

For those running off-road recently the weather has made conditions underfoot extremely treacherous, and for the Stratford AC competitors taking part in the Mayhill Massacre, Stourbridge Stagger and Dursley Dozen they had very different sets of conditions to cope with. The first running of the Mayhill Massacre was an 8-mile multi-terrain event being staged near Huntley, approximately 5 miles west of Gloucester. There was a fine turnout of 356 for this woodland challenge, although it was not for the faint-hearted with the out-and-back course containing a lot of mud and some tough climbs up to the fantastic views from the top of May Hill. The first-half of the race was relatively tame as the runners worked their way uphill through the pleasant smelling pine forest, but the second-half was completely different with the trails and paths deep in strength-sapping mud and a liberal sprinkling of large branches.

Pete Hill (71:09, 62nd), whose injury-free stretch of training has seen him return stronger than ever, was the first of the 7 Stratford AC members back. The Shipston speedster's fine performance would actually have got him a prize for 1st male O55 had he realised and stayed around for the presentation ceremony. Lesley Kirk (78:50, 130th), 4th female O45, was next to escape the bitterly cold wind, and she was chased back all the way by Allan Coldicott (83:19, 176th). The queens of mud and hills - Sarah Odell (86:59, 207th) and Maxine Horsman (88:54, 228th) - presumably enjoyed the conditions more than most, with Chris Seeney (89:17, 235th) coming in just behind them. A rare outing from Karen Holmes (97:53, 290th), taking it steady as she looks to build back up her racing fitness, was the final Stratford runner back to the exotic changing rooms of an open-sided cow shed! The pleasantly familiar, if slightly odd-looking, faces of Brennan Lively (68:34, 38th) and Johann Breytenbach (76:14, 107th) also brightened up rural Gloucestershire, with Lee Rankin (Stroud) and Laura Kent (Cheltenham) winning the main prizes by recording times of 57:03 and 67:24 minutes.

Ten more Stratford AC members then took up the challenge of the Stourbridge Stagger, which didn't have the mud of Mayhill but had plenty of other ways to slow the competitors down! This 10-mile multi-terrain race is now an established event in the Midlands' race calendar, and offers a scenic rural course with varied off-road trails containing such beautifully descriptive sections like Dinosaur Beach, Horsetail Bank, Joan's Delight, Slop Gully and Step Hill. Starting and finishing by the bandstand in Mary Stevens Park the route follows a hilly out and back course to the south west of Stourbridge, and has a few stiles and gates thrown in just for good measure. The cold, frosty morning gave the runners perfect conditions with spectacular scenery around the lake and from the top of the hills, and also meant that the mud in places such as Slop Gully were largely nullified this year.

The most entertaining aspect of the race itself was that the first 55 runners were sent the wrong way by a marshal near the end, and consequently ran half a mile less than the other 412! The first three Stratford runners home certainly had differing experiences of this error with Kate Wright (68:42, 50th), the rapidly improving Emerson Mayes (76:20, 65th) and Mark Francis (77:00, 71st) coming in just either side of the great divide. This shouldn't take attention away from the fact that all of the trio ran superbly well, with Kate actually finishing 3rd lady overall and 1st O40 female. The irrepressible Allan Coldicott (86:40, 180th) knocked a minute off from his 2006 time, and he finished just ahead of a great run from Emma Bexson (86:55, 185th) who seems to be gaining strength and stamina all the time. Sarah Odell (91:13, 237th) also

did really well to take a minute off from 12 months ago, with Chris Seeney (95:47, 294th) and Karen Holmes (98:42, 320th) building on the fitness gains from their Mayhill outing. Another pair to have made terrific strides in the past year – Helen Monk (99:36, 330th) and Annabel Richardson (106:25, 390th) – ably demonstrated this improvement as they completed the Stratford turnout. Tom Kenderdine (Kidderminster & Stourport) retained his overall title in 56:12, not surprisingly over 3 minutes quicker than last year, with Emma Gooderham (Malvern Joggers) first lady across the line in 66:31.

As all good multi-terrains should, the Dursley Dozen in south Gloucestershire had everything from rain to bright sunshine up above, deep mud to bare rock underfoot and a golf course to a quarry as landscape. This 12 miles up and down the Cotswold escarpment is as tough a test as there is, and even includes a longish section up a bank 2 miles from the end where a rope has to be specially provided just to get the runners back to the top of Stinchcombe Hill! The 5 Stratford runners present amongst the foolhardy field of 386 never flinched from the challenge though, and 3 of them even got their slightly soiled hands on some silverware.

Rob Minton's (82:48, 8th) tremendous run and t-shirt prize may have gained him huge amounts of respect again, but unfortunately not quite enough to counteract the embarrassment of managing to lose, and then eventually re-find, his car keys in his shorts! The indestructible Brian Thornett (99:02, 88th) deservedly earned himself an extremely large box of chocolates for winning the O60s category, scraping home by over 8 minutes, while Pete Hill (101:15, 108th) missed out on an O50s prize by only 13 seconds. This demanding course with over 1600 feet of ascent suited Lynn Sherren (106:51, 149th) perfectly, and consequently she was the third of the local winners, taking the female O50s group award, with fellow battle-hardened competitor – Lesley Kirk (111:55, 194th) – coming in just behind her.