

In the senior Warwickshire County Track and Field Championships at Leamington, held in conjunction with Leicestershire, Stratford Athletic Club won an unprecedented 3 golds and a silver. In the senior women's 5000m Catherine Clifford won Warwickshire gold after running a very even paced race, starting in 6th place and moving through the field as the others slowed to finish 2nd in the race, but was surprised to win after realising that first across the line was a Leicestershire athlete. In the senior men's 400m on the Saturday Neil Hawkins powered to a good win in a time of 50:0 seconds, running a controlled first 200 and then kicking with 200 to go to pull away and win comfortably. Then the next day Neil completed the double by winning the senior men's 800m, and in doing so retained his title in this event that he won last year. After a slow first lap of 59 seconds, when Neil sat in second place, he took the lead with 300m to go only when the pace slowed further. He surged again at 200m when the only opposition was Stratford team mate Joe Brocklehurst, with Neil winning in 1:57:2 and Joe second in a season's best of 1:58 – a great achievement for the club.

The Silverstone 10K is a midweek race that takes advantage of the longer, lighter evenings, with a large entry always drawn to the famous race track by the good running surface and hopefully traffic-free circuit! The two-lap event also usually attracts some fairly rapid runners as it is part of the highly competitive East Midlands Grand Prix, and amongst this year's total of 1007 finishers were 3 from Stratford AC. Luke Watkins (46:48 minutes, 463rd) has not had the easiest of years in 2006 but still shows that he is capable of pulling good times out of the bag, and he was joined in Northamptonshire by sister Natasha (63:14, 953rd) who is another that has held things together well in the last few months and was 2 minutes quicker than last year. The third Stratford member was Jane Mason (56:33, 846th), whose 4 10Ks in 2006 have all resulted in a new PB! She improved her time from last year by 3 minutes, itself an improvement of 5 minutes on 2004, and is a classic example of how distance runners can just keep on improving by putting in consistent and well thought out training over a period of time. The quality of the field was highlighted by good winning times from both the first male (William Cinhanhu in 30:26) and first female (Kate Ramsey in 34:51).

The Cobra Classic 14K race, held near Halesowen, is somewhat more lumpy than a race track with the single undulating lap incorporating suburban roads, bridle paths, woodland and meadow, and taking in the obelisk on Wychbury Hill. On a cool, damp morning Stratford AC's Mark Francis was not one to be put off by this, and once the initial flat first 5K was out of the way he started to show his strength as the runners made their way up the steep hill. By the time he had reached the last 1K downhill to the finish Mark had moved up to 23rd place out of the 160 competitors, completing the difficult course in an excellent 60:40 minutes. The race winner was Tom Kenderdine (Kidderminster & Stourport), who recorded 48:22, with Lucy Eastoe (Charnwood) the first lady back to Old Halesonians Rugby Club in a time of 59:28.

Neil Hawkins gave himself a good build up to those County Championship victories with a series of warm-up races in the early stages of the track and field season. A rare 1200m event took place at Birmingham University in April, with Neil finishing 4th in a time of 3:15:3 against strong opposition, starting off a little too quickly but still achieving a time to be satisfied with. On the same track in early May Neil had a fine win in a British Milers Club organised 800m, pulling away after a 57 second first lap to win comfortably in a quick 1:56:1 minutes. Another BMC 800m in mid-May saw another victory, this time in an even faster 1:55:49, but Neil could definitely have gone quicker with better opposition around him – he was rather disappointingly put into the ‘E’ race, when his winning time would have put him mid-pack in the ‘C’ race.