

Last Saturday saw one of the most exhilarating and fun events on the UK triathlon calendar with the staging of the National Club Relays in Nottingham, and Stratford AC's two teams punched well above their weight. The relays take place at the National Water Sports Centre at Holme Pierrepont and revolve around teams of four using a tagging format where everyone swims, everyone bikes and everyone runs in a race that looks like a mixture between competition and chaos. Now in its 14th year the event consists of a 400m open water swim, a 15km bike and a 5km run and is as close as it gets to racing a triathlon in an arena, with a completely closed course providing your teammates with the opportunity to see you (and shout at you) for the duration of all three disciplines. Whilst it may be a fun day out, which this year was greatly helped by the tropical weekend weather, the racing is serious with all of England's top triathlon clubs out in force.

From a sociability point of view Stratford AC decided to put in two mixed teams, rather than 1 male and 1 female team, and so they lined up amongst the 194 teams competing in the morning session. All eight competitors excelled themselves throughout to finish 27th and 153rd overall, and 17th and 75th out of 89 in the mixed team category, putting Stratford as one of the highest non-tri specific clubs. Rather bizarrely for a running club, the 'first team' performed relatively weakest on the run discipline! They put their strongest swimmer Jenny Armitage out on the first leg, in order to get out of the start melee quicker, and the other 3 didn't waste her fantastic top-10 performance. The bike section saw storming 3-lap performances from Pete Evans and Debbie Cooper, and despite twisting his ankle again just before the run Pete kept the team momentum going on the 5K lap. Keith Hawkes picked off one or two on the final run leg, but couldn't quite get to RAF Triathlon and London Tri B just ahead, and the team finished in 3 hours 33:34 minutes (30:21/1:36:03/1:27:08). The club's 'second team' used the same tactics by sending off strong swimmer Jeff Titmarsh first, and with Maxine Horsman also porpoise-like in the water the quartet were off to a flying start. With this pair also performing well on the bike, and Sarah Bland showing just how much she has improved at the most important discipline, things continued to go well. The blazing sunshine made the run hard work but, again, Cornelius Quilligan on the final leg used his excellent stamina to move the team up the rankings, giving them a total time of 4:05:50 and more consistent splits (38:27/1:48:03/1:39:19). This was a really positive and enjoyable day out for some of the club's triathletes, with a great job done by Steve Kirk, having a rare day off from competing, who organised and encouraged all morning. Local Nottingham club TFN just pipped Birmingham University to take the honours in the mixed category, and also topped the male competition, but BRAT from Birmingham were the female winners.

The local rivalry between the running clubs of Stratford and Kenilworth is always an enjoyable and friendly one, and the annual road race between the two is one of the highlights of this positive association. A pleasant Wednesday night in Snitterfield bore witness to this year's event, which was actually hosted by Kenilworth, and was made even more fun by the invitation of Leamington's Spa Striders to compete for the first time. The club have grown rapidly in recent years, and their interest in participating was gladly accommodated since they seem to have an ethos to match the event – run hard but make sure that you enjoy yourselves. Since it was a competitive race though it would be remiss not to mention the fact that Stratford won it – again!

The impressive turnout of 105 runners from the three clubs lined up for the start of the 5.75 mile course, which took the participants up a short, sharp, climb out of the village and along the road to Wolverton, including a long steep hill into the village. After reaching Norton Lindsey, the undulating course took the runners out of the village along Snitterfield Lane and back to the downhill finish in Bell Lane.

On the evening there were three competitions being contested; the overall which counted the first 32 runners to finish, the men's which took in 21 competitors and the ladies which counted 7 runners. Stratford comfortably took the overall honours and also, in a very close battle with Spa Striders, the ladies' title, while the male spoils narrowly went to Kenilworth Runners. The Stratford females showed both great form and strength in depth to hold off a powerful Spa Striders outfit, with Kate Wright (38:04) winning comfortably and terrific runs from just about all the other counters – Lesley Kirk (41:07), Helen Evans (41:16), Debbie Cooper (41:35), Lynn Sherren (43:22), Jenny Armitage (44:16) and Sarah Bland (46:56), with another 6 non-counters backing them up. On the men's side the highlight was undoubtedly Wayne Vickers' (34:27) fantastic win but, again, there were some impressive outings throughout the counters, with Jason Harman (36:13), Emerson Mayes (36:30), Dave Mothershaw (37:00), Dave Knight (39:01), Pete Tingle (39:40), Luke Watkins (40:29), newcomer Tom Reid (41:17), Geoff Hillman (42:51) and Pete Law (43:12) all deserving special mentions.

The most important thing was that the main aim of the evening was achieved i.e. to have a hard fought but friendly contest and a fun time, and hopefully the bar takings of the Snitterfield Arms should testify to the latter!