

Abnormal weather in this bleak summer has meant that course diversions due to flooding has been a more common problem than sunburn, but the 'Hooky 6' gave a large turnout of local runners a rare opportunity for the traditional complaints about high temperatures and a hot sun! The Oxfordshire village of Hook Norton provides a pleasant venue for this 2-lap 6-mile road race, and a beautiful Sunday morning meant a high level of local support en route and a perfect setting for families to enjoy the post-race lunchtime BBQ. The 21st staging of this popular event saw a field of 255 competitors trying to stay in the shade for as long as possible at the 11 a.m. start, and there was a fine showing of 16 Stratford AC runners under those trees.

The in-form Phil Howell (38:26,26th) was the first of the group back as he continued his good sequence, and Phil was followed back by another reaping the rewards of training hard - Andy Cockerill (39:46,35th). Kate Wright (41:10,47th) is excellently consistent over this sort of distance, and again had a podium place as 2nd female and 1st lady O35, and again was pressed hard to the finish by Mark Francis (41:12,48th), although 2 seconds was the biggest winning margin in this contest for a while! Noted beer devotee John Turner (41:50,53rd) managed to keep his mind off the nearby brewery and took consolation with a strong outing and 3rd O60, staying well ahead of contrasting performances from Emerson Mayes (43:23,75th) and Luke Watkins (43:33,79th). Emerson had a rare poor run, but Luke has been storming ahead in the last few months and took nearly 4 minutes off his 2006 time. Maybe it's the incentive of having your father (Graham, 51:15, 166th) starting to chase, but sister Natasha (65:34,242nd) has also been running well and she took over 2 minutes off from 12 months ago. The next trio of Stratford runners – Allan Coldicott (45:59,108th), Dave Maundrell (47:11,124th) and Michael Oliver (47:40,133rd) – couldn't quite stick together as they independently worked hard round the undulating route, just in front of the returning Darren License (49:35,151st). Darren had been sidelined earlier in the season by a serious heel injury and for him to race, albeit very steadily, so early in his comeback was a brave one. Naomi Whittaker (52:49,177th) is one of the most determined runners in the club, perhaps belying her very pleasant nature, and she provided the sprint finish of the day to cross the line a fraction ahead of her female Headington rival. Anna Schofield (55:27,193rd) continues to improve her fitness and times, Sue Taylor (59:59,224th) got comfortably under her 60-minute target and John Butler (63:06,231st) kept everyone entertained despite wilting a little in the heat. An enjoyable morning was enhanced by the friendly faces of Dave Mothershaw (38:58,30th), Allison Bagnall (45:28,98th) and Simone Ryder (55:10,192nd), while Headington Road Runners colleagues Gary Harris (32:51) and Jude Croft (36:53) were the top of the class.

Another favourite race venue for Stratford AC runners over the last few years seems to be the little village of Redwick, near Newport in South Wales, with their Wednesday night 'Rose Inn' summer race series proving highly popular. Chepstow Harriers organise a quartet of monthly 4-mile midweek races over the summer period each year, and the unusual distance, flat course, picturesque area, free pint and friendly locals seem to combine to keep tempting runners from South Warwickshire to cross over the Severn Bridge. There were three 'Hooky 6' veterans who made the international trip last week for the final one of this year's series, and their performances would suggest that they weren't too badly affected by the time difference. Unfortunately though the warm and sunny conditions that usually grace

this fixture were replaced with wind and horizontal rain, although the latter did ease off soon after the start.

Phil Howell was the first to complete the 2-lap course, and his fine run was rewarded with a time of 24:18 minutes, 21st place overall and the 3rd male O40 slot. Rather annoyingly, the Alveston ambler also captured Keith Hawkes' male, 40-44 age category, 4-mile club record by 12 seconds. Not far behind Phil was John Turner, with the silver fox continuing his phenomenal year to record 25:35 and 40th overall; his excellent showing just missed out on the O60 first prize but it did lower his own club record in that distance / age group by half a minute. The third of the trio back to the very inviting pub and BBQ was Allan Coldicott, making his first appearance in this peaceful setting, and he did well to be placed 94th out of the 160 finishers in a time of 29:27. Stephen Davies (Newport Harriers) and Gemma Jones (Lliswery Runners) were both reasonably comfortable winners, in times of 19:57 and 24:51, with Gemma 27th overall.

June's staging of this event had seen John Turner, a Rose Inn addict, make a solo sortie across the border to set the club record that he broke in August! With the better weather bringing out a larger field of 177, John was timed at 26:08 minutes, which put him into 52nd spot and 2nd O60 behind the same Severn AC runner that would pip him again in 2 months. Also, in the more favourable conditions Stephen Davies set a new course record of 19:11 minutes.