

July's 9-mile race at Hampton-in-Arden was fairly unremarkable in most aspects, but it was the day that Stratford AC's Darren License was pole-axed by a ruptured tendon in his heel. With only 4 months until the start of the New York Marathon, a race he had entered earlier in the year, Darren is not someone to let minor things like the inability to walk to get in the way of a dream. Once back on his feet the rapid increase in training and racing is not one that will be found in any running magazine schedules but it worked for him, and sheer guts, determination and hard mileage found him lining up on the bottom level of Staten Island's Verazano-Narrows Bridge for the start of the world's largest marathon.

Darren then went onto push through the other four boroughs and over another four bridges, all with punishing inclines, before crossing the Central Park finishing line in a fantastic time of 3 hours 45:18 minutes – right at the top end of any realistic expectations. With 10K splits of 50, 52, 53 and 57 minutes, going through halfway in 1:48, the inevitable slippage was kept well under control by Darren's obvious stamina reserves and also his great enjoyment of the event. His only slight crisis came around the Central Park entrance point in the final stages, when his sensitive stomach took exception to one of the less glamorous aspects of distance running. Darren recovered well from this ill spell though, and his storming run put him 7,311th out of the 38,010 finishers. Probably more importantly though it showed that Paula wasn't the only Briton in the race demonstrating the mental and physical fortitude required to perform at this distance.

This year's eight Warwickshire Road Race League fixtures came to a close with two 10-milers and a half-marathon, and included many impressive performances from the Stratford AC runners involved. The Nuneaton 10 was the sixth event, with the two-lap race also incorporating 10-mile championships for the county and the Midlands Masters, and after an overcast start the sun started to warm the field up about 45 minutes into the race. John Turner (67:50, 31st) was first of the Stratford seven back, an excellent performance that gave him 3rd prize in the Midlands Masters O60s, took over 3 minutes off his pb and sliced 53 seconds off the club age record set by Brian Wall in April 1997! Behind John came a couple of close battles between Dave Maundrell (76:56, 68th) and Emma Bexson (76:58, 69th), and Michael Oliver (77:14, 72nd) and Allan Coldicott (77:34, 73rd). Sarah Odell (81:37, 88th) and Chris Seeney (86:38, 102nd) also finished well up amongst the 130 finishers, leaving the club a fine 6th on the day in both the men's and women's team standings.

So it was onto Kenilworth for their half-marathon, which saw a rural undulating course and a beautiful day for distance running. The event was filled up well in advance as usual, with 532 completing the distance, and the 10 Stratford runners amongst them provided some remarkable results, enabling the club to be placed a magnificent 4th and 5th in the male and female team competitions. Malcolm Bowyer (1:26:47, 39th) led this charge with one of his best runs in a while, followed by a big pb from Emerson Mayes (1:28:22, 48th), controlling his efforts purely by heart-rate, and a battling run from Phil Howell (1:28:57, 56th). John Turner (1:29:31, 61st) had yet another good day at the office – pb, club record, 1st O60, and sub 1:30 for the first time at the tender age of 64! Why a tough course like this should have provided so many pb's remains a mystery, but the next three also did just that – Phil Groom (1:36:47, 129th), an outstanding run from Emma Bexson (1:37:54, 144th), and Dave Maundrell (1:40:14, 179th). Tony Hunt (1:47:53, 265th), Maxine Horsman (1:59:35,

418th) – looking delighted to be back running on the hard stuff – and Kim Johnston (1:59:42, 420th) all added their valuable contributions to a highly successful day, which was also notable for fine performances from recent members Brennan Lively (22nd) and Johann Breytenbach (33rd).

That just left a trip over to Rugby to complete another season, but due to an unfortunate clash of various events only five Stratford members could make the journey, and therefore this was always going to be a struggle from the team point of view. With a new venue this year, the course now consisted of two laps around Draycote Water with an extra loop on the first one, including Alpacca Hill, to make up the distance. This route seemed to work well for the field of 121 – apart from the midgets, the blinding sun and the lumpy bits towards the end! – and the Stratford runners even came away with four of the prizes. Kate Wright (66:36, 23rd) continued her great sequence of successes with 3rd in her age group and 4th female overall, John Turner (69:13, 35th) was 3rd in O60s and Mark Francis (70:12, 38th) an excellent 6th in the O50s – and with a total of 65 prizes this has to go down as one of the best sponsored races in the area! With Pete Hill (72:01, 45th) and Sarah Odell (81:05, 86th) providing terrific support, the Stratford quintet surprisingly did enough to put themselves up as an impressive 7th male team and 4th female team.

Although there are a few discrepancies still to iron out, the individual end of season positions show John Turner as 15th male and 1st O60, a nice reward for all his hard work in getting the Stratford contingent organised, Sarah Odell a fantastic 6th senior female (and probably 1st O35 female when the proper corrections are applied), and Emma Bexson as 17th female overall. Considering Stratford are always likely to be one race shorter than everyone else – because the club isn't quite large enough yet to both organise and have runners in the Summer 6 – this has been another quality effort from the club this year.