

The continuation of this year's Warwickshire Road Race League saw greatly contrasting conditions, with scorching sunshine for the Northbrook 10K in Coventry and then torrential downpours for the Two Castles 10K between Warwick and Kenilworth! The contrast was also noticeable from a Stratford AC point of view, as the relatively low turnout for the Coventry event was completely reversed by an impressive club contingent for the Two Castles.

Coinciding with the warmest day of the year so far the Northbrook 10K took place over a traffic-free rural route on the edge of northern Coventry; a course that is predominantly undulating or uphill for the first two-thirds before rewarding the field with a relatively kind finish. Amongst the total of 385 rather sweaty finishers were half a dozen from Stratford AC, and at the head of them Mark Francis (39:56 39th) recorded his best ever time for this particular course. Mark's continuing fine current form meant that his traditional battle with Kate Wright (40:46 50th) was not quite as close as usual, but Kate still showed her remarkable ability by finishing as 4th female and winning the 1st F45 prize by nearly 8 minutes! James Deacon (41:04 55th) was third back for the club, whilst Allan Coldicott (47:38 150th) and Sarah Odell (49:09 172nd) both did really well to keep going so strongly in the heat, with the former especially showing a real return to something like past glories. John Butler (62:59 362nd) completed the club's presence, Nigel Stirk (Tipton Harriers) took 1st place with 33:16 and Myshola Kirkham (Cov Godiva) ending up as 1st lady in 38:36.

A record entry of 3000 runners were left dodging the lightning and heavy downpours that was this year's Two Castles race, although once things got underway conditions were actually fairly decent for distance running. The course is always a tough one with the competitors having to cope with a slight incline for most of the 6.2 mile journey, although the picturesque start and finish inside the respective castles helps makes up a little for this handicap! The chip timing meant that the rush to get through the tight start was not quite so manic, although with positions having to be based on first past the post (the race incorporated the Warwickshire AA 10K Championships) there were plenty examples of being beaten by someone with a slower time!

First Stratford member back to the heavenly delights of Kenilworth was (one of) Temple Grafton's finest, Keith Beardsmore (40:14 46th) – not bad for a 53-year old, and a time that put him 3rd amongst the O50 males. One place and 5 seconds behind Keith was Kate Wright, which placed her as 3rd female and 2nd O45 (as she was unfortunate to be just behind the winner, Leamington C&CC's Monica Williamson, who is also in the same age group). Darren License (40:32 52nd) put in a tremendous return to form in his local race, doing extremely well to edge ahead of Mark Francis (40:38 138th), although the maverick mailman got caught well back in the narrow Warwick Castle starting passage. Phil Brennan (44:01, 149th) is one of the club's current golden generation of golden oldies, and another fantastic effort put him 20 seconds clear of the next O60, which also kept him ahead of the irrepressible Martin Todman (43:06 198th), another who seems to be improving with age.

Dave Maundrell (45:27 214th) and Dave Wolstencroft (45:51 233rd) could use each other to pace themselves against throughout, although with the size of the field there was never a shortage of targets ahead, as could Sarah Odell (48:14 371st) and Paul Perry (48:21 448th). Sarah seems to be in fine form after the London Marathon, despite starting to turn her hand to triathlon, while Paul has been a highly enthusiastic addition to the club over the last few months. Phil Marshall (45:56 450th) was another to do especially well after getting caught well back at the start, Allan Coldicott (50:02 532nd) recalled doing the race when the castles were still inhabited, and Tony Hunt (51:29 747th) showed that he also doesn't need much of a break from running after a marathon. Michael Oliver (53:14 1,000th) has had limited training recently but still continues to greatly impress with his determination, while Andy List (48:44 1,030th) pulled out a terrific effort from somewhere. Being the modest chap that he is, a starting position well down the field meant that Andy was only 30 seconds slower than Sarah Odell but nearly 700 places further back!

Kate Sergent and Debbie Crisp – both 56:19 minutes and 1,091st – just show no sign of their rate of improvement slowing, and seem to work brilliantly off each other, while Diane Keen (57:52 1,198th) showed bags of promise with a sterling performance. Mark Smith (53:13 1,384th) took up the place of the

injured James Deacon at fairly late notice but still put together a fairly impressive display, with again one of the larger discrepancies between chip time and gun time, just leaving Natasha Watkins (65:56 2,123rd) to wrap things up. The ever cheerful Natasha has been working her way back towards racing fitness after a persistent knee problem, and must have been greatly encouraged by her outing here. Richard Harper took the main honours in a time of 33:04 to win by over a minute, and the race was again a credit to the Rotary Club organisers, as well as to all the runners and spectators for staying so cheerful on such a miserable day!