

Although parts of the course took a bit of a battering from last Saturday night's storms, it dawned bright and sunny on Sunday for Stratford AC's annual Not The Roman IX road race sponsored by Simply Run. Once the flying marquees, fallen portaloos and other parts of the set-up had been resurrected everything seemed to go relatively smoothly for the sixth staging of this event, a 12K-challenge which replaced the original Roman 9(-mile) course back in 2004. The 558 finishers amongst the sell-out field of 700 enjoyed some sparkling views from the top of Loxley hill, and with only a light breeze and cool temperatures to contend with conditions were almost perfect.

At the sharp end of proceedings Stephen Price (40:57) took advantage of these factors as he steadily increased the gap throughout over previous winner Garry Payne (42:42), not running too badly for an over-50, with the ever-impressive Sue Harrison (43:22) just holding onto 3<sup>rd</sup> from Carl Tucker (43:27). The close battle for second lady behind Sue Harrison was won by Spa Striders' Carolyn Wilkinson (48:37), who only pulled clear from Catherine Philp (49:15) in the latter stages. Stratford AC themselves just had two runners competing this year, with Sarah Littell (58:12, 193<sup>rd</sup>) and Mick 'n Phil Curry (74:09, 532<sup>nd</sup>) both doing the club proud.

The remainder of the prize winners were as follows: ladies – F35 Alison Pyne (55:11), F40 Jenny Jeeves (52:32), F45 Sue Tawney (49:40), F50 Catherine Wright (55:35), F55 Marilyn Maidment (58:53), F60 Jean Dolan (63:07) and F65 Virginia Pawlyn (68:58). And the other male winners were – M40 Chris Bedford (44:48), M45 Graham Stephens, (44:04), M50 Phil Gilkes (47:37), M55 Steve Colbourne (50:14), M60 David Parsons (48:59), M65 Graham Patton (50:43) and M70 Jackie Langman (57:27). In the team awards, the ladies 1-2-3 was Leamington C&AC, Spa Striders and Evesham Vale, whilst the men's order was Cherwell Runners, Bromsgrove & Redditch and UKNetrunner.

A lot of hard work behind the scenes ensured that all the runners had to worry about was their fitness levels, so many thanks go to Simply Run and DLF Trifolium, the residents of Tiddington and Loxley, Stratford Bowls Club, the local police, NFU Mutual for their invaluable contribution of the car park and FISSC, the 60-plus marshals and helpers from Stratford AC and last, but definitely not least, organisers Ashley Sherren and Tony Jackson and their race committee.

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It almost comes as a shock when the Stratford AC junior cross-country squad have a West Midlands Young Athletes XC league fixture in which they don't break all their previous records, but this terrible situation occurred in their third fixture at Sandwell Valley Park in Tipton! The team was a little bit down on numbers due to a high-level of winter bugs, but all those that were there gave 100% and in doing so the club held onto 11<sup>th</sup> spot in the season's rankings. The course was a new one at this familiar venue, due to the usual one being waterlogged, but it was still an undulating parkland trail with one steep hill on each lap and only one small muddy section.

The U11 girls were led back by Maddy Briggs (26<sup>th</sup>), who missed the last meeting, and she had a terrific run to put her into her best ever finishing position. Felicity Bee (54<sup>th</sup>) and Ysabelle Caswell (63<sup>rd</sup>) were both a bit down on last time due to heavy colds, but they worked really well and finished strongly to bring the team home in 13<sup>th</sup>, leaving them as 12<sup>th</sup> for the season.

For the U13 girls there was a real return to form for Molly White (36<sup>th</sup>) as she recorded a season's best, and she was followed back by steady runs from Cara Williams (40<sup>th</sup>) and a distinctly under the weather Chloe Connor (43<sup>rd</sup>). Rachel Chandler (57<sup>th</sup>) has improved with each outing this season (91-77-57), and although a rather tired Abbie Brooks (68<sup>th</sup>) had run in the Gloucestershire County Champs the day before (finishing 11<sup>th</sup>) she still ran well enough for a season's best placing. Club debutant Zoe Young (75<sup>th</sup>) put nerves to one side to perform well, Ellie Turner (84<sup>th</sup>) had another season's best, Hannah Taylor (102<sup>nd</sup>) was also an illness victim, Olivia West (104<sup>th</sup>) was so late in arriving (due to parking chaos) that she had to run holding her number and Holly Pyne (109<sup>th</sup>) continued her strong improvement over the winter (140-129-109). So, this all left the enthusiastic and talented U13s as a splendid 8<sup>th</sup> on the day and 9<sup>th</sup> overall.

In the U15 girls race Zoe Chandler (8<sup>th</sup>) has at last gained enough confidence to set off fast, and this is really paying dividends (as her 11<sup>th</sup> place in the season's standings will testify), and Katie Taylor (34<sup>th</sup>) also had a storming run to give her a winter's best position. Lucy McDermott (36<sup>th</sup>), who faded slightly but is working hard to increase her strength, was only just behind Katie, while debutant Rhiannon Davis (63<sup>rd</sup>) was running

mainly to make up a full team of 5 but illness eventually reduced this only 4 anyway. Like the U13s the girls finished 8<sup>th</sup> on the morning, leaving them in 10<sup>th</sup> place for the season.

Finally for the females, Nienke Verwer (17<sup>th</sup>) was the only Stratford woman in the U17s and showed how determined she is by persevering when badly hampered by a bad knee and being generally run down. This still left Nienke as the 10<sup>th</sup> best performer on the season so far, and also put the team into 12<sup>th</sup> on the day (11<sup>th</sup> overall).

For the youngest males (the U11s) the highly consistent Fergus Allison (19<sup>th</sup>) is also in the marvellous position of being 10<sup>th</sup> overall on the season after another good run, and he was just ahead of an SB performance from Ianto Davis (23<sup>rd</sup>). Jonathan Fury (27<sup>th</sup>) has also improved with each meeting, showing that he is much quicker when the pressure is on race-wise than he is when just training, Alex Eves (45<sup>th</sup>) provided another season's highest showing but Ben Taylor (66<sup>th</sup>) really struggled with a chest infection in bravely completing a full quintet. This kept the U11s as the highest placed Stratford team by coming in 5<sup>th</sup> on the day, leaving them as a fantastic 5th overall.

Onto the U13 boys, and Howard Allison (33<sup>rd</sup>) demonstrated that whilst structured training is important a sharp haircut is what you really need to fly through the field! The third of the Team Davis trio - Nye Davis (34<sup>th</sup>) - came in hot on the heels of the style icon, and although Patrick Eves (68<sup>th</sup>) struggled a little this still left the boys as 13<sup>th</sup> team for the fixture and 16<sup>th</sup> for the season.

Team Allison were also on fine form at Tipton, and the final member of this select band - Jack Allison (22<sup>nd</sup>) - had a flyer in the U15 boys' event, showing that he is really starting to put his hip and knee problems behind him now. The U15s were probably the worst affected by the dropouts, so although Joshua Newman (43<sup>rd</sup>) had a decent run this left the team in 14<sup>th</sup> on the day and 13<sup>th</sup> overall.

The U17 men saw a Stratford duo finish 13<sup>th</sup> (leaving them 14<sup>th</sup> overall), with a below par Sam Taylor (37<sup>th</sup>) hanging in there well and keeping the same position throughout, and Alex Gregg (48<sup>th</sup>) supporting him well in only his second club XC. So the club retained 11<sup>th</sup> spot overall and will be desperately trying to overhaul Tamworth above them in the remaining two fixtures.