

A pleasing mixture of local and out of town runners experienced one of Stratford's greatest assets last Sunday morning, with the staging of the 'Simply Run Welcombe Wobbler' – a 5K / 10K multi-terrain race across the Welcombe Hills. A beautiful autumnal morning meant that this fantastic venue was seen in its best light, although it is possible that some of the competitors may not have shared this opinion of such a tough course! The majority of the field signed up for the full 10K two-lap version, although both sets of runners followed the same figure-of-8 route, starting at the Welcombe Road end of the park, then taking on the steep rises behind the Welcombe Hotel and obelisk, before doing a lap of the tough Clopton Field and then back down via Clopton Tower.

Some of Stratford AC's men were excused marshalling duties to give them a gruelling warm-up for their forthcoming cross-country fixtures, and if Sunday is anything to go by then it should be a successful season. Joe Brocklehurst (33:01,1st) and Rob Minton (35:22,3rd) had blistering runs to take two of the podium places, with Jonathan Stacey of Ranelagh Harriers squeezed between them in a time of 34:45 minutes. Phil Howell (41:47,19th) and Mark Francis (43:32,23rd), who took the male 50-59 prize, followed this pair across the line, with Phil Groom (45:34,32nd) a couple of minutes further back. Allan Coldicott (48:56,47th) and Kim Johnston (54:54,71st) completed the tally for the hosting club, while the other age group winners were John Johnson (39:05) and Andrew Johnson (44:37) in the 40-49 and 60-69 categories respectively. The women's race was a closer affair with local runner Alison Bagnall (44:32) doing well to hold off Amazing Feet RC's Helen Parish (45:14) and Black Pear Joggers' Annie Baumber (45:21), while the age category honours went to Vikki Sivertsen (49:47) in the 35-44s, Karen Stacey (55:28) in the 45-54s and June Johnson (56:28) in the 55-64s. Rob Thompson of Kenilworth Runners was first home in the 5K event, recorded at 18:41 minutes, and Krissie Newton was the top female in 28:35. Many thanks go to sponsors Atherstone-on-Stour's Simply Run, organisers Sarah Bland and Paddy Davies for all their hard work and all the other Stratford AC helpers, but definitely no hugs for all the cows who ate the paper direction markers!

On a very active day for the athletic club, nine other members took part in a trio of half-marathons as far apart as Lancaster, Stroud and Coventry. Jason Harman has just started up at Lancaster University, and in a last minute decision entered the local half-marathon to make his debut at that distance. In a terrific performance he notched 1 hour 24:45 minutes for 22nd place out of 217 finishers, a hugely impressive time and one that bodes well for the future as he gains strength and stamina. Five more competed at Stroud, along with 1,440 others, and they also came away with some fine performances. Kate Wright (1:29:08,182nd) and John Turner (1:31:28,232nd) both managed to do themselves justice with quality outings despite having short stops for bodily emergencies, and in doing so came 3rd and 4th respectively in their age groups. Sarah Odell (1:47:16,678th) kept it together brilliantly over a difficult last couple of miles and managed yet another PB, while Michael Oliver (1:51:07,834th) and Jane Mason (2:26:05,1384th) also took full advantage of the delightful conditions. Over in the West Midlands, and a trio of Stratford AC males took part in the third staging of the Lady Godiva Half-Marathon in Coventry. The undulating route probably doesn't make it a PB course, but plenty of support round the city helped push the runners on in their hour of need. Emerson Mayes (1:39:16,252nd) has struggled to get into any sort of rhythm in the last couple of weeks and, by his

extremely high standards of 2007, this won't be an outing that stays too long in the memory. Darren License (1:48:06,605th) fast approaches his moment of destiny with the New York Marathon, and on the basis of his last few races all that hard work has put him into great shape to face it with confidence, and, along with the indestructible John Butler (2:10:45,1264th), he finished well up amongst the 1,617 finishers.

Two Stratford AC members recently took part in Cancer Research 10K races, which were hosted in the rather different surrounds of Long Marston airfield and Blenheim Palace. Louise Neil had entered the Ragley Hall version expecting, not unsurprisingly, a scenic trip around the impressive estate but unfortunately, due to foot and mouth worries, the event had to be switched to the raceway at Long Marston, with part of the Greenway included. This certainly didn't seem to adversely affect her though as she absolutely flew round in 44 minutes to finish 5th overall out of over 900 runners! Victoria Jeffs on the other hand, did get a beautiful morning and a spectacular route around the Blenheim grounds, although this was partly balanced out by a much more undulating course. The single lap event was started by the 11th Duke of Marlborough himself, and Victoria's hard work of this year really paid off as she went round in an excellent 67 minutes, putting her in a highly respectable position amongst the field of around 2000.

For anyone who would like some company when running on these increasingly dark evenings, then why not come along to one of Stratford AC's seniors' road runs on a Wednesday evening. Normally the club are based at the Sports Club in Swan's Nest Lane, but with the flood damage refurbishment beginning this week they are temporarily relocating this meeting point to NFU's FISSC club in Knight's Lane, Tiddington. As long as you can run 4 or 5 miles then there will be someone of your pace to run with. With the exception of October 31st's club event they will meet there at 7 pm, with contact email and telephone numbers available from www.stratfordac.co.uk.