

It's unlikely that the subject of climate change would have occupied the mind of too many runners taking part in the first London Marathon in 1981, but the warm weather of last Sunday's race will have been cursed by all of those trying to complete the 26.2 miles. Spring marathons have always been subject to the vagaries of the weather, especially when people have just done the majority of their training in the fog and frost of the winter, but the 27th staging of the world's favourite marathon was the hottest ever with temperatures getting over the 20c mark. Six days earlier the Boston Marathon had seen freezing temperatures, gale-force winds and driving sleet! Despite the difficult conditions 12 members from Stratford AC managed to make it back to the Mall in one piece; all of them delighted just to have finished, even if many of their times were maybe not quite what they were hoping for.

The problem with being a top runner on top form going into the race is that a lot of unwanted pressure can be put upon them. Rob Minton (2 hours 53:40 minutes, 476th out of 24,813 males), despite being in his first ever marathon and in the massed start, handled those expectations majestically and will have learnt an immense amount from his debut. Apart from trying to catch up the inevitable early lost time a little too quickly, he ran a perfectly paced race, going through halfway in 1:20, before a cramp stretch-stop at 18 miles was followed by another cruel 2-minute one with only 800m to go. Someone who knows all there is to know about peaking for London is Malcolm Bowyer (3:01:11, 907th), one of life's great natural distance runners. Malcolm will have been disappointed not to have dipped under that 3-hour barrier, which he has done a couple of times, but his consistency on a day of many casualties can only be vastly admired again. In an event when mental toughness and physical stamina were going to be at the top of the 'must haves' list, then it was perhaps inevitable that ironman Wayne Vickers (3:04:53, 1,069th) would come into his own. The boy wonder kept everything together brilliantly, although the effects of the hot weather took its toll as he was wheelchaired off to first aid when he collapsed over the line. A good way to get pushed around and a free massage for an hour some may say! Steve Donnelly (3:06:14, 1,163rd) ran with Wayne as they passed through the 13.1-mile mark in a well-judged 1:27, but it was just not Steve's day as he couldn't replicate his fantastic sub 3-hour run in Berlin last year and faded slightly. His niggling calf injury in the fortnight before will not have helped but there are races when it just doesn't happen, especially on a day like Sunday, and Steve will return soon even stronger than before.

Phil Howell (3:18:11, 2,102nd) is a good advert for a slightly alternative marathon training plan – the 4 week one! Despite starting from a good base of fitness this late start really meant too few long training runs, so to keep going when the inevitable stamina issues started is great testament to Phil's tremendous determination and running ability. For males over-41 getting a time under 3:15 guarantees them a place for the next 2 years so Pete Hill (3:25:31, 2,751st), like Phil, can count himself very unlucky that a warm day probably robbed him of a shot at that target. The Shipston strider took his fine form down to the big city and, although every mile after 16 may have felt like double the distance to him, his strength was shown by a fantastic 54th position in his O55's age category.

The first lady back for Stratford was Kate Wright (3:39:02, 656th woman out of 10,851). Like Rob, Kate's performances sometimes put very high expectations onto her and, although more sickness issues meant that her time probably doesn't do her ability justice, it has to be remembered that she finished in the top 5% of women and

118th in her O40s age category. Douglas Waddell (3:53:01, 6,420th) obviously thought that Phil Howell had the right idea – a phrase not often heard in the Stratford area – and joined him in a 4-week training regime. His renowned natural stamina pulled him through when the less strong would surely have failed, with a painful second half adequately quantified by a 1:42 / 2:11 split, but even Douglas must have been worried when he actually found the first (downhill) mile difficult! Emma Bexson (3:56:57, 1,365th) was the second of the three Stratford ladies back past Buckingham Palace, and out of the dozen from the club had some of the most even split times, with again the temperatures denying an excellent run the chance to get nearer to the women's 3:45 pre-qualifying time. Even Tony Hunt's (4:02:09, 8,016th) metronomic pacing wavered slightly in the unusual situation, but despite not breaking 4 hours he can be very proud of his performance, and with wife Sonia achieving a big PB of 4:48 it was a memorable day for the happy couple. Some competitors' training goes better than others, and since Rob Maull's (4:11:39, 9,446th) calf injury had denied him any serious training for the last month this was a spectacular effort to get round in a more than respectable time, especially with the offending muscle playing up from before halfway. Just behind Rob came another storming performance, this time from the third of the club's women participants – Liza Dyer (4:13:44, 2,232nd), who once again proved that she has stamina and toughness in abundance.

Whilst the club is most definitely not just about how quick you get round, it was encouraging to see all the twelve's training pay off so well and end up comfortably in the top half of the finishers. More importantly all of them seem to have enjoyed and benefited from the experience of being part of the biggest London Marathon in history – 125,000 applicants, 50,000 acceptances, 36,396 starters and 35,674 finishers. The elements meant that about 5,000 runners were treated by the excellent medical team, so let's hope that this Sunday's marathon and half-marathon in Stratford has more conducive conditions. Good luck to all who those are running!