

A busy latter part of the season saw most of Stratford AC's enthusiastic triathlon section out there in the water and on the roads, with noticeable improvements in many over the year and great successes for a few. Debbie Cooper has never been one for lazing around, and recent weeks have seen her qualify for her third major championship this year. Xterra UK, taking place at Neath in Wales, was the qualifier for the world off-road tri championships in Hawaii, and Debbie came in a magnificent 5<sup>th</sup> lady to claim her place. The 1500m swim took place in a clear lake, but this was followed by a challenging 29K mountain bike course, including some unrideable parts where you just had to carry your bike! The run was possibly even worse, with the 5K-up 5K-down route including a stream crossing that, if you could scramble out of, left you to pull yourself up a bank with a rope! Debbie's total time was 3:23 hours and the quality of the field in general, and the cyclists in particular, was shown by her rankings out of the 170 finishers – 50<sup>th</sup> on the swim, 'only' 69<sup>th</sup> on the bike and 66<sup>th</sup> on the run. The relatively low turnout was probably due to the difficulty of the event, and last year's dreadful weather, but typically Debbie did appear to enjoy both the challenge and the communal showers in the rugby club afterwards!

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Back in the slightly more civilised surroundings of the NEC in Birmingham Debbie joined Pete Evans in the quest for world sprint championship places, while Phil Groom took part in the longer classic event. This was the inaugural staging of the Birmingham Tri and unfortunately there were a number of organisational issues, mainly on the sprint, including competitors being sent off in the wrong wave and many people being sent on the wrong (shorter) bike route. This all took a lot of sorting out afterwards, but the deserved outcome was that both Debbie and Pete will be packing up their tri suits and bikes and jetting off to Vancouver next year for the world champs. Pete took the 4<sup>th</sup> of his category's 6<sup>th</sup> slots, coming in at 1:12:36 (15:39/36:45/20:10), including the 750m swim in Pendigo Lake, while Debbie's incorrect original time and splits were 1:13:15 (24:26/28:10/20:37). The classic distance also managed to be completely contained within the NEC's grounds, hence the slightly convoluted cycle route, and Phil admirably navigated his way round for a fine time of 2:40:37 hours (34:39 swim, 1:14:36 bike, 48:10 run).

As triathlon cements its place as the UK's fastest growing sport another new event pops up on our doorstep – the Warwickshire Tri in Stratford – and Debbie Cooper and Phil Groom were once again in attendance. Phil will look forward to next year in an extremely positive frame of mind after another great outing and a PB for this course, finishing 134<sup>th</sup> out of 391 in a time of 1:20:41, while Debbie's phenomenal talents secured her a terrific 2<sup>nd</sup> place amongst the women. At the end of a long season she was just pipped to the top spot by an excellent performance from Snitterfield's Sara Burling; Debbie's 1:10:49 (7:22/42:02/21:25) losing out by a couple of minutes, most of it on the swim.

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Three of the club's membership ambled over to Rutland Water to take part in the popular Vitruvian Triathlon, which also doubles up as the national half-ironman championships. There were perfect conditions for this fantastically well-organised event, with not a breath of wind to disturb the still water as the various age groups started off in the early morning light. Two swim laps made up the 1900m before

everyone jumped on their bikes and set off on two loops of 43K each, basically round the reservoir on well-surfaced A-roads with only the Rutland Ripple hills interrupting a flat route. Finally the half-marathon run took the field on two out-and-back stretches across the dam and, rather obligingly, the clouds decided to obscure the sun for this last section. Although Steve Kirk (5:10:50: 38:32/2:45:38/ 1:41:12) had never raced this distance you wouldn't have guessed it as he paced himself beautifully, making sure that he had some leg strength left for the run and only slightly faltering in the last 5K. This placed him a terrific 282<sup>nd</sup> amongst a very strong field of 700 finishers. Fellow debutant Sarah Bland (6:08:43: 42:44/3:15:33/ 2:04:49) was another who judged it perfectly, with her very strong showing on the all-important cycle leaving her enough energy to power out a determined run. The third of the trio, Keith Hawkes (5:16:32: 33:50/2:52:47/1:45:44), didn't bother with pacing, deciding instead to put all his effort into his weak cycling, which resulted in both an interesting run and interrupting a local wedding reception with a loo visit! Sarah also wins the 2007 'Best Person To Be Friends With' award for the use of her mobile (stately) home! The autumnal version of the Warwick Triathlon, based at Warwick Boys School, saw the appearance of two Stratford AC members in this sprint distance event and both will be more than happy with their morning's work. Helen Evans hadn't appeared in a tri for 5 years, but showed how class is permanent as she came home a fantastic 5<sup>th</sup> female, recording 1:11:03 (10:02/40:03/20:57) including the 2<sup>nd</sup> quickest run. The legend that is Jeff Titmarsh also impressed as he came an excellent 6<sup>th</sup> amongst the highly competitive male veterans, being timed at 1:08:00 (7:20/38:35/22:02) and storming to the 2<sup>nd</sup> fastest swim. With Jeff's wife Edwina making her tri debut in the shorter version, and coming 3<sup>rd</sup> in the female vets, it was a fun day out for all the family!

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Despite some obvious highlights in Pete Evans' season, it has been a bit of an injury-interrupted year for a triathlete of Pete's undoubted quality. The world sprint tri qualification came almost 3 years to the day since he accepted a drunken challenge to enter an event, having never swam, cycled or ran since school – how times change! After the NEC, Pete took part in the Northampton Sprint, another world qualifier, and since he had already secured his place he tried a few different things. This resulted in 90 seconds off his 750m swim pb and a fast time of 1:21:51 (12:21/46:22/23:05), including a 25K bike, for 41<sup>st</sup> overall (out of 212) and 8<sup>th</sup> in his age group. The week after Pete went up a distance as he travelled over to Bala in Wales for their classic event, but it wasn't a happy day out! A force 6 wind forced the swim to be shortened, but the high waves meant a lot of lake water was swallowed resulting in painful stomach cramps both on the bike and especially on the run, which was more of a jog / walk at times. Pete persevered and finally finished in 509<sup>th</sup> place out of the 785 starters with a time of 2:31:15 (24:20/1:07:58/58:57).

Enjoy your close season folks but don't let that training slip too much; there's only 5 months until it all starts again!