

In recent years the Shakespeare Marathon and Half-Marathon have become both an integral part of the bard's birthday weekend celebrations and an integral part of the local road running calendar, and last Sunday saw another sell-out field take to the roads of south Warwickshire. The event is beautifully organised by the Rotary Club, helping them to raise a large amount of money for worthy charities, and since the race switched to a morning start, and provided energy drinks as well as water, the participants are as well catered for as the good causes.

With 32 members running, this was the most people that Stratford AC have ever had participating in one race, although unusually this year none of them were amongst the 748 doing the marathon. Malcolm Bowyer (chip time 1:27:28, gun position 34<sup>th</sup>) ran off the disappointment of having to miss the London Marathon, moving away in the latter miles from one who was in the capital a fortnight ago, Wayne Vickers ((1:27:58, 40<sup>th</sup>). Malcolm was one of a group of half-marathoners to have the red numbers on that are usually associated with the 2-lap competitors, leading to the occasional bit of confusion at the sharp end as to who was actually racing who. Emerson Mayes (1:31:19, 67<sup>th</sup>) continues his charge in the right direction, whilst Kate Wright (1:32:01, 73<sup>rd</sup>), another heroic London performer, showed her mental toughness to overcome a mid-race hiccup and pick up strongly to finish alongside the elusive Keith Beardsmore (1:32:01, 74<sup>th</sup>). This couple also picked up well-deserved gongs for 1<sup>st</sup> O45 female and 3<sup>rd</sup> O50 male respectively. Two of the other day's star performances came in just behind this pair, with a terrific showing from Alison Bagnall (1:34:25, 107<sup>th</sup>), being well-paced by Nick Dobson, and Dawn Davies (1:35:20, 123<sup>rd</sup>), who produced an unbelievable 7-minute PB run, finishing as the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> women across the line. John Turner (1:36:35, 134<sup>th</sup>) had one of his rare off-days, and still managed to be the 3<sup>rd</sup> O60, while another storming run from Sarah Bland (1:37:13, 140<sup>th</sup>) saw her finish just behind Alison as 5<sup>th</sup> O35 lady. These four Stratford females had a total of 36 place points (or 79 for 6 counters), and would have won the team prize by a distance had they actually remembered to register as a team beforehand! It does seem slightly odd though that in these days of computerised entries people still have to fill out forms at a time when they are trying to warm up and get ready.

On a day when the expected damp weather was replaced by very warm and humid conditions many people struggled with the heat, but Mark Bullock (1:38:15, 149<sup>th</sup>) and Helen Evans (1:39:22, 180<sup>th</sup>) seemed to cope a lot better than most. This amazingly enough was the latter's first ever half-marathon, despite a glittering pre-children triathlon and duathlon career, and to come in under 1:40 was a fabulous effort. Phil Groom (1:40:49, 204<sup>th</sup>) looks in good shape for his multi-sport summer, but a knee injury to Emma Bexson (1:41:52, 232<sup>nd</sup>) unfortunately meant that she had to limp every step of the last 7 miles. Allan Coldicott (1:43:22, 258<sup>th</sup>) may have just pipped the very impressive Phil Brennan (1:43:23, 261<sup>st</sup>), but he couldn't deny Phil a superb first prize (male O65) for the second weekend in a row or the relevant club record to go with it. Another courageous effort from Darren License (1:43:40, 290<sup>th</sup>) saw him come through the Rec just behind this pair, whilst the youngest of the club's contingent, Alex Wolstenholme (1:41:48, 296<sup>th</sup>), recorded a great time even though an over-conservative start-line position probably cost him 60 places – not bad for someone running just to stay fit for football!

The Kineton express that is Sarah Littell (1:44:04, 340<sup>th</sup>) looked to enjoy every moment of her fine showing and the sunny day, Tony Hunt (1:46:39, 407<sup>th</sup>) produced his usual masochistic post-London outing, while Sarah Odell (1:48:16, 409<sup>th</sup>) worked very hard in order to eventually squeeze past Dave Maundrell (1:48:16, 435<sup>th</sup>), another mad marathoner. Pete Plimmer (1:48:33, 417<sup>th</sup>) has had a mixed time of things running-wise lately so did well to produce such a respectable time, with Phil Marshall (1:48:28, 437<sup>th</sup>) obviously doing a fabulous job in helping another one of Stratford's star ladies round. Naomi Whittaker (1:49:34, 454<sup>th</sup>) ran with Phil for much of the race and her tremendous effort saw 5 minutes disappear off her 2007 total on a day of generally increased times; good enough to put her into the dizzy heights of 6<sup>th</sup> in the female O45s. This event just wouldn't be the same without Michael Oliver (1:54:40, 654<sup>th</sup>) and he didn't disappoint, whilst Ann-Marie Blackmore (2:00:36, 911<sup>th</sup>) agonisingly failed to get under the 2-hour mark. She was obviously expecting trouble en route, so the ever-gentlemanly Phil Howell did a fine job in escorting her through the badlands of Welford and onwards.

The even more elusive Astrid Matts (2:16:03, 1415<sup>th</sup>) showed that she is still thriving, it was inspiring to see Sue Taylor (2:19:32, 1475<sup>th</sup>) back in half-marathon mode after a wretched 12 months, and Mickleton's finest John Butler (2:23:07, 1570<sup>th</sup>) still manages to resist the comforts of retirement as he knocked a few minutes off last year's showing. Kate Sergeant (2:23:59, 1581<sup>st</sup>) and Julia Cross (2:23:59, 1582<sup>nd</sup>), making her half-marathon debut, have been enthusiastic recent additions to the club and worked really well off each to eventually partner up again before the finish. Declan Logue (2:35:07, 1712<sup>th</sup>) came in well ahead of over 100 others in an impressive finishing total of 1845, Daniel Soltys (1:12:13) and Rachael Elliott (1:25:59) took the main honours and it was great to see some 'old' Stratford AC faces such as Alice Crane (2:10),

Stuart Curtis (1:25), Chris Hall (1:55) and Kim Johnston still out there and performing so well. Another ex-member Johann Breytenbach put up a great result in the marathon as he recorded 3:11:51 for 40<sup>th</sup> place, despite never feeling comfortable from the off in Waterside, with Shaun Milford (2:37:19) and Angie Sadler (3:12:55) finishing top of the pile in the two-lap madness.

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If you and your family would like to experience the joys of running, but in a less demanding event, then the annual fun run takes place on the Recreation Ground this Sunday (4<sup>th</sup> May) at 11 a.m. The approximate 2-mile course is suitable for young and old alike, with free child swims at the Leisure Centre afterwards, and entry can be gained by turning up to the start area in plenty of time (phone 01789 266569 for queries).