

This year sees a remarkable anniversary for one of Stratford Athletic Club's longest serving members, as Allan Coldicott notches up his 25th consecutive year in the yellow and black vest. In any sport this is a fantastic achievement, but perhaps even more so in such a physically hard and mentally challenging activity as distance road running, and the highs and lows of Allan's career have often matched the undulating fortunes of the club itself.

Allan's running history saw a fairly humble start back in 1980, when he resolved to get fitter and faster just so that he could keep up with his 3-legged Cocker Spaniel! After taking a couple of years to master that trick he then decided fresh (human) challenges were needed and having seen Alan Wood, a former Stratford AC chairman, out with some of the athletics club he ventured down to their then High School base. At the time the club was relatively small, consisting of about 20 seniors and 30 juniors, although the latter folded after a while, in total contrast to today's thriving junior section. The club started to expand slowly and in 1985 Allan suggested to John Dell, the very active chairman, about having a relay race across the Cotswolds. After a couple of long car journeys looking for the steepest hills and quietest roads the Hilly 100 Relay Race was born one year later, and is as popular today as it was then, still using basically the same route. (Allan is probably better on the suggestions front than the implementation side of things, although he was membership secretary and on the committee for a few years!) The speedy postman has outlived a succession of chairmen – in addition to Alan Wood (ably assisted by Graham Collins) and John Dell, Allan has also seen other local running legends such as Jim Bayliss, Rory Coleman, Dave Wright and Paul Hawkins at the helm – and a succession of different homes, with the High School, Cricket Club, Home Guard Club and finally a return to the modernised Sports Club.

Allan ensures that he has as much fun as possible when racing and has therefore made numerous sporting friends over the years, especially when competing in races, of which he has done over 500. The pick of the highlights from these races make a slightly bizarre collection since he's been up to his neck in icy water, lost 7lb in sweat in less than 2 hours, been shot at in the Hilly 100, been sold a Bible during the Evesham Half-Marathon, hitched a lift on a canal boat (which subsequently crashed into a bridge), been chased by a herd of cows, helped look for an escaped panda during a XC race in Edgbaston, been trampled on at the start of a race, been given a £500 Christmas present by a fellow runner, been a Runners World centrefold and tried every (legal) supplement going as an alternative to structured training! Allan has now been an integral and popular part of the athletics club and the local running scene for a long time, and everyone looks forward to him repeating this feat for another 25 years!

Allan added another 13.1 miles to his 'running total' recently when he travelled down to Bourton-on-the-Water, along with another 9 Stratford AC members, on a very wet Saturday evening. The 'Bourton Hilly Half' does give a clue about its nature in the title, but the course is actually quite a strange one. There are indeed two large hills – a steep one in the first mile and a longer, less severe one later on – and other undulations, but the long, gentle downhills in between do actually give the field a chance to make that lost time up. The single-loop half-marathon starts and finishes in the village itself, before taking in other such pretty places as Clapton, Sherborne, Windrush, Great Barrington and Great Rissington, as well as some very pleasant Cotswold countryside.

The 6 p.m. start saw 273 competitors heading off, and Steve Donnelly (1 hour 24:08 minutes, 13th) returned back first for the club after a tremendously strong second-half to the race. With no Mark Francis around, Emerson Mayes (1:32:02, 55) took it upon himself to battle with Kate Wright (1:32:23, 58th), and they spurred each other on to record excellent times. Kate ended up as third female O35, 6th female overall, and knocked 13 minutes off her 2006 time. Keeping his eye on this pair, but narrowly failing to catch them, was the elusive Keith Beardsmore (1:32:35, 60th), whilst the legend that is Allan Coldicott (1:45:01, 132nd) led home the next group of Stratford runners. Michael Oliver (1:46:48, 142nd) had one of his best runs for a while, but no-one could eclipse a terrific performance from Sarah Odell (1:48:29, 151st) who lowered her time from 12 months ago by a massive 10 minutes. Tony Hunt (1:51:25, 169th) was another to work hard to reduce his time from his previous outing in this race, and he led home the indefatigable Kim Johnston (1:58:02, 203rd), who will always be found where there's tough running to be had! Jane Mason (2:12:44, 263rd) reaped the benefit of having one of the great club stalwarts of recent years pacing her round, as Mick Warner incorporated the race into his brief return from a retirement life down in West Wales and showed that he is still as supportive as ever.