

A sell-out field of 700, together with a fair few spectators, made the most of near perfect weather conditions on Sunday morning as they tackled the 12K course that is Not The Roman IX. The race seems to fill up quicker each year, possibly helped by the traditional dry weather, and the runners again proved to be a good mixture of those racing and those for whom just finishing is the challenge. The first half of the course is the toughest, with an undulating Boundary Lane followed by a long drag up the Banbury Road and the steep hill up into Loxley. For those who can resist popping into The Fox pub, things flatten out much more on the way back into Stratford with the incline by the Croft School balanced out by the slightly downhill Knights Lane and the finish at FISSC.

At the sharp end it was a clean sweep for Worcester Tri Club with Daniel Keen and Michelle Parsons taking the top prizes in times of 41:39 and 46:24 minutes respectively. Michelle was nearly a minute slower than her 3rd place of last year but was still too strong for Nicola Gonn (Witney RR) and Sally Baker (Rugby & Northampton AC), who recorded 46:54 and 47:24, with the top three all categorised as veterans. For the men, one of Stratford's finest Steve Marshall (42:40), running with his Oxford University hat (and vest) on, had a superb run and his traditional strong second-half meant he beat Simon Pritchard of Banbury Harriers by 13 seconds. In the age category awards the benefit of increased sponsorship from Warwick Sports meant that prizes could now be awarded in 5-year bands rather than 10-year ones. On the male side the winners were: M40 Chris Bedford (Abingdon Amblers) 44:33, M45 Graham Stephens (unattached) 43:38, M50 Steve Colbourne (Sphinx AC) 44:51, M55 Anthony Norman (Nuneaton Harriers) 44:42, M60 Ben Kent-Payne (Spa Striders) 47:11 – provisional only, M65 Mick Clarke (Northants Road Runners) 57:45, and retaining his M70 title Richard Phillips (Cheltenham & County), who was over 2 minutes quicker than 2006 in recording 58:50. Given that only three randomly drawn males and three females from Stratford AC participate, since most are required for organisational duties, it was remarkable that two of the ladies won their age groups: F35 Debbie Cooper (Stratford AC) 52:36, F40 Kate Wright (Stratford AC) 48:05, F45 Rachel Ward (Amazing Feet RC) 52:27, F50 Ellie Hooper (Amazing Feet RC) 56:58, F55 retained by Eleanor Robinson (Ripley RC) 53:46, F60 Sheila Taylor (Rugby & Northampton AC) 65:10, F65 Phylly Wilson (Wreake Runners) 70:43.

In the women's team event there was an exact repeat of last year with Leamington's Spa Striders edging the three Stratford AC ladies into second place, with 16 clubs having complete teams. Apart from Kate's 35th and Debbie's 103rd, Dawn Davies (54:19, 149th) put on another impressive showing to take a minute and a half off her time from 12 months ago, but is obviously far too young to be concerned with things like age-group prizes. The men's team prize saw Coventry's Sphinx AC top of the 15 complete teams, with the three Stratford boys doing a great job in coming 4th behind Spa Striders (provisional) and Banbury Harriers. By being drawn out of the hat, eventually, Phil Howell (46:26, 23rd) had to miss out on his usual task of selling his homemade fairy cakes, but made up for this disappointment by showing what a return to form he's had in the last month with a terrific run. Steve Kirk (48:40, 42nd) didn't have Pete Hill to race against so he picked on Mark Francis (48:50, 43rd) instead, and this process pushed both of them into outstanding performances as they battled it out back along the Loxley Road. This was especially impressive from Steve as he had only stepped in as a late substitute for the unfortunately cold-ridden Rob Minton.

Probably the most impressive turnout of the day though was from Aldridge Running Club, who actually turned up in a coach they had so many entrants!

Many people from both Stratford and further afield seemed to get a lot of pleasure (afterwards) from the challenge that this special race provides, but without all of the following it just would not happen each year: sponsors Warwick Sports, Stratford police, NFU Mutual, Stratford Bowls Club, all the residents of Tiddington and Loxley, all the Stratford AC volunteers and Ashley Sherren and his hard-working race committee.