

Last Sunday morning saw the third running of the Leamington Spa Regency Run, a 10km multi-terrain course around the town's beautiful parks and streets. This year's race saw the entry limit greatly increased to 1,500 competitors (with 1,217 finishers), and amongst the crowds was an excellent turnout of 16 Stratford AC runners, including the winner! The larger numbers this year caused a few problems at the end, with people struggling to get over the line and into the jammed finish funnel, but generally the race was very well organised. The course is mostly flat with one short sharp incline, is run over paved surfaces and some all-weather bridleway, and includes both Newbold Comyn and Victoria Park before finishing at Jephson Gardens.

Rob Minton (33:27, 1st) didn't seem overly concerned by crowded finish funnels as he produced a stupendously quick run to lead from early on, and in the end beat last year's winner Emerson Combstock (Coventry Godiva) by a comfortable 31 seconds. Rob is looking in fantastic shape for his marathon debut in London on Sunday morning, but he is only too aware that there is nothing logical about 26.2 miles and that anything can happen! The Emerson Mayes (41:44, 73rd) bandwagon shows no sign of slowing after another lightning run, but Steve Kirk (42:20, 86th) only had the consolation of beating Roger Wilson by one place and one second, with both hoping to get back nearer the 40-minute mark soon. First lady back for Stratford was Dawn Davies (42:35, 97th), whose tremendous form on the winter mud is now being translated into the same on the road, and she took an enormous 2 minutes off her PB from last year's race. Next for the club were two more on the rapid improvement track, as Darren License (43:40, 134th) and Emma Bexson (45:22) flew round. Emma has put disrupted marathon training behind her to come on very strongly in the last few weeks, and she wisely took the opportunity to get a pre-London sharpener under her belt.

Another fine run from Chris Hall (46:32, 226th) was unfortunately eclipsed by an even better one from Dave Maundrell (46:41, 232nd), who took a massive 7 minutes off his 2006 time. Cornelius Quilligan (48:07, 292nd) showed his less gentlemanly side by pipping Sarah Odell (48:07, 293rd) to the line, with Michael Oliver (49:05, 328th) just behind the inseparable couple. The unseasonal temperatures were slightly negated by the 9 a.m. start, but even so Naomi Whittaker (49:49, 359th) and Luke Watkins (51:15, 416th) did well to keep battling right until a rather warm finish. The only cooling influence was a burst water main flooding the course early on, but that 30 seconds of refreshment was soon overtaken by the prospect of squelching running shoes for 9K! By Jane Mason's (57:30, 730th) recent standards this performance may not be one to put in the scrapbook, but it was still a time that she would have been delighted with 2 years ago. Allan Coldicott's bad knee prevented him from running so, slightly bizarrely, he walk / jogged his way round to be placed 1,185th! Sue Harrison (35:32, 6th) was the women's winner at her hometown event, and therefore it was she who joined Rob on the dance floor for the first waltz at the post-race ball.

The 17th running of the extremely challenging Cleevewold Race took place on Cleeve Common, near Cheltenham, in somewhat muddier and foggier conditions than Leamington, and there were 5 Stratford AC runners present to pick up the gauntlet. This 14-mile multi-terrain event involves so much climbing that competitors often feel like they have their feet in the clouds, but with a misty start this year it felt even more so! After a steep climb up to the Common and Cleeve Cloud trig point the field

join up with the Cotswold Way, and the highest point in the Cotswolds, before venturing into Sudeley Valley, onto the Windrush Way and then back onto the Cotswold Way again, before heading home via some woodland tracks.

With the 5 Stratford runners taking home 3 prizes a good day was had by all, and Pete Hill (1 hour 59:52 minutes, 31st) set the tone for the day as his winged heels brought him home as the 2nd male-O50. Pete showed that good marathon training does not have to involve endless miles on the road and hopefully he will get his just reward this Sunday. The ever-remarkable Brian Thornett (2:01:53, 38th) took the O60's prize by the mere matter of half an hour, while Rob Maull (2:02:06, 39th), another London Marathoner, was one place behind. With an existing calf problem it wasn't perhaps the ideal race for Rob to do, but hopefully aggravating it won't have affected his big day performance too much. The two Stratford ladies, Lynn Sherren (2:13:25, 61st) and Karen Holmes (2:59:50, 90th), can be pleased with their performances and hopefully will have enjoyed the bottle of beer that all the finishers received! Lynn's will have tasted all the better for knowing that she also took home some silverware for being placed 2nd female-O45. Both the men's and women's course records were broken by the host club's runners, as Cheltenham Harrier's Jeremy Bradley (1:32:01) and Laura Kent (1:52:28) entered the record books, while Stratford's trio of males did well to finish as the 5th team behind another Cheltenham victory.

Stratford AC's senior men's second appearance at the prestigious National 12-Stage Relays in Birmingham on Saturday didn't go quite according to plan; in fact it didn't go at all! After a fantastic effort to qualify a fortnight earlier the team suffered a series of injuries, illnesses and prior commitments leading up to the event and eventually, with no representative side available, the decision was taken to pull out. Whilst it was unfortunate, the team have again shown this Spring what they are capable of and will be aiming to be back even stronger next year! On a warm afternoon Leeds City AC were the clear winners of the men's race, while an exciting women's race saw Charnwood hang on from Aldershot Farnham & District.

With a few nervy days still to go to the London Marathon the many local participants will still desperately be avoiding loved ones with colds, DIY accidents, running too hard and anything else that may waste months of hard work! Good luck to you all on Sunday morning.