. Finally a special mention to two ex-Stratford members, Karen Farquhar (4:54:44, 24,630<sup>th</sup>) and Victoria Johnstone (4:58:40, 25,443<sup>rd</sup>), and to one of the club's newest recruits, Emma Bexson (4:02:44, 12,318<sup>th</sup>), on fine runs. Another unforgettable day for all those involved as they achieved something that can never be taken away from them.