

Amidst all the fun and games of the summer's track meetings and triathlon events the hardcore of Stratford AC's road-running seniors still continue to fly round the highways and byways, competing over a whole host of different distances near and far. The Warwickshire Road Race League provides a well structured range of events all the way from 5K up to half-marathon and, despite the disadvantage of having no runners in the Wilmcote 'Summer 6' (because they were all assisting), Stratford AC still have a number of members well placed in the rankings.

Coventry's Shinx AC hosted the 'Midsummer 5' in the city's Memorial Park, and in spite of the 7:45 p.m. start the half dozen Stratford runners still had a very warm evening to contend with. Golden oldie Roger Wilson (34:45,66<sup>th</sup>) was the first of these to finish the 5-mile challenge, and whilst he isn't exactly at the peak of his powers currently he was still too good for the other over-60s present. A fine effort from Andy Turner (39:11,111<sup>th</sup>) was sandwiched between a pair who struggled somewhat in the warmth - Luke Watkins (37:52,98<sup>th</sup>) and Sarah Odell (39:31,115<sup>th</sup>) - which just left the father and daughter combination of Graham (39:41,116<sup>th</sup>) and Natasha Watkins (49:53,180<sup>th</sup>) to wrap things up shortly afterwards. Both male and female winners- Matt Lole (25:24) and Danielle Stewart (30:39) - were from Coventry Godiva, with the local club unsurprisingly taking the team prize as well. The WRRL standings at this point (after 4 races) showed that Sarah Odell and Kate Wright were well placed in both the senior women (4<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> respectively) and veteran women (2<sup>nd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> respectively), so it was slightly unfortunate that neither were able to jaunt over to deepest Birmingham for the next fixture.

The annual midweek Rowheath 5K took place on a re-measured course and the already challenging route was subsequently extended by another 150m, much to everyone's dismay! This obviously took its toll on the expected finishing times, although a cool evening breeze did slightly compensate by providing ideal running conditions. There were 5 members there from SAC for an event which incorporated the Warwickshire 5K Championships, and despite suffering from severe backache John Turner (20:50,82<sup>nd</sup>) still led this merry quintet home. In doing so John took the county title as the first O65 across the line and, although he was very disappointed with his time, his remarkable achievements do sometimes get overlooked by the high standards that he sets himself. Luke Watkins (21:55,106<sup>th</sup>) is in an impressive vein of form these days, which was continued here, and Michael Oliver (23:01,125<sup>th</sup>) showed that he can still maintain a consistent race pace even though he doesn't train quite so much these days. This then just left impressively strong efforts from Andy Turner (23:28,130<sup>th</sup>) and Graham Watkins (24:01,135<sup>th</sup>) to complete the Stratford group, with Ian Williams of Tipton (15:27) and Bedford & County's Nicola Sykes (17:07) as the happy victors.

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Outside of the WRRL there have also been a number of local races that really stand out in the running calendar, the pick of which was probably the Evesham Vale 10K. The second incarnation continued in the same fantastically well organised vein as the first, and as a result the entry numbers nearly doubled from 2008, meaning that the limit of 700 was unexpectedly reached. It seemed like the whole town came out to support again (including the Mayor), although the weather was not quite so obliging this year, with a heavy downpour dogging the High Street start and first 3K followed by warm and muggy conditions. This didn't seem to much hamper Richard Malin (Bromsgrove & Redditch), whose 33:55 beat Garry Payne's course record by 4 seconds, and first lady (ex-international) Emma Gooderham of Malvern Joggers, who clocked 38:03. The off-road bits of the course were made slightly trickier by the morning rain, and there were one or two issues with the results due to the unexpected numbers, but these certainly didn't detract from another event that showed Evesham at its best.

Amongst the 612 finishers was an excellent showing of 17 from Stratford AC, with the mercurial Mark Francis (40:34,43<sup>rd</sup>) leading them home. Alison Bagnall (42:51,85<sup>th</sup>) produced another flying round to finish as 7<sup>th</sup> female, followed by a still somewhat injury-restricted John Turner (44:15,112<sup>th</sup>). A riveting contest between Allan Coldicott (45:02,130<sup>th</sup>), Phil Brennan (45:04,131<sup>st</sup>) and Dave Maundrell (45:14,136<sup>th</sup>) resulted in a narrow victory for middle-age over experience and youth respectively, whilst Luke Watkins (45:40,149<sup>th</sup>) wasn't much further back after showing again how much fitter he is these days. Paul Perry (46:41,181<sup>st</sup>) is another who seems to be getting quicker all the time, Graham Watkins (49:43,246<sup>th</sup>) seems to be showing the same rate of improvement as his son and Michael Oliver (49:51,253<sup>rd</sup>) was also just on the cusp of the top third. Back to the ladies and Kathryn Deane's (53:18,348<sup>th</sup>) spectacular sprint finish across the slippery grass down by the river was not quite enough to catch up a great run from Debbie Crisp (53:17,347<sup>th</sup>), Chris Seeney (54:45,391<sup>st</sup>) showed that there's still life left in the old boy yet, and by taking over 3 minutes off her 2008 time Kate Sergent (57:19,462<sup>nd</sup>) could well have given herself the club's F55 10K record. The final pair in for the club were John Butler

(58:54,498<sup>th</sup>), doing well to get back under the hour again, and Natasha Watkins (61:40,543<sup>rd</sup>), who looks like she is moving full steam ahead back to race fitness. It was encouraging to see 'old' members Jackie Clark and Victoria Johnstone (both timed at 65:46) doing so well, while Heather Rees (42:13) displayed pure class as she took the female 45-54 honours.

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The 'Snipe 6' race at Snitterfield is one that takes in an extremely picturesque route, and coupled with good organisation really deserves far more entrants than the 71 that it got for its third staging. The 6-mile route takes in Norton Lindsey and Wolverton, before returning to Snitterfield, and although there were very hot and humid conditions to contend with Jack Mee (Leamington) comfortably managed to reduce his own course record by nearly a minute to 33:32. The women's winner was Stratford AC's Kate Wright who, despite having raced a half-marathon the night before, still somehow clocked up a time of 39:27 to take the female honours by about 3 minutes ahead of a strong run by Sue Berry.

Kate came 7<sup>th</sup> overall, with another 2 of the 9 Stratford AC crew just in front of her, as Andy Cockerill (38:25,5<sup>th</sup>) used his tremendous stamina to just edge out the strength of Dan Lynch (39:21,6<sup>th</sup>). Roger Wilson (42:00,11<sup>th</sup>) pulled away from Allan Coldicott reasonably early on and was not for catching, whilst Luke Watkins (45:02,22<sup>nd</sup>) still got a lift home from father Graham (48:13,26<sup>th</sup>) after showing gross disrespect and beating him! Andrew Turner (52:27,39<sup>th</sup>) must be pleased with his steady improvement again, and with the ever-determined Natasha Watkins (63:12,63<sup>rd</sup>) wrapping things up for Stratford so ended a very jolly outing not too far from home!