

One of the great joys of this time of year is that the extended evenings enable a multitude of athletic events to take place during the week, since the reliance on street lighting is temporarily removed. A recent Thursday night was a typical June one with Stratford AC athletes present at an open track & field meeting and two splendid multi-terrain races.

The Worcester Open saw four of the club's older juniors in two 1500m track races, and a well-known face from the past showing that he still has what it takes to get to the top. The season long battle between Lucy McDermott and Zoe Chandler has been one of the most entertaining for a long time, and as is often the case they seem to be spurring each other on to ever greater feats. In the U15 girls' race the pair kept up a very even pace and pulled away from the rest of the field at around the 800m mark, and with both athletes finishing strongly it was Lucy who crossed the line first in 5:04:4, 2 seconds ahead of Zoe. This removed Zoe as the U15's club record holder, but not to be outdone she regained it three days later when she recorded 5:03:5 at the league meeting!

In the men's race Jack Allison and Sam Taylor finished as 1st and 3rd of the U17s, with both finishing just outside their PBs. Jack went off a little too fast as he tried to stay with the U20 winner from Halesowen, and whilst Sam paced it better Jack held on well to cross the line in 4:44:8 against Sam's 4:48:3. In the 100m Stratford's Ryan James, who competes for Birchfield, won reasonably comfortably in 11:1 seconds, and while this probably wasn't his greatest performance ever he certainly showed his class the following weekend as he finished 3rd in the Midlands Championships in an impressive time of 10:8.

At the same time the second of the Run Stratford / Adventure Sports multi-terrain summer 10K races was taking place, with the field of 118 enjoying the perfect cool and still running conditions. The Wedgnock site is accessible from the Woodloes estate in Warwick, and the area is absolutely ideal for this sort of event since it can utilise the open spaces of the range itself, as well as the public rights of way alongside the Warwickshire golf course and the tranquil country lanes near Beausale. With the second and final races in the 4-meeting series run anti-clockwise, this was a chance for anyone who had completed May's clockwise staging to see if they could run it faster this way round!

There were 5 Stratford AC members taking part, with this year's corporate challenge also spicing things up a little. Ladders solicitors completed a 3-person team shortly before the start when the quick learning Johann Breytenbach (39:28, 10th) received notification of his bar exam successes, and in conjunction with the slightly less knowledgeable Steve Baker (43:55, 30th) and the impressive Sonia Kang (49:18, 56th) they formed a strong alliance. The Stratford trio couldn't quite compete with the strength in depth of the 7 winning National Grid participants though, but they can still be very proud of their efforts. The other two from the running club were both over-60s males, with Roger Wilson (45:15, 36th) just being beaten into 2nd place in his age category and John Butler (66:18, 111th) showing that there's still a lot of life left in those experienced legs! Phil Gould of Kenilworth was a clear winner in a time of 36 minutes dead, and Linda Howell (19th) of Bournville was an even more emphatic female victor as she stopped the clock at 41:20.

Evesham Vale Running Club have been a fairly recent addition to the Midlands running scene, although there had been a club in the town a number of years ago, and their rate of growth since (re-)forming has been spectacular. They staged a very successful inaugural 10K race last summer (which is coming up again on the 12th July), and on the same night as the Wedgnock 10K they resurrected a terrific off-road race called the 'Bredon Bash' that the old club used to host. The 5.64-mile course is worryingly simple - you start from Elmley Castle, you run up Bredon Hill (which includes 722 feet of ascent), you run along the top for a bit and then you run back down to where you started! This may all sound a bit pointless, but in fact the route is varied and picturesque, the challenge demanding, the view from the ridge spectacular, and the organisation and the food provided by the local cricket club afterwards were all top notch.

The race, like many multi-terrain events, was a very low-key and cheap one, with around 50 entrants and no printed numbers – you get one written on your hand and then you shout it out as you finish! The exact results aren't currently to hand, but the 6 Stratford AC members who enjoyed the pleasant trip down on that Thursday evening did not return empty handed. Andy Cockerill was the first across the line to get his hands on the food, followed by a quartet of fighting fit over-50s. Pete Hill did well to take the male age category prize with Lesley Kirk doing the same in the female equivalent, and between this victorious pair was another flourishing half-centurion – Phil Marshall. Allan Coldicott edged another close battle with Dave Maundrell

to finish things off, and there's no doubt that this glorious race will take place again next year and also that it is bound to grow in popularity as word of mouth works its magic.

Just a reminder that another rather pleasant evening race takes place soon, with the sixth staging of the 'Stratford Summer 6' on Saturday 4th July. This gently undulating 6-mile race starts and finishes at Mary Arden's House in Wilmcote and the event is ideal for runners of all standards. Entry forms can be found at www.stratfordac.co.uk or entries can be made on the night prior to the 7:30 p.m. start.