

One of the most popular of the early season 10Ks is at Bourton-on-the-Water and, despite it being a difficult race to get into, a fine turnout of 16 Stratford AC runners were present. With 458 finishers, tight roads and relatively small laps there was a bit of crowding in places, but generally the course is a very pleasant and fast one. With internationals Martin Rees (31:45) and Emily Pidgeon (33:37) leading home their respective genders, and the first 30 all getting under 35 minutes, there was certainly some quality on show, but the Stratford contingent rose to the occasion and did the club proud.

Pete Evans (39:44, 119<sup>th</sup>), back racing after a twisted ankle, edged out Kate Wright by one place and one second after a flying finish, and both of them came in just ahead of a strong run from Paul Johnson (40:38, 133<sup>rd</sup>). Debbie Cooper (41:49, 155<sup>th</sup>) did well to achieve her sub-42 target, while Paul Hawkins (42:15, 167<sup>th</sup>) will have been pleasantly surprised at his run and fast finish considering he took no training rest for the event. Darren License (42:36, 175<sup>th</sup>) is a man really on the move at the moment, taking over 3 minutes off his 2006 time and PBing by almost as much, and he came in ahead of Allan Coldicott (43:21, 193<sup>rd</sup>), someone who after 25 years of racing still gets caught in the middle of a race and has to stop for a pee! John Turner (43:53, 203<sup>rd</sup>) is thankfully edging his way back into racing after his health problems over the last couple of years, followed home by promising new member Chris Hall (44:11, 211<sup>th</sup>). The next pair back for the club were the ever-consistent Michael Oliver (46:28, 269<sup>th</sup>) and Sarah Odell (46:36, 272<sup>nd</sup>), with the latter just pipping Tony Hunt (46:38, 273<sup>rd</sup>). The next trio of Stratford ladies all produced terrific PB performances, and with the hard work that they all put into their training there will definitely be more to come: Naomi Whittaker (49:33, 329<sup>th</sup>), Helen Monk (52:16, 363<sup>rd</sup>) and Sue Taylor (54:06, 395<sup>th</sup>). The running machine that is Jane Mason (56:40, 417<sup>th</sup>) wrapped things up for the club as she produced another splendid showing, taking 2 minutes off her time from last year even though she was just returning from injury. Amongst the 'other halves' competing were Dave Mothershaw (37:40, 76<sup>th</sup>), Ashley Mason (45:15, 241<sup>st</sup>) and Sonia Hunt (53:07, 381<sup>st</sup>), which all helped finish off an enjoyable day out in the heart of the Cotswolds.

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Two Stratford AC runners blessed with fine stamina took part in the Belvoir Challenge, which is an annual long distance walk or run in rural Leicestershire for all ages and abilities. In total 1,200 runners and walkers participated, with entries closing well before the day.

Starting in the village of Harby, and including the Belvoir Estate and castle along the way, the 15 and 26-mile routes split and went their separate ways within the first mile. This meant that Lesley Kirk had to decide on her distance rather sooner than anticipated and, having been persuaded to do the longer route by Pete Hill, she soon regretted it as shoes were being lost in the mud! Although the weather was a balmy 10 degrees, the relentless rain overnight had left all the fields a quagmire.

There were checkpoints every 5 miles where tables were laid out, groaning under the weight of the cakes, sandwiches, drinks, etc, for which the event is famously known. Unfortunately our intrepid duo, along with a number of others, went the wrong way and added at least a mile to their route, but after just under 5 hours of running across the countryside they arrived at the final checkpoint at 21 miles. Due to utter fatigue, Lesley decided to call it a day and left Pete to fly the flag for Stratford all the way to the finish. The intrepid Shipston mudskipper gallantly continued on for the final 4.4

miles to record a time of 5:32:10 hours, where he was greeted by Lesley and another endless amount of free, hot food! Although the magic of GPS would indicate that the final distance was more like 28 miles rather than 26, any event where the competitors are likely to gain weight during the race has got to have something going for it!

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Amongst the plethora of half-marathons currently being staged, two Stratford AC runners competed in the slightly diverse settings of Inverness and Milton Keynes. Darren License made the long trip up to Scotland for the 22<sup>nd</sup> staging of the Inverness Half-Marathon and was rewarded with a large personal best and a beautiful course. The 1,150 runners enjoyed a scenic route that ran alongside the meandering River Ness and below Inverness Castle, before continuing along towards the famous Loch Ness. Darren's terrific run in less than ideal weather conditions saw him cross the line in 265<sup>th</sup> place, knocking a big chunk off his previous PB with a time of 1 hour 37:05 minutes. Paul Johnson swapped real cows for concrete ones, and rolling hills for flyovers and underpasses, as he took on the same challenge in Milton Keynes. The excellent facilities of the Open University provided the ideal starting place for the intellectual Paul to feel at home, and there were actually some quite interesting and pretty areas for the 2,039 finishers to admire along the way. Even though the flat course is reasonably fast the Stratford athlete probably set off a bit too quickly, going through 10K in under 40 minutes, and meaning the last 4 miles were quite a struggle. Paul managed to keep it together well though and recorded a fine time of 1 hour 31:19 minutes, which was good enough to put him well up the field in 222<sup>nd</sup> position.