

The good people of Stratford should be sleeping soundly this week, mainly because last weekend most of them appeared to be running, rowing or cycling! The Boat Club held their annual 'Pubs & Clubs Rowing Regatta' on the River Avon on Saturday, and with the ever popular Macride (including a 100-mile Shakespeare Sportif) on Sunday there surely couldn't be anyone left with enough energy to run the first ever 'Stratford Big 10K'?

This appeared not to be the case though, as a remarkable 315 entrants tackled the inaugural 6.2-mile course, which started at the Racecourse and then headed up the Greenway to Milcote, before veering off to Clifford Chambers and back to the Recreation Ground finish via Seven Meadows Road. This Run Stratford / Adventure Sport production lived up to all expectations, as a beautifully sunny Sunday morning helped provide an idyllic backdrop for the race and was even good enough to slightly cloud over ready for the 10:30 start.

At the sharp end Coventry Godiva's James Griggs pulled away steadily from the start to record an impressive time of 33:31 minutes, and win by just over a minute from Kenilworth's Richard Simkiss. The women's contest was a much closer affair though with Nikki Weatherley of Cheltenham's Almost Athletes taking the honours in 41:22, only 8 seconds ahead of Lucy Baker with Eloise Du Luart a further 52 seconds further adrift. In the various age categories prizes went to: M40-49, Mark Smith (39:11); M50-59, Ian Thomas (40:39); M60-69, Colin Tether (46:53); M70+ no-one; F35-44, Vikki Sivertsen (45:26, although the first 2 ladies overall were also in this age group); F45-54, Denise Fitzgerald (45:54); F55-64, Nikki Holden (54:00); F65+, Virginia Pawlyn (58:23).

From a Stratford AC point of view things were fairly quiet, with a lot of members either helping, running elsewhere or cycling, but there was still a trio of happy faces to wend their way round. Jane Fox was 225th in 58:21, and she ran with mum Liz who did terrifically to get under the hour as she finished 7 seconds and 4 places behind her daughter. It wouldn't have been the same if John Butler wasn't taking part in this first of hopefully many stagings, and the Mickleton marauder was 255th in a time of 61:01. Many local organisations (such as the Rugby Club) gave invaluable assistance on the day, and there can't have been too many occasions when runners have opened their goody bags at the end to find a pair of fresh, quality sausages looking back at them (courtesy of Aubrey Allen)!

The trails and paths around Top Barn also provided a terrific setting for another new entry onto the race calendar – The St Richard's Worcester Half. The two-lap, multi-terrain route was a very testing one, but the 186 finishers can console themselves with the fact that they all helped to raise funds for the local hospice that the race is named after. They can also console themselves with the fact that things could also have been a lot worse – 3 days before the race the organisers decided to scrap a woodland section which included 2 very steep hills; an uphill with a rope and a toboggan run-like descent!

The three hardy characters from Stratford AC who chose to put themselves through all this were all able to look back afterwards with a certain sense of satisfaction from a job well done. Debbie Crisp (2:07:54) came back first in 128th place, and 3rd F45, which is just a small pointer to the great improvements that her dedicated training has brought about in 2009. Sue Mothershaw (2:16:35) was second back for the club in 148th, and that man John Butler (2:36:15) rounded things off in 174th place.

The cheerily named 'Autumnal 5' is always a joyful marking of the passing of yet another summer, but a decent turnout of 10 SAC members on a wet Friday night in Coventry did at least brighten things up a little. This Godiva organised 5-miler is now totally enclosed within the Memorial Park with 2 large and 1 small lap the order of the day. The driving rain eventually decided to relent before the start of this Warwickshire Road Race League event, much to everyone's relief, and the 198 runners actually set off in decent conditions.

First of the 10 back was Keith Hawkes (31:39,40th), although he was being rapidly caught up near the end by Kate Wright (31:47,43rd), whose fine form - despite a two week holiday - brought her the prize for 3rd female. John Turner (34:08,74th) was yet again just too good for his fellow O65 retirees, although he did nearly freeze to death waiting for a rather delayed prize-giving ceremony, with Luke Watkins (36:18,99th) continuing to display his improved fitness, just before returning to the excesses of university life! Sarah Odell (38:19,121st) and Andy Turner (38:27,122nd) had a great tussle, which was evened out by the fact that they had both done the club's Ilmington hill race 2 days previously, while Graham Watkins (38:47,128th) and Michael Oliver (38:51,129th) were only just behind them courtesy of two very strong showings. Kate

Sergent (43:46,166th) is really starting to look strong again after a below par month or so, and seemed to really enjoy her first ever 5-mile race, and of course the prolific veteran that is John Butler (47:06,183rd) was present and also showing good form. The top dogs were both from the host club, as Ben Jones (25:12) and Jo Emery (30:25) proved themselves too strong for the rest of the field.

Two more of the Stratford AC faithful took part in the Wolverhampton Half-Marathon, which is not only a highly popular event itself but also incorporates one of the largest provincial marathon fields in the England. The course starts and finishes in West Park, which is very close to the city centre and football ground, heads north-west to Aldersley, Oxley and then Codsall, before returning back into the city via Claregate and the main Tettenhall Road. Those lucky enough to be doing the marathon then have to repeat it all again! Amongst the 1,211 half-marathon finishers were Dave Maundrell and Allan Coldicott, and they certainly took their usual tight contest right down to the line once more. A sprint finish between the pair saw Dave get a 1-second verdict, according to the chip timing rather than Allan's timing, with a 1 hour 45:40 overall time, and these fine efforts put the boys well up in 303rd and 304th places. The respective male and female winners were Robin Sedman-Smith (Telford AC) and Adela Salt (Trentham RC), in 1:14:23 and 1:23:59, whilst an investigation has begun as to where John Butler was.