

Striders of Croydon

DECEMBER 2022 MAGAZINE



The M60 medallists in the Surrey Masters Cross-Country Championships 2022

Left to right: Matthew Stone, David Ogden (SLH), Steve Corfield

(photo by Stephen Allport)

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40 Years Ago – Local Athletics in Winter 1982/83

10 Years Ago – Local Athletics in Winter 2013

STRIDERS MARATHON TRAINING RUNS 2022/2023

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|--------------|------------------|---|
| Sun 18 Dec | Beckenham 11 | https://www.gmap-pedometer.com/?r=5735667 |
| Sun 8 Jan | Greenwich 13 | https://www.gmap-pedometer.com/?r=2170782 |
| Sun 15 Jan | Farleigh 12 | https://www.gmap-pedometer.com/?r=6140789 |
| Sun 22 Jan | Wandle 14 | https://www.gmap-pedometer.com/?r=2366613 |
| Sun 29 Jan | TBC | |
| Sun 5 Feb | Warlingham 16 | https://www.gmap-pedometer.com/?r=5312946 |
| Sun 12 Feb | 11 Parks 18 | |
| Sun 19 Feb | High Elms 18 | https://www.gmap-pedometer.com/?r=6217783 |
| Sun 26 Feb | Coulsdon 21 | https://www.gmap-pedometer.com/?r=6546887 |
| Sun 5 March | Regents Canal 20 | https://www.gmap-pedometer.com/?r=5833749 |
| Sun 12 March | TBC | |
| Sun 19 March | Coulsdon 21 | https://www.gmap-pedometer.com/?r=6546887 |
| Sun 26 March | Regents Canal 20 | https://www.gmap-pedometer.com/?r=5833749 |

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Saturday 7 January – Surrey Cross-Country Championships – Lloyd Park
Saturday 14 January – Surrey Cross-Country League Women's Div 2 – Woking
Saturday 14 January – Surrey Cross-Country League Men's Div 3 – Woking
Saturday 28 January – South of England Cross-Country Championships – Beckenham
Saturday 11 February – Surrey Cross-Country League Women's Div 2 – Morden Park
Saturday 11 February – Surrey Cross-Country League Men's Div 3 – Morden Park
Saturday 18 February – British Masters Indoor Championships – Sheffield
Saturday 11 March – British Masters Pentathlon Championship – Lee Valley

EDITORIAL: DECEMBER 2022

Welcome to the December issue of our club magazine. This issue begins with a couple of articles celebrating some remarkable achievements by two of our best-known members. Firstly, Matthew Stone describes how he became the European over-60 aquathlon champion in Bilbao in late September. Secondly, Ally Whitlock describes how she set a club 100-mile record in October, covering the distance substantially quicker than any of our men have done.

Striders are of course a club which is proud to cater for all running abilities, so it is appropriate that we follow these two articles with an article from Peter Johnson, celebrating the success of the club's 'Couch To 5K' programme which concluded at the South Norwood parkrun in September. This in turn is followed by a report from Selena Wong on the Marathon Medicine Conference 2022. We also include our usual 'competitive highlights' article, covering the period from September to November, and our usual history articles looking back at local athletics 40 years ago and ten years ago.

On the subject of 'competitive highlights', it was particularly pleasing to see our men's over-60 team place second in the Surrey Masters Cross-Country Championships in October. We were only just behind South London Harriers and just ahead of Herne Hill, two long-established clubs with histories dating back to the 19th century. Although we have occasionally won team medals at Surrey road running championships, this is the first time in our 40-year history that we have won team medals in any age-group in a Surrey cross-country championship.

While we have been competing in local cross-country races for many years, and many of our members enjoy cross-country, we do of course also have many runners who prefer the firmer surfaces of road races. As usual, we have arranged a programme of longer Sunday training runs to help our runners to prepare for a marathon in the spring. On the subject of road races, it might be worth reminding members, especially newer Striders, that there is a form on our website (<http://www.stridersofcroydon.org.uk/races/results/>) which people can use to submit their race results. Submitting results via this form should make it easier for Graeme Drysdale to compile our annual road rankings, and is also helpful for whoever is submitting our weekly press reports to the Croydon Advertiser (although we do have a limit of 300 words for our press reports, so that it is not usually possible for our reports to include all the races which Striders have taken part in).

Alon



THE EUROPEAN AQUATHLON CHAMPIONSHIP: BILBAO

(by Matthew Stone)

I have done three international Aquathlons before, around the time of moving into a new age category (55-59), in 2017 and 2018. The first was in Bratislava (won a silver medal), then Fyn (another silver) and lastly Ibiza (fifth).

With the pandemic fitting conveniently into my older end of my age group, I was ready to enter one of these competitions again. The European Championship (ETU) was announced first, in Bilbao in northern Spain, so I applied for that. The World Championship was announced later, in Samorin in western Slovakia, but took place before Bilbao. It was interesting that the two athletes who won gold when I got silver were second and third in Samorin, but not coming to Bilbao. The competitions are of a similar standard anyway. Qualification is based on race times achieved, so that was quite easy for me and I was duly selected. I started my training for the event in May, when the open-water swimming season started.

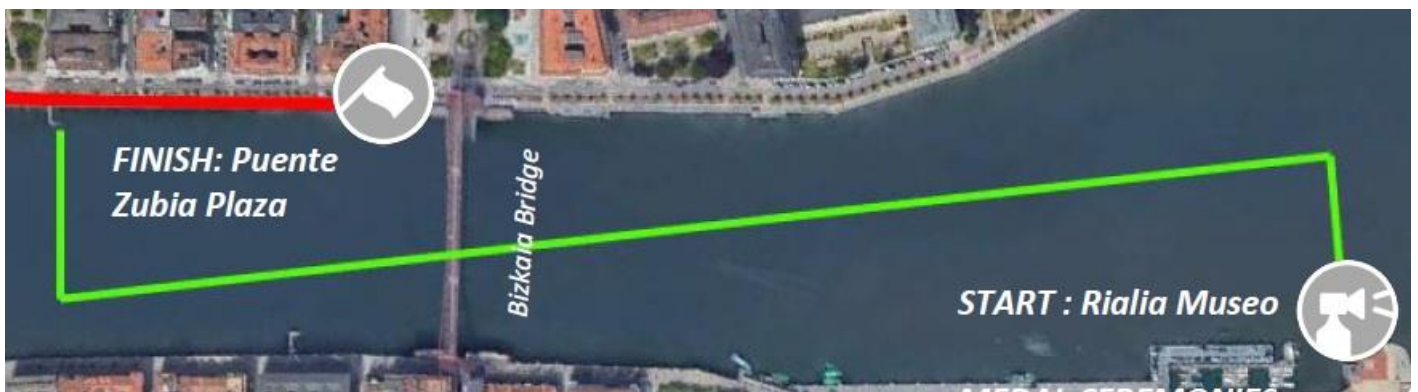
There are various formats of Aquathlon depending mainly on the facilities available to the organisers. The Championships are now always a 1000m open-water swim followed by a 5000m run. The distance is never exact in any open-water race, but the run is accurate. An important part of any multi-sport is the transition; for this race you had to get your wetsuit off and running shoes on as quickly as possible.

I did my swim training mainly in Divers Cove, totalling 163,000m. This is an old quarry, which is a beautiful setting to swim in, with tranquil calm water. Mainly I trained for endurance and adapting my stroke for open water. I also did 137,000m elsewhere, mainly speed training in pools. I entered a 5K swim in Bewl Water as race preparation. This was a lot choppiier than Divers Cove, so it was good to remember what open water could be like.

I also did five Aquathlons in June-August. Three of these were at Tooting Bec lido, 1000m swim and 7400m run, organised by the South London Swimming Club under British Triathlon rules. A wetsuit could be worn for this, so it was very good practise for transition as well. Another two I did in Leybourne Lakes, near Maidstone. There was a choice of 750m (1 lap) or 1500m (2 lap) swim followed by 5000m run. I'm sure you know my choice. The last race was too warm for wetsuits, a nicer swim really, but not exactly what I wanted. I also had the pleasure of Paul Finch's company.

There was not much change in my running training, though no long races. I did track sessions and marathon training with Striders, parkruns, a 5K race and my own running in between. The training seemed to have gone well as Rosemary and I boarded the flight to Bilbao on Wednesday; the race was on Friday (23 September).

I had joined the Facebook group for the race, set up by British Triathlon, and the unofficial WhatsApp group. Some of my clubmates from Tri Surrey were also in Bilbao, one in the Aquathlon and a few others doing the middle-distance triathlon, so there was a WhatsApp group for them. The 'phone has become a necessity to keep up with everyone's thoughts about the event.



On Thursday morning we went down to the race course for a recce. We couldn't swim directly on the race course, but I had 15 minutes off an adjacent beach in skins. The water temperature was 19°C according to my watch, so it would certainly be wetsuit optional for 60+ age groups. The water was salty of course, and quality seemed quite high. We looked at the swim course, which started off a jetty south of the river. We

had to swim across to a buoy, then down towards the sea under the famous iron bridge towards another buoy, then across the river width to the exit. The buoys weren't out at this stage as there was a big ship going out to sea on Friday afternoon. The exit was by stone steps which looked to be the main problem as they were narrow and slippery.

The run course was very straightforward, up and down the seafront. It was flat with good footing, two laps, and five 180 degree turns. The ETU seem to prefer to make the swim the more interesting aspect of Aquathlons.



The race started for my wave (M60-69) at 18:34 on the Friday, so it seemed like a very long wait to build up the tension. About 16:30 I went to set up the transition, then we all had to cross the river by gondola under the iron bridge to get to the swim start. We had suited up and watched the first waves of swimmers starting. It was apparent that the current was strongly down to the sea, as high tide had been at 16:17, though the wind was increasing in strength in the opposite direction. The swimmers were being dragged downstream and some were struggling to round the buoy, so we had to aim upstream to the right.

The swim started with us in the water holding on to the pontoon. The start was OK, not too much of a scrum, and I judged it well to the first buoy. However, when we turned to go downstream, we were suddenly subjected to big waves whipped up by the wind blowing directly upstream towards us. It was difficult to see anything when in a trough and we were likely to get smacked in the face by a wave when looking forward. At times the water would suddenly disappear underneath me, and I would drop down with a crash. Drafting other swimmers was impossible; I had no idea where anyone else was.

Front crawl was quite exhausting as I was getting battered by the waves. This was quite unexpected and in this situation you are sure to think about giving up and if it was worth carrying on. However, the only way out of the river with its high walled banks, was at the race exit! So I thought I needed to change tactics. It seemed that progress was slow heading into the waves, but actually the current was taking me quickly in the right direction. So I changed to do some breaststroke and found it much smoother to ride the ups and downs of the waves, and I was confident that I wasn't losing much time by swimming a slower stroke. When the water looked calmer I went back to front crawl, but four spells of breaststroke for 20 seconds each time saved me lots of energy, which I would soon need.

I rounded the last buoy, which according to the course map should have been opposite the exit steps. So why was the exit upstream? Now I really had to sprint to cross the river diagonally against the current, else I would never have made it (as happened to several swimmers). I reached the side of the steps and on my second attempt managed to grasp the hand-rail and haul myself out. What a relief to get onto the matting at the top of the steps!

As I sped off to transition, I wondered how the rest of my Age-Group had coped with that swim. I was confident that if they were only one minute ahead, I would get them back on the run. It turned out only one was significantly ahead of me and he wasn't a great runner. I don't know if he was a faster swimmer or had just negotiated the conditions better, or just been lucky.

Transition went well for me; it has been a weakness in past races. I have gradually cut the legs shorter on my race wetsuit so I can now easily get out of it. I rounded the first corner and had to divert around a group of medics attending a competitor on a stretcher. No idea about how that happened, ironic after surviving the swim. Quite quickly into the run I overtook a group of M60s running together, which was a confidence booster, then I started overtaking M50s and M55s who had started in the previous wave. I got quite a bad stitch, but knew to just keep going and run it off. The turns required some concentration, especially wearing Vaporflys, but it was just a matter of keeping the same steady pace. Towards the end, I was still slightly worried that someone might be ahead of me, but it seemed unlikely as I couldn't see anyone in my age group with a long straight ahead of me. I accelerated on the last 1K just to make sure. As I went through the finish, I heard the announcement that I had won the M60+ category, which made it all worthwhile, after getting silver twice before. My time was 34:02 - despite the hardships it was a fast course.

The Italian who came second spoke to me afterwards – he claimed he was injured and couldn't run at full speed. It was good to have won by a decent margin of 47 seconds after losing my first Aquathlon by 0.7seconds. The next three were Spaniards, the next GB athlete was sixth. I realised when I finished that my right shoe was dyed red, as I had three cuts on my big toe from climbing out of the river.

| Results: 2022 Europe Triathlon Aquathlon Championships Bilbao - Bizkaia 60-64 Male AG | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|------------|---------------|------|---------|-----------|-------------------|-----|-----|----------|----------|----------|--|
| 🇪🇸 Bilbao, Spain • 23 Sep, 2022 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 60-64 Male AG | | | | Filter: | | Type to filter... | | | | | | |
| Pos ^ | First Name | Last Name | YOB | Country | Start Num | Time | Run | T1 | Swim | T2 | Run | |
| 1 | Matthew | Stone | 1962 | GBR | 5555 | 00:34:02 | n/a | n/a | 00:14:08 | 00:01:19 | 00:18:37 | |
| 2 | Carlo | Simongini | 1962 | ITA | 5559 | 00:34:49 | n/a | n/a | 00:14:03 | 00:01:16 | 00:19:31 | |
| 3 | Alejandro | Altuna Elorza | 1959 | ESP | 5544 | 00:35:24 | n/a | n/a | 00:13:04 | 00:01:23 | 00:20:58 | |

After the race, I met up with the Tri Surrey team, who had come to support me and Sarah, who also did the Aquathlon. Ben was also in the race; he has been swimming with Croydon Amphibians.

The medal presentation was quite late and the elites dragged on a bit, with raising the flags and playing the national anthems. Luckily I found a burger stall nearby, as I was starving. The Age-Group was actually better, I thought: we had combined presentation with the ladies, no anthems and just our teams' Union Jacks. At last I got my hands on a gold ETU medal. An Aquathlon is the shortest race time to get one, but it certainly felt deserved after that swim.



There was certainly plenty of feedback on the race, mainly concerning the swim. Two people ended up in hospital and they ran out of foil blankets (the water temperature was 19.2C, which is fine). Several could not finish the swim and were pulled out by the kayaks because they were too exhausted to swim back against the current to the stone steps. (The buoy was not where it was shown on the plan, it had been moved downriver towards the sea which made the finish quite hard.) The conditions had certainly deteriorated as the wind picked up as the race went on. Towards the end the first buoy had broken free and, taken by the wind, started going upriver, which made it very hard for the swimmers to round it. I think nearly everyone had cut their feet getting up the steps, there was a long queue for the first aid tent when I left.

Some people appreciated the challenge of the conditions as being worthy of a European Championship. I can feel that way about most of it. It was unfortunate that the river conditions worsened as the older age groups started, but the elements are by nature uncontrollable. Actually there are many times in triathlons when the open water swim has become out of control, so it is just a risk of entering the event. Now I am just looking forward to the next one.

My age grade for the run was 85.77% (according to my calculation). Two of the ladies in the AG team were higher, one lady got over 90%!

THE AUTUMN 100: THE ONE THAT WENT RIGHT (by Ally Whitlock)

29 minutes in and my watch beeps at me. I stop and slow to a walk as a steady stream of runners pass me, several pausing to ask if I'm okay. I guess they're not used to seeing someone walk quite so early on in a race and I appreciate their concern.

My walking is intentional though as I have a plan.

I glance down at my heart rate (HR). Checking it's within target. It is. I look at no other data on my watch screen as I tear open and swallow the first of many gels.

60 seconds later, another beep and I ease back into a gentle run.

This is my plan for the next 20-odd miles. Run for nine minutes, walk for one. Eat every 30 and keep my HR in check.

In my mind, this is all I am doing. No more, no less. Although I have a goal, I refuse to chase distance, pace, or time. I'm simply running – and walking – 25 miles. Not even a marathon.

Autumn 100 by Centurion Running is made up of four 25-mile legs, each one starting and finishing at a central point in Goring, a small town alongside the Thames in South Oxfordshire.

Each leg is different. Each leg varied. 12.5 miles out to a turnaround checkpoint, 12.5 miles back. Legs one and four head in different directions along the flat Thames Path. Legs two and three along the undulating Ridgeway.

At the end of every leg, you return to the village hall, aka race HQ, where there is the usual array of food, drink and support from the Centurion army, and also your own personal drop bag.

But in my head, I'm not running 100 miles. I'm running four x 25 miles.

A new run, a new race, a new challenge and a new goal each time I leave Goring.



With Brian, Jaco, Kerry and Paul before the race starts

LEG 1. THAMES PATH, GORING TO LITTLE WITTENHAM. MILES 1-25

The morning is bright and sunny as we gather outside the Parish Church of Saint Mary just across the river from Goring Village Hall. The race briefing is short and to the point. 100 miles, four out and back legs. It might get cold at night so wrap up warm. Don't be a dick towards other trail users.

With the briefing done, the final few minutes drag on. Knowing the path narrows pretty quickly, I deliberately position myself towards the front of the crowd. Near to – but a little behind – Debbie Martin-Consani and Mari Mauland, the race favourites.

As James Elson the race director finishes the countdown from ten to start the race, the Church bells chime at 9 am and we're off. A buzz of anticipation in the air.

I am calm. I am ready. I know what I need to do. Splashing through puddles, the narrow path winds around the back of Streatley and through a small woodland before popping out alongside the glorious Thames. With more space riverside, people quickly begin to spread out.

It's disconcerting as runner after runner passes me, some sprinting as if it's the final mile, not the first. I put my hand up, I am competitive and it takes a lot of restraint not to let my ego get the better of me and chase after them.



The buzz of the start line!

With difficulty, I ignore my ego and everyone around me. Reminding myself that 100 miles is a very long way and a lot can, and will, happen over the course of the race.

I have a plan and I will stick to it.

This was a learning from the TP100 in May. On paper, it looks like I had a great race and I am not unhappy with the overall result. However, the race did not go how I wanted it to. I over-planned. Focusing too much

on the outcome and not enough on the process, I gave myself no room for flexibility. When I was thrown a curveball within the first 20 miles, my pace dropped and my mind faltered.

In ultra running, mental strength is as important, if not more so, as physical strength. 30 miles into that race, I knew I wasn't going to hit my target time and I wasn't mentally strong enough to deal with it. I put myself under too much pressure and I have only myself to blame.

This time around it is different.

I still have a goal and a plan; start easy, run-walk and fuel well, but it is fluid and flexible with a buffer should there be any curveballs. I've removed the self-imposed pressure and allowed myself room to adapt as needed. I am not obsessing over time, distance or pace. The only stat I am monitoring is my HR. Get my HR and effort levels right and everything else should fall into place.

All I need to focus on is running 25 miles.

The golden autumnal sunshine sparkles on the water and I marvel at how beautiful the morning is. Running conditions for mid-October are pretty near perfect. Temperatures in the mid-teens are warm but not too warm, with sunshine and blue skies. Bar a small amount of mud in these early miles, the trail underfoot is as near to perfection as it can be.

The path peeling away from the river and through the small town of Moulsham coincides with my first walk break.

This is the first time I have used such a frequent run-walk strategy in a race. I trialled it on a couple of long training runs and I was pleasantly surprised at how well it worked. Over 22 miles, my overall pace was no slower than if I'd run continuously whilst my legs felt fresher and far less fatigued at the end.

In this first leg, I am religious about my minute walk breaks. I stop conversations, abandoning those around me and slow to a walk the moment I hear the alert. This early in the race, I don't **need** to walk, however, I know that I will feel the benefit in the latter miles.

It helps my mind to know that every nine minutes I have a small break. I don't stress when my HR is slightly high because I know I can bring it back down when I walk. A higher than normal (aka training run 'normal') HR is one of the things that threw me on the Thames Path.

It's warm and I'm excited/nervous/drank lots of coffee pre-race. I can feel the race-day adrenaline pumping around my body. It will affect my HR. I have my minute to chill, and we go again.

Checkpoint one in Wallingford, I don't stop. Along into Benson and over to the other side of the river. I run, walk, run, walk, run, walk, snack, run, walk...

I see the leading runners coming towards me and this tells me I can't be far from the turnaround. There's a small group of them fairly close together and I give a cheer as they pass. I try to count the ladies as I see them coming towards me, and work out I must be around 10th or 11th.

Before the race, I didn't know how I would feel about the out and back nature of it. I prefer running somewhere and, as a rule, am not a fan of out and back. However, the further into the race we go, the more I grow to like it. I like crossing paths with other runners, seeing the strength and speed of the leaders whilst cheering on those behind me. It's rare in a race to see so many of the other runners, which also means I get to see the friends that I said goodbye to on the start line.

Not long after the Little Wittenham turnaround, I see Kerry, Jaco and Paul. A high-five across the trail along with their shouts of encouragement act as a little pick-me-up! Part of me wishes that I was running with them, enjoying chat and trail gossip with friends!

Saying that, on the return leg, I avoid running with others. I find it easier to stick to my plan and my effort level when it's just me. Surrounded by other people I get drawn into chat and before I know it, my pace has quickened and my HR shot up.

I am quite happy and content just me, myself and I. It stays like this for most of the first three legs.

Back through Wallingford and soon I'm on the approach to Goring. In the final mile, I catch up with several of the runners who sprinted past me in the first mile.



The Thames just outside Goring

Over the river and across the bridge. I run into the village hall and am handed my drop bag. I swap my pre-filled bottles over, refill my race vest with snacks, grab a couple of peanut butter sandwiches from the table and go.

No fanfare, no ceremony, in, out and ready for leg two.

- **Leg one: 3:56:38, average pace 9:45 min/mile (Plan: 4:10:00, 10:00 min/mile)**
- **62nd overall, 9th female.**
- **Time spent in Goring checkpoint: 4:31 (Plan 10:00)**



**Debbie Martin-Consani and I passing each other just before I reach the leg one turnaround.
Look at my swishy ponytail!**

LEG 2. RIDGEWAY, GORING TO SWYNCOMBE. MILES 25-50.

I press the lap button on my watch. Leg one is done. Forgotten about. I'm starting afresh on leg two. I'm running 25 miles. My Garmin lap resets to zero, my mental clock resets to zero.

A new run. A new race. A new goal.

I leave Goring looking forward to leg two. In my mind, this is my favourite one as it is the hilliest trail section. The kind of terrain that I thrive on.

First, there is a rather dull and flat part along roads and through the villages of South Stoke and North Stoke, the location of the mid-leg checkpoint. Deceptive, as at 4 miles from Goring, it is not mid-way.

On the way into North Stoke, I have a mini wobble. My legs are sore, my right abductor is grumbling and my left lower leg aches. My wobble wonders if my legs ache now, how are they going to get through another 70+ miles? Momentarily I forget my trick of looking at how far I have come, rather than how far I have to go. I've already run nearly 30 miles. No wonder my legs ache!

I put on a podcast to distract myself. Bad Boy Running talking to Sophie Power from She Races. As a woman in ultra running, her campaign for equality on the trails is something I'm always keen to hear more about.

A few miles later the aches and pains are forgotten as I hit upon Grim's Ditch. This is my bit. My trail. Undulating and uneven single track with roots and rocks to skip and dance over. Through woods, around trees, up and down ditches and over a fallen log. At times I forget that I am supposed to be walking up inclines as I run up them with a smile on my face. The tedious tarmac and aches and pains of North Stoke are long forgotten!

I walk a long incline in the middle of a nine-minute run block. I run down a hill during the one-minute walk break. I adapt my 9:1 run-walk ratio to the ebbs and flows of the hills. I leave Grim's Ditch behind for now and head towards the field of dreams, not quite so dreamy in October as it is in the full bloom of summer but still a photo worth taking.



The Field of Dreams. Not quite so dreamy in October...

I forget my whereabouts in this leg when I begin to cross paths with the race leaders. Grim's Ditch, the Field of Dreams, or somewhere in-between. The trail becomes busy and I'm enjoying running alone but surrounded by others, sharing the occasional word here and there.

I'd expected the litre of fluids that I picked up in Goring to last me the whole of this leg. But it's so unseasonably warm that I have drained both bottles by the time I reach the turnaround at Swyncombe. I refill them and grab a couple of sandwiches.

I hadn't planned on stopping for more than a few seconds at the CPs out on the course. But I have enough of a buffer in my race day plan so that I don't need to worry about a few unexpected minutes here and there. Refilling my bottles and staying hydrated is more important than saving two minutes 37.5 miles into a 100-mile race. Another learning from TP100.

Whereas the peanut butter sandwiches (aka running food of the gods) at Little Wittenham and Goring went down like a treat, I find it impossible to eat these ones. I chew and chew and chew. And chew some more. But I just cannot swallow. Nothing wrong with the sandwiches, just my usual inability to eat solids the further into a race I get. This time, I don't force it. I don't make my body take on food it doesn't want as I have done previously with disastrous results. I've done my best, I can do no more. I know I have enough easily digestible gels and sachets of baby food to get me through the remaining miles.

Back across the Field of Dreams, I wave at Kerry coming in the opposite direction. I'm looking forward to the upcoming treat of Grim's Ditch, but my feet are becoming tired and in the early stages, I stumble several times on the uneven ground. A deep breath to keep me calm and relax my body. I walk a few more of the inclines but can't resist flying down the hills!



The Ridgeway on leg two



©Brian Drought. Midway through leg two, I cross paths with Brian and he snaps a great photo of me

I keep step with a guy called Nick for a while. We chat whilst riding the Grim's Ditch rollercoaster Up, down, up down, round the corner and up again... We continue to cross paths numerous times during the rest of the race, eventually finishing just a handful of seconds apart.

Running out of Grim's Ditch and back towards the monotonous tarmac of the Stokes I flick another podcast on. I remember little of what I listened to with the inane chatter in my ears acting more as a distraction than entertainment.

Looking back, if I was to pick out a low point of the race it would be now, approaching halfway. As these things often are, it is entirely my own doing. I didn't enjoy this part when I ran it with Kerry and Windsor Andy in June and the negative feeling from that day is stuck in my mind today. I expect to find it dull and tedious, and surprise, surprise, I do.

I wonder what the difference would have been had I gone into those last few miles of leg two with my positive pants on?

Reaching Goring again is a relief. I run into the village hall and steal a quick glance at the race clock. 8 hours 21 minutes. If that is indeed correct and halfway is 50 miles, I have just run a 29-minute trail 50-mile PB... (I count 7:55 for a track 50 as something completely different).

A fleeting look at the clock as I rush into the hall at the end of each lap is the only time indicator I have as to how I'm doing. Having found the last few miles challenging, seeing this time in big red numbers gives me some much-needed reassurance. I walk into the main hall with a smile on my face to be greeted by Spence, Stu and Zoe.

In anticipation of the upcoming nighttime drop in temperature, I change into a long sleeve t-shirt whilst Spencer swaps my bottles over for me and stuffs my race pack with new gels and baby food. ZF's given I strip off in the middle of the hall to save time. I have my first cup of coke and sit quietly for a few minutes.

Half way. 50 miles done. 50 to go.

I'm told that one of the ladies in front of me is dropping out. This means that without taking a step, I move into fourth place as I start leg three.

- **Leg two: 23.94 miles, 4:22:28, average pace 10:59 min/mile (Plan: 4:35:00, 11:00 min/mile)**
- **30th overall, 5th female.**
- **Time spent in Goring checkpoint: 11:31 (plan 10:00)**

LEG 3: RIDGEWAY, GORING TO CHAIN HILL. MILES 50-75.

I press the lap button on my watch. Leg two is done. Forgotten about. I'm starting afresh again on leg three. I'm running 25 miles. My Garmin lap resets to zero, my mental clock resets to zero.

A new run. A new race. A new goal.

The coke instantly works its magic and I leave Goring with a bounce in my step. I still have no idea what the actual time is, but the sun is sinking fast in the sky ahead of me and I wonder if I can make it to the top of the Ridgeway before it sets.

Before the race, I was expecting this to be my least favourite section, but during the 11 minutes I spent in Goring I had a complete change of mindset. I went in on a bit of a downer. I have come out on a high. There is something very magical about seeing the start or end of a day and the possibility that I may see the sunset is an incentive to get moving.

I find myself running up the early inclines with an enthusiasm I thought was long ago lost. I don't want my walk breaks, I just want to keep going. I do make myself walk for those 60 seconds, knowing that I may regret it later if I don't. As with leg two, I slightly adapt the 9:1 run-walk ratio to the ebbs and flows of the hills.

I just miss the sunset. Not quite making it high enough on the ridge before the sun slips silently below the earth's edge. It leaves behind a vibrant blanket of pink and orange in the quickly darkening sky. I'm all alone. The runner in front is now just a tiny silhouette on the horizon. The runner behind is lost in the darkness of the shadows.

It's quiet and peaceful.

I know some people don't like nighttime running but I love the silence and solitude of running by myself at night. Tonight the sky is clear and visibility is still good. Waiting as long as possible before putting on my head torch, I look up and see a scattering of stars twinkling above my head. The route is simple, essentially a straight line of rolling and runnable hills with little need to worry about navigation.

Just after I've passed the first checkpoint, I see the head torch of the leading runner coming towards me. Pretty soon, there is a long line of lights meandering my way.

Apart from this. I have little to say about the section between East Ilsley and Chain Hill. With just the lights from nearby towns glowing brightly on the horizon, the darkness of the night has stolen the views. All I have to look at are the dancing shadows on the path in front of me.

I see the lights of the Chain Hill checkpoint in the distance and know I don't have far to go until the turnaround. Both checkpoints on this section are outside and with the wind up in the ridge, the volunteers are going to have a very chilly night. They really are the superstars of the race, especially those out amongst the elements on this third leg. Without the volunteers, there would be no race. Their selfless acts of kindness enable us to run.

I reach the checkpoint and quickly down a couple of cups of coke, my rocket fuel of choice for these latter stages. I politely decline the shots of vodka they have lined alongside the Tailwind, (although also very slightly tempted...!). As with all the checkpoints, I'm in and out in a minute or so. As I leave, I put some music on, deciding I need something lively to accompany me on my return ride to Goring.

Between the two checkpoints on the way out, I overtook the lady in third. A minute or two after the turnaround we pass each other again. I work out that I may now be three or four minutes ahead of her.

It is the most random of playlists and I apologise profoundly to anyone who heard my dulcet tones singing along to Bruno Mars, Justin Timberlake or Stormzy (told you, random...) as I have a bit of a one-woman Saturday night party on the Ridgeway!

It's funny how music can affect mood. With an up-tempo playlist, the whole section from Chain Hill back to Goring is a blast. I feel good. I feel strong. I feel happy. I feel as if I can take on the world. At times I am flying and I'm not sure I actually have enough words to describe how amazing I feel.

There are tunes in my ears and a beautiful orange half-moon rising in the sky in front of me. My legs have a spring in them and I am full of energy. 65, 70 miles into the race and I feel better than I did at 25 miles.

I'm running out of superlatives.

With the field now spread quite far out, I run most of the second half of this leg completely alone. I am in my element and this doesn't bother me in the slightest.

As I come back down the hill towards Streatley I snatch a quick glance at the time on my phone. I still haven't looked at my watch. From what I can remember, I'm ahead of my rough plan. Considerably ahead. I may be not far off being an hour earlier into Goring than I planned.

I panic that if I'm too early, Nikki, my leg four pacer, may not have arrived. In a most unlike Ally move, I realise that there is absolutely nothing I can do about this right now so I put the worry to one side and carry on.

I fly into Streatley, pass the pub I stayed at last night and across the bridge to Goring. I pass several runners on the bridge just starting leg three. Into the village hall, I forget to sneak a glance at the clock because there is Nikki, ready and waiting.

Instantly a crowd surrounds me and there is a rush of activity around me.

My pack is taken off. The empty bottles are swapped for the last two pre-filled full ones from my drop bag. The pockets are stuffed with fresh snacks.

I'm handed my flask of coffee. Made when I was last in Goring and left to brew whilst I was running leg three. I sit. I stand. Drink. I sit again. Stand again. People talk to me. At me. About me. Apparently, the second lady isn't that far in front of me. I begin to feel a little overwhelmed and am unsure of what is going on. I say things and am told things I don't now remember. I sit. I stand. I drink a bit more coffee.

After just seven minutes, my pack is put back on my back. I'm ushered out of the hall while shouting I'll see them in 25 miles. A glance from Nikki as she asks if I'm ready and presses start on her watch.

- **Leg three: 25.47 miles, 4:45:22, average pace 11:12 min/mile (Plan: 5:00:00, 12:00 min/mile)**
- **22nd overall, 3rd female.**
- **Time spent in Goring checkpoint: 7:02 (plan 10:00)**



The Thames in Goring at 8:30am on race morning

LEG 4: THAMES PATH, GORING TO READING. MILES 75-100.

I press the lap button on my watch. Leg three is done. Forgotten about. I'm starting afresh again on leg four. I only have to run 25 miles. My Garmin lap resets to zero, my mental clock resets to zero.

A new run. A new race. A new goal.

Whilst I've enjoyed the solitude of the first 75 miles, happy and content in my own company, I now relish having someone running alongside me.

Nikki and I have shared 100s of miles over the past few years, many in the deep depth of lockdown when we were only permitted to run with one other person. In my mind, this was going to be just like those runs; a lovely long chatty jog with a friend...

In reality, I have no energy to say more than a few words. My mind is more tired than my body and I struggle to form sentences. The conversation is pretty one-sided as I listen to Nikki chattering away.

I'm always humbled by the sacrifices that those who crew and pace make. Nikki, our club's cross-country captain, has missed the opening league match of the season to spend the night running with me along the Thames Path.

She crewed me at SDW100 and TP100, seeing me fly on the South Downs and crash on the Thames Path. She's seen me at my best and at my worst and knows me better than most. A super strong and disciplined

runner in her own right, she knows my loose race plan and knows exactly what needs to be done. She takes charge.

She tells me to run. I run.

She tells me to walk. I walk.

She tells me to eat. I eat.

I do as I am told.

She allows me to walk up the hill just outside Whitchurch. We run down the other side as the race leader passes us in the opposite direction. He's just a few short miles from the sweetest of victories.

Across the bridge over the river and into the Pangbourne checkpoint. I wasn't planning on stopping here but I desperately want some coke. In the rush, I forgot to have some in Goring and I have been craving it ever since.

We're swift. In, coke, two boiled potatoes (a solid food win!), and out... a minute at the most before our feet hit the ground and we're crossing Pangbourne Meadows. I feel an almost instant energy boost from the caffeine. Next stop Reading...

On route, we pass the fabled "Welcome to Reading" sign. The sign that raises runners' hopes and breaks their spirits all in one.

It is not in Reading.

It is nowhere near Reading.

It is still approximately 34276 miles to the Reading checkpoint.

I know this. I am prepared for this. I stick my finger up at the welcome in defiance and carry on.

A little before the actual checkpoint and the turnaround, we see Debbie and her pacer Kirsty running towards us. I realise that she must have overtaken Mari. It spurs me on knowing that as the race leader, she is not that far in front of me.

I tell Nikki that I want to claim back the three minutes I saved in Goring for a brief sit down in Reading. I feel like a child asking permission.

The steps into the checkpoint that I have heard so many complaints about don't bother me. I'm focusing on the sit-down I get at the top. In the back of my mind, I am wondering where Mari is. I grab a coke and slide gratefully into a chair. Ian Robertson has his usual array of vegan bakes but as much as I want to eat some real food, the thought of it turns my stomach.

As I'm drinking, Mari comes back into the main room from the ladies. I greet her and ask how she is. She tells me she's not enjoying this section. As she is handed a cup of hot tea, I catch Nikki's eye. I haven't had my full three minutes rest but I say to her "I think I'm ready to go now", knowing that if I leave whilst Mari is still in the CP I will move into second place... a concept that literally blows my mind.

The coke and this knowledge gets me out of the chair, down those stairs and back onto the Thames Path quicker than I thought possible. I'm not sure how much time I have, but if Mari is drinking a hot drink, I should be able to get at least a small head start on her.

Nikki knows me well enough to know what I am thinking without any words being said. She takes control as we ease back into a run. When the walk alarm beeps a couple of minutes later, she decides that we are skipping the walk break and pushing on to the next, I mean, I did just have a 30-second sit-down!

Moving into second place has given me such a boost. I can't get my head around it. Me, in second. Third was a crazy enough notion, but second? My goal is 20 hours, anything more than that is an added bonus. This is now an incentive to keep moving, to keep pushing. I'm on the home straight and I don't want to lose it now.



Following the pink ribbons...

I am tired and my whole body hurts. There is a deep, deep ache in my legs and my feet feel like heavy weights tied on the end of them.

I'm digging deep. Nikki runs in front of me setting the pace and reminding me to focus on form and technique. I follow, imagining a rope between us pulling me along. Head high, shoulders relaxed, hips high, knees high, using my arms to drive me forward. Focusing on good running form takes my mind off of the pain and discomfort.

Nikki does my thinking for me.

She tells me when to run.

She tells me when to walk.

She tells me when to eat.

This is the first 100 that I am still "eating" in the final miles. It is also the first race that I haven't had embarrassing stomach issues – no urgent diving behind bushes today! Like my whole race day approach, I removed the fuelling pressure and kept it simple.

I ate 'real' food for as long as I could. When my body told me it had had enough of solids (the sandwiches at Swyncombe), I didn't force myself to eat food I didn't want. In previous races, I have done this with detrimental results.

I have one 500ml flask of strong Tailwind for each leg. I sip throughout using my walk alert as a prompt to drink. I have a gel or baby food sachet every 30 minutes and drink coke at checkpoints in the second half. I'm not monitoring or counting my calorie and carb intake. I simply make sure I have a little something every half an hour.

I never once run out of energy and I never once feel nauseous. This is a first for me over this distance.

Nikki counts down. Three minutes. Two minutes. 90 seconds until I can walk... I live for those fleeting walk breaks. 60 brief seconds of respite that is over all too soon.

We stick as religiously to the 9:1 run-walk ratio in leg four as I did in leg one. The only exception is the occasional small incline. I marvel at my body. At how strong it is. 90+ miles and running for nine minutes at a time at what still feels like a reasonable pace.

I say reasonable pace. I have no actual idea what pace I am running, I base this judgment purely on feel. I'm still not looking at my watch. I've slowed down enough that my HR is easily within range so I don't even check that. I still have no idea how far I have run, how long I have been running, what pace I am running at, or even what time of day it is.

I've found not knowing the distance/time/pace quite liberating as it has removed all (self-imposed) pressure.

As we move further away from Reading, the twinkle of head torches coming towards us becomes more frequent. Sometimes just one solitary light, a runner without a pacer. At other times, a line of lights snakes its way along the path towards us. In the darkness of the night, the lights are blinding and it's hard to see faces until we're almost on top of each other. I nearly run right by Kerry but Nikki spots her just in time.

We don't stop at Pangbourne on the return journey. My need for the finish line is greater than my need for coke. I volunteered at Pangbourne last year and spent most of my time telling runners it was less than five miles to go.

Crossing the river for the last time we climb up through Whitchurch. We walk the hill and my feet are momentarily thankful for the ease of the tarmac. A small respite from the uneven, grassy path across Pangbourne Meadows.

The final decent. A wonderful winding and twisty woodland trail. I would fly down a hill like this on a normal day with reckless abandonment. Today is not a normal day. Not trusting my fatigued feet, I tip-toe gingerly down one tiny step at a time.

Out of the woods and back alongside the river. I know I'm close but I don't know how close. My run has become more of a shuffle and my moaning is a little louder. I use anything that remotely resembles an incline as a reason to walk a step or two.

Under the railway line, I can see lights up ahead. Maybe a mile to go. Nick, who I met on leg two and last seen a few miles back, appears behind us again. One moment he's in front of me. The next moment I'm in front of him. Around the fields just outside of Goring. My headtorch gives a final dramatic flicker and dies. I don't want to waste time rummaging around in my pack for my spare so Nikki lights the path ahead for both of us. There's a bridge up ahead. I confidently tell Nikki it's not the bridge between Streatley and Goring. It's another bridge.

Turns out it is the bridge between Streatley and Goring...

The slight incline up to the road feels like a huge mountain but now it's one I climb with enthusiasm. The village hall and a gaggle of hi-vis-clad volunteers are mere metres away. Smiling, I pick up my pace for a "sprint" finish... Through the side gate, down the alley, a timing beep, an arch of twinkling fairy lights, round the corner, in the back door of the village hall and done.

A very unceremonious finish.

Music is playing. The room is full of people. I have no idea who. I sit. Someone hands me a buckle. Someone else gives me a t-shirt. There's chatter all around me. Stu tells me I've run sub-18:30. I don't believe him. I can't focus on my watch to see.

James checks the official timing. Second lady in 18:27:25.

I can't comprehend this. How the absolute f**k have I just managed that? Not just my 20-hour goal, 92 minutes quicker than my 20-hour goal! WTAF.

- **Leg four: 25.38 miles, 4:59:44, average pace 11:48 min/mile (Plan: 5:25:00, 13:00 min/mile)**
- **15th overall, 2nd female.**



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I must mention Nikki's pacing on leg four here. She knew my rough goal was 5:25:00 for this section. Her goal, (based on what she knew and I didn't at the end of leg three) was 5:00:00. She brought me in with 16 seconds to spare! She was like a metronome. Bang, bang, bang. Consistent, steady pacing.

- We ran from Goring to Pangbourne on the way out in **58:50**
- And from Pangbourne to Goring on the way back in **58:14**
- From Pangbourne to Reading on the way out in **1:36:44**
- And from Reading to Pangbourne on the way back in **1:35:38**
- Goring to Reading – **2:35:34**
- Reading to Goring – **2:33:52**

This consistency blows my mind. As she said, it's what you get when you ask a road runner to pace you on the trails!

| | | | | | | |
|------------------|-----|----|----|-------|----------|----------|
| Goring Leg 3 End | 22. | 3. | 3. | 11:04 | 01:09:49 | 13:17:58 |
| Pangbourne Out | 21. | 3. | 3. | 12:00 | 00:58:50 | 14:16:48 |
| Reading | 18. | 3. | 3. | 12:43 | 01:36:44 | 15:53:32 |
| Pangbourne Back | 15. | 2. | 2. | 12:34 | 01:35:38 | 17:29:10 |
| Finish | 15. | 2. | 2. | 11:53 | 00:58:14 | 18:27:25 |

REFLECTION

- 100 miles
- 18:27:25
- 15th overall
- 2nd female
- 2:44:50 100-mile PB

In some ways, it feels very strange writing this blog. As a typically reserved Brit, I am not used to talking about my own successes. But here, there really is no way around it. It's taken me six attempts, but finally, finally, I have had a race where everything came together. A race where everything, and I mean everything, went right.

I have worked bloody hard for this. Not just for the finish time and position (which is an unexpected added bonus!). I have worked hard for the whole positive race experience. I trained physically for this race, but I also trained my mind and learned from my previous five 100-milers. You could almost say that this result has been three and a half years in the making.

Everything that I did at Autumn 100 came about from learning from when things didn't go right in other races. In the words of Elizabeth Day; **"Learning from our failures is actually learning how to succeed"**.

At Thames Path 100, I put myself under too much self-imposed pressure to perform. The biggest win for me at Autumn 100 was removing that pressure. The only thing I monitored during the whole race was my heart rate.

I did not look at the time, pace or distance. I ran not knowing how fast or slow I was running, how far I'd gone, or how far I had to go.

I put trust in my training. Focusing on the process, not the outcome. I was aiming for 20 hours. I knew I was capable of this and that if I ran easy on the first leg, the rest should fall into place. Not obsessing over numbers was liberating and made the race so much more enjoyable!

And it worked. At the end of leg one, I was 62nd overall and 9th female. I finished 15th and second.

Start easy, finish strong.

At my first 100-mile race in 2019, I crashed, burned and walked the final 35 miles. Adopting a run-walk strategy from the start at Autumn 100 was a game changer.

I didn't **need** the 60-second walk breaks in leg one, but taking them enabled me to run the 9-minute blocks at the end of leg four. Even when tired, I knew I could keep running for 'just' nine minutes. In previous races, I've adopted a much more reactionary run-walk strategy and inevitably ended up walking for longer. Run walking is not a sign of weakness, it's a sign of strength and discipline.

I have had digestion issues and bouts of nausea in every other race. **Not getting fuelling right was the reason for my DNF at Wendover Woods 100 in 2021.** My legs felt great, my stomach did not.

Again, at A100 I kept it simple and took away the pressure. I didn't try to force myself to eat 'real' foods because that's what I thought I should do and what people told me I should do. I listened to MY body and the difference that made was staggering. It was by no means perfect, I mean, 18 hours of Tailwind, gels, baby food and coke isn't exactly good nutrition, but it kept me going throughout, my stomach was happy and I never once ran out of energy.

The simplicity of my fuelling helped in other ways. **It removed the temptation to waste time.** It's very difficult to make decisions when you're tired at 75 miles and the time wasted trying to decide between peanut butter or jam sandwiches, adds up.

My drop bag at Goring was my main checkpoint and I had everything lined up for a quick turnaround. Pre-filled bottles with my favourite Tailwind flavour mixed to my preferred strength. End of the leg, swap empty for full. 10, 20 seconds max. No faffing.

I had a labelled bag of things I'd need for each leg. Gels and baby food sachets. A clean buff, a long sleeve top and pair of gloves for leg three. My watch charger for leg four. When I got to Goring, I didn't need to think. I didn't need to make any decisions. It was there, labelled, ready and waiting for me.

I was aiming for no more than 10 minutes in Goring between each leg. I took a combined time of 23 minutes and 4 seconds. During the whole race, **I only had 31 minutes and 10 seconds of elapsed, non-moving time.** I find that pretty incredible as I've been known to spend that long in one checkpoint before. In fact, I think that's about how long my temper tantrum at Henley was at Thames Path 100... I was moving for 17:56:15 of my 18:27:25 race time.



The biggest learning? **I am stronger than I think I am.**

I thought I could run a 20-hour 100 miler. Turns out, I can do so much more than that.

I finished my TP100 blog with the line: **"...Because you never know what you are capable of if you don't try. I tried. Today I didn't fly. But perhaps next time I will soar like a bird."**

At Autumn 100, I tried again and **I did indeed soar like a bird.**

And you know what. It feels bloody amazing!

|  | 15 | 115 | Whitlock, Ally | | F | F40 | Finish | 11:04 | Finished | 2022-10-16 03:27:24 | 18:27:25 |  |
|---|----|--------|----------------|--------|-------|----------|----------|-------|----------|---------------------|----------|---|
| Split | | O.Pos. | C.Pos. | G.Pos. | Pace | Duration | Time | | | | | |
| Wallingford Out | | 66. | 10. | 12. | 9:19 | 01:00:36 | 01:00:36 | | | | | |
| Little Wittenham | | 62. | 9. | 11. | 8:22 | 00:50:16 | 01:50:52 | | | | | |
| Wallingford Back | | 65. | 10. | 12. | 9:08 | 00:54:51 | 02:45:43 | | | | | |
| Goring Leg 1 End | | 62. | 7. | 9. | 9:58 | 01:04:50 | 03:50:33 | | | | | |
| North Stoke Out | | 49. | 6. | 8. | 13:12 | 00:52:51 | 04:43:24 | | | | | |
| Swyncombe | | 33. | 4. | 4. | 9:58 | 01:24:45 | 06:08:09 | | | | | |
| North Stoke Back | | 32. | 5. | 5. | 10:05 | 01:25:46 | 07:33:55 | | | | | |
| Goring Leg 2 End | | 30. | 5. | 5. | 11:58 | 00:47:53 | 08:21:48 | | | | | |
| East Ilsley Down Out | | 26. | 4. | 4. | 12:48 | 01:20:44 | 09:42:32 | | | | | |
| Chain Hill | | 24. | 3. | 3. | 12:13 | 01:15:49 | 10:58:21 | | | | | |
| East Ilsley Down Back | | 22. | 3. | 3. | 11:15 | 01:09:48 | 12:08:09 | | | | | |
| Goring Leg 3 End | | 22. | 3. | 3. | 11:04 | 01:09:49 | 13:17:58 | | | | | |
| Pangbourne Out | | 21. | 3. | 3. | 12:00 | 00:58:50 | 14:16:48 | | | | | |
| Reading | | 18. | 3. | 3. | 12:43 | 01:36:44 | 15:53:32 | | | | | |
| Pangbourne Back | | 15. | 2. | 2. | 12:34 | 01:35:38 | 17:29:10 | | | | | |
| Finish | | 15. | 2. | 2. | 11:53 | 00:58:14 | 18:27:25 | | | | | |

Race stats



STRIDERS COUCH TO 5K (by Peter Johnson)

Around two and a half years ago, I attended the Leadership in Running Fitness course, with just some basic objectives in mind of being able to lead a run competently and to assist the club in ensuring that it has sufficient numbers of qualified coaches and leaders. However, hearing other attendees of the course explaining their aims, which included setting up Couch to 5k courses and making running more accessible to their local community, inspired me to broaden my thinking and believe, as a direct result of the course, that I could also deliver a Couch to 5k programme.

I made the club, through the committee, aware of my plans shortly after the course, but they became more concrete after a Striders' parkrun social at Clapham Common, where I discussed the idea in detail with Annabel Crouch, who also explained to me that it wouldn't just be great for new runners to have access to Couch to 5k, but it would also be so beneficial for steadier runners wanting to return to running following injury. I became aware that Annabel had a programme intended for her colleagues at work, which she sent to me. I made some tweaks and adapted it so that we could use it for a weekly session.

I ran my plans by the committee, but Covid hampered the delivery date; however, it was agreed that friends and family of existing member of Striders could participate, and the intended start date was set for 8 July 2021. Spring and summer are definitely the best times of the year for starting a programme, as there's less chance of people dropping out because the weather is cold, rainy or snowy and because it's dark.



The biggest requirement I had was to recruit people to assist with the programme. Participants in the early weeks need running buddies to help them. We have a distraction programme in that time where I get volunteers from the club to run and talk with participants so that they don't realise, for example, that they have just run for a minute. This might not seem difficult, but if you haven't run since you've been at school,

then it's a big deal. I was fortunate that Annabel Crouch, Nikki Javan, Stuart Hills, Alex Legge, Keith Murkin, Lynn Hann plus some occasional guests helped to support the runners.

The programme was advertised via email and the newsletter. We had about 14 people attend the first session and they ranged from those that hadn't run since their school days to those that had lost confidence, whether it was due to injury, Covid, or some other reason, and needed a helping hand to get back to running.

The first few weeks of the course are held at Sandilands, which allows us to show off the facilities of the club to potential new members, although there's an annual chat that I now always seem to have with the cricket Chairman, so they know we are there. Around week 5 the sessions are moved to the REPS field in Lloyd Park, and we have the final session before the South Norwood parkrun graduation around the roads near Sandilands.



The first session starts with an introduction with the Strider members saying how they got into running and what they could do now. One clear memory was Nikki's poignant description of needing some time for herself after her daughter was born and that it had to be a completely different hobby from that of her husband; she described it a lot better than me, but it really resonated with the group.

After the introduction, we established some basic rules, such as the group is always supportive of each other; that encouragement is our ethos; and that as everyone will develop at different stages not to compare yourself with anyone else in the group. We also want people to have fun so that they return each week. We maintained this ethos throughout the course. The session always starts with a warm-up, followed by the session, and ends with some stretches. Structure is really important, especially in the early stages, as well as embedding best practice.

Warm-ups have to be a bit different, so we start the early sessions with a brisk walk. I'm sure most people that attended got fed up with me saying we need to walk a bit faster to catch the train, but it was an effective way of increasing heart rate without running or jogging.

I'm not going to describe each week, but the first week involves running for a minute and walking for 3 minutes and we complete that 4 times. By week 4, we have increased that to running 3 minutes and walking 3 minutes 5 times. Within 4 weeks, we have gone from a total of 4 minutes running to 15. I can tell you that if I told the group in week 1 that they could run 15 minutes, they would have thought that I had taken leave of my senses.

From week 3, we run-walk for 30 minutes. gradually change the ratio between running and walking so that we run more and the number of reps decreases. I always mention how important the walking aspect is – time on feet is vitally important and it helps build up the running distance in a safe way. In week 9, there is 9 minutes running, one minute walking with just 3 reps. Week 10 sees a huge jump and always worries those that take part as we move to 13 minutes running, 2 minutes walking, with just 2 reps.

Of course, they couldn't have reached this point without doing some "homework" and it's been a joy to see groups of people send photos of their homework in to the dedicated WhatsApp group we set up to support those that take part.



The latter weeks introduce the group to running up hills. We extend the route we take in the REPS field to take in the incline and we also introduce them to looping so that they can seamlessly transfer to Group 5 or even Group 4 or 3 following graduation.

The final weeks really show how the group have improved from the initial weeks. The breathing issues they may have had in week 2 have now disappeared and there's a confidence to their running

Last year I arranged two separate parkrun Saturdays for graduation as not everyone could make it on the same week. It was a real joy when graduation day came, as participants couldn't believe their progress and that they were now able to run a 5k without stopping. For me, it was hugely rewarding.



From that first programme: Donna Murkin and Sally Bartlett have just completed a marathon. Sally also smashed her half marathon personal best recently running under 2hrs 30mins, something she had previously thought impossible. She always credits Couch to 5k in her running achievements, but she has worked incredibly hard.

With the success of the first year's programme, my plan was to run a new Couch to 5k program starting in April 2022. However, this didn't take into account the injury I suffered towards the end of 2021, which ended up requiring knee surgery in March 2002. Those plans had to be put on hold.

I ended up having to adapt the Couch to 5k plan for myself so that I could get back to running – I can remember walking Wimbledon Common parkrun in over 48 minutes towards the end of April and being able

to run a bit the following week at Swanley, about 30 seconds at a time and achieving just over 44 minutes. A couple of weeks later, I was able to run a bit more and was delighted to achieve 34 minutes. I was on a strict run-walk strategy, physio's orders, and can remember being told by someone that I was close to the finish and could run the last part. The same happened at Folkestone a few weeks later. However, despite the temptation, it's really important not to overdo things and stay disciplined, and it gave me a greater understanding of the Couch to 5k participant.

The 34 minutes parkrun gave me confidence that I could start a new Couch to 5k program for 2022 with a start date towards the end of June, so with the club's help this was publicised and year two began on 23rd June. A lot of the same helpers returned, in particular Keith and Stuart. It was great to see Donna assist, as she had graduated from the previous year, but we had new supporters in Yaz, Susanna Luttman and Kara Boaks, and their help was invaluable. We also had others supporting the odd week or two and I'm very grateful for all those that helped.

The programme was very similar to the previous year. We did have to deal with a lot of very warm evenings, which allowed us to stress the importance of hydration. We ended up with a split graduation this year: one around the roads of Sandilands and the other a couple of days later at South Norwood parkrun.

Last week, as I write this, 25th October, there were 6 people that attended REPS who had either attended the Couch to 5k program or had started in group 5 following its resurrection after Couch to 5k in 2021. This really is great to see. I can also see that this year's graduates have started to move up to other groups.

I'm really proud of this programme and I think it has enhanced the activities offered by the club. I was also very proud and thankful to have won a recognition award at the recent AGM, which was something I wasn't expecting, and to have received so many positive comments about Couch to 5k.

Without tempting fate, my plan is to run Couch to 5k from April 2023, once the clocks go forward and there's less chance of wintry weather. We may need to widen our reach to potential participants, as we have probably exhausted family and friends of Striders' members. I will, of course, be looking for volunteers again. Please consider it. I'm sure all those that have been involved previously will tell you how rewarding it is.



MARATHON MEDICINE CONFERENCE 2022 (by Selena Wong)

The London Marathon Medicine conference is a free annual half-day event, now in its 38th year and is always held the day before the London Marathon. I first learned about it in 2015, when I had signed up to run my first marathon at London and my interest was piqued, so I signed up, went along and was dazzled by the fast-paced, 30 minute lectures on the science of running. It was my first taste of sport and exercise medicine.

Since then I have returned each year to enjoy listening to eminent, internationally-renowned sports scientists present their most recent, cutting-edge findings in this niche field of medicine. The event is hosted at the Royal Institute of British Architects in central London and includes a 'fluids and carbohydrates break' with a chance to mingle and meet the other attendees, most of whom are doctors or physiotherapists and are going to be involved in the marathon either as runners or on the medical support teams.

This year was my first in-person event since the pandemic, so it was especially good to be back. The topics were:

- What makes Kipchoge so good? The fourth dimension in the physiology of marathon running
- The aetiology of bone stress in female athletes
- The postpartum runner: a unique opportunity to prepare for injury
- Strategies to improve the durability of masters runners
- Cardiovascular effects of endurance exercise: mainly good but some concerns

The conference always finishes with a round-table question and answer session with the speakers. If this is an event that you would be interested in, then look out for its return on 22nd April 2023. Tickets are available on Eventbrite several weeks beforehand.

Strategies to Improve the Durability of Masters Runners

This talk was presented by Dr Richard Willy, a researcher based at the University of Montana and an experienced clinician specialising in the treatment of the injured runner.

Masters athletes are runners over the age of 35 years and they account for the fastest-growing age group in marathons making up more than half of all marathoners, however they have unique challenges in terms of injury. Dr Willy shared research demonstrating that the injuries suffered by this group differs to their younger counterparts. The younger runner is more likely to experience bone stress injuries and anterior knee pain, whereas the masters runner is more susceptible to soft tissue injuries to the lower leg and foot, namely Achilles tendinopathy, calf strains and plantar fasciitis.

Dr Willy explains that these types of injuries are more common due to the altered running biomechanics and changes in the tendon quality seen in older runners. Sarcopenia is the progressive loss of skeletal muscle mass and strength that occurs to us all as we get older. This, coupled with a gradual loss of tendon stiffness, results in characteristic changes in biomechanics: a declining step length, reduced leg stiffness, and a loss in propulsive power from the ankle complex. (Tendon stiffness and leg stiffness are regarded as desirable qualities that improve running economy).

He points out that endurance running alone is not enough to maintain muscle mass and function as we age. Training of these athletes should therefore focus on improving muscle quality and tendon health with recommendations made for strength training at high load with low repetitions.

His research has shown that strength training 2-3 times a week is optimal, targeting the plantarflexors (mainly the soleus muscle) with weighted heel raises and heel raises up on toes. The weights should be

heavy, but the repetitions are low in volume and slow (such as 3 sets of 6-8 reps, with 3-second phases). Tendons thrive under high load; lift heavy and slow, but a lot of volume is not necessary. Dr Willy recommends doing this strength training before going for a run.

Finally, being able to continue running is considered the ideal model for successful ageing and has undoubted health benefits and reduced mortality. Maintaining high levels of training with running volume and intensity slows the rate of VO2max decline and should be encouraged. To mitigate the risks of specific injuries in this age group, he advises to plan for more recovery time between hard sessions and prioritise resistance training over stretching.

Further reading: Willy RW, Paquette MR. The physiology and biomechanics of the master runner. Sports Medicine and Arthroscopy Review. 2019 Mar 1;27(1):15-21.



Selena at the Surrey Masters Cross-Country Championships

(photo by Stephen Allport)

COMPETITIVE HIGHLIGHTS: SEPTEMBER – NOVEMBER 2022

In the final Southern Veterans League match of the season, at Walton on 5 September, Striders did very well in the 3000 metres, where Tatsuya Okamoto won the men's race (9:57.2) and Rachel Lindley won the women's race (11:17.7). Steve Massey was second in the M50 race (11:11.7), having also placed second in the M50 800 metres (2:29.8). Nikki Javan was third in the women's 800 metres (3:00.1) and won the B 3000 metres (13:12.4). Sandra Francis was second in both the women's long jump (3.08) and the women's discus, where she set a club W65 record of 8.64 metres. Sam O'Dongo was second in the men's long jump (4.27) and third in both the M40 800 metres (2:28.4) and the M40 discus (14.09).

On 18 September, Striders' men did very well to finish seventh in the Surrey Road Relays at Wimbledon Park. This was the first time that Striders had entered this event since 2016, and was their best placing in this event. The team comprised James Rhodes (16:29), Andrew Aitken (16:18), Tatsuya Okamoto (16:02), Martin Filer (16:43), Harry Madgwick-Lawton (16:28) and Phil Coales (15:46).

Striders had 21 finishers in the London Marathon on 2 October, led by Jay Lidbetter who ran 2:55:13. Steve Corfield also ran well to set a new club over-60 record of 3 hours 22 minutes 42.

Striders' men placed third in the East Surrey League cross-country race at Lloyd Park on 9 October. Phil Coales was fifth, Tatsuya Okamoto eighth, Andrew Aitken eleventh and Lee Flanagan 12th. Striders' women placed fourth. Consuelo Kennefick was the eighth woman to finish, with Kara Boaks 11th, Cindy Siu 18th and Debra Bourne 20th. In the Chicago Marathon on the same day, James Bennett set a new Striders over-40 record of 2 hours 35 minutes 47.

On 15 October, Striders' women did very well to finish fourth out of 26 clubs in their Surrey Cross-Country League Division Two match at Reigate. Jennifer Gutteridge ran well to place 17th, Kara Boaks was 34th, Ellyw Evans 39th, Jemma Zakariyyau 40th and Kate Marshall 59th. Striders' men placed equal fourth in their Division Three match at the same venue. Phil Coales ran very well to place third of the 135 finishers, Andrew Aitken was 17th, with Lee Flanagan 21st, Peter Mills 23rd, Martin Filer 40th, Simon Ambrosi 46th and Luke Burden 52nd. Steve Corfield was the first over-60 to finish, placing 56th overall, while Marc Burrows was 60th and Graeme Drysdale completed the A team in 67th.

On the same weekend, Ally Whitlock was the second woman to finish the Centurion 100-mile race from Goring-on-Thames, setting a club record of 18 hours 27 minutes 25.

In the Valencia Half-Marathon on 23 October, Consuelo Kennefick set a club W50 record of 99 minutes 44. On the same day, Steve Corfield was the first over-60 to finish the Croydon 10K (39:23).

In the Surrey Masters Cross-Country Championships, at Nonsuch Park on 29 October, Striders won silver medals in the M60 team competition, which was the first time that Striders had won team medals in any age-group in the Surrey Cross-Country Championships. Matthew Stone ran well to place second in the M60 race, while Steve Corfield was third and Jon Dean was eleventh. Striders had two other individual medallists, with Consuelo Kennefick placing third in the W50 race and Robert Zietz third in the M65 race. In the M70 age-group, Keith Simpson placed fourth while David Hoben was sixth. Tatsuya Okamoto placed sixth in the M40 race, while Justin Macenhill was tenth in the M50 race.

Striders' women placed seventh in their Surrey Cross-Country League Division Two match at Oxshott on 12 November. Jennifer Gutteridge was 22nd, Kara Boaks 28th, Ellyw Evans 43rd, Nikki Javan 66th and Anna O'Sullivan 76th. Striders' men were third in their Division Three match at the same venue. Phil Coales again ran well to place fifth, Harry Madgwick-Lawton was 14th, James Rhodes 15th, Peter Mills 21st, Andrew Aitken 24th, Lee Flanagan 38th, Erik Schrijnemaekers 54th, Luke Burden 66th and Tom Vincent 72nd. Steve Corfield was first in the over-60 category and 74th overall.

In the London Cross-Country Championships at Parliament Hill on 19 November, Phil Coales was 104th, Harry Madgwick-Lawton 105th and Andrew Aitken 148th. A week later, Striders had 26 finishers in the South of the Thames Cross-Country race at Lloyd Park. Matthew Stone was first in the over-60 category.

40 YEARS AGO: LOCAL ATHLETICS IN WINTER 1982/83

The Surrey Women's Cross-Country Championships were held at Richmond Park on 11 December. The senior women's race was won by Julie Standing of Crawley, while Epsom won the team event with Croydon Harriers second. Croydon's team was led by Australian Diane Chettle, who finished sixth, while Samantha Lloyd was 11th and Jill Burchett 15th.

The men's championships were held separately on 8 January, on a hilly course at Frimley. Bob Treadwell of Surrey Beagles gained a comfortable win, finishing 53 seconds ahead of the runner-up, Tim Crossman of Woking. Aldershot won the team event with Epsom second. Of our local clubs, South London Harriers were fourth, led by Andy Evans who ran well to finish seventh. Croydon Harriers were eighth, led by Don Faircloth who placed 21st.

Bob Treadwell also won the Southern Championships over a muddy course at Cockfosters on 12 February, while Aldershot again won the team event.

The Surrey Cross-Country League was celebrating its 21st season, and had been split into three divisions for the first time. Aldershot won the Division One title for the eleventh successive year, more than 400 points clear of South London Harriers and Herne Hill, who tied for second place. Epsom (4th) and Belgrave (5th) retained their Division One status, while Croydon Harriers (6th) and Ranelagh (7th) were relegated to Division Two. Hercules-Wimbledon won the Division Two title, with Metropolitan Police also gaining promotion in second place. The newly-formed Division Three was won by a new and short-lived club named Omega, who were based at a public house in Weybridge. Woking placed second.

The Surrey Women's League was in its fourth season, and still comprised just one division, with 15 clubs. Croydon Harriers won the league for the second time, finishing two points clear of Epsom, with Surrey Beagles third. South London Harriers had entered a team for the first time, and finished ninth.

The highlight of Aldershot's highly successful season came on 5 March, when they won the team event in the National Cross-Country Championships, held on an unusually flat and dry course at Luton. Aldershot had five of the first 23 runners to finish. The individual winner was 24-year-old Tim Hutchings of Crawley, who now works as a TV commentator. Defending champion Dave Clarke of Hercules-Wimbledon was second, while Bob Treadwell ran well to finish ninth. Of our local clubs, South London Harriers placed 33rd, with their leading runners being Andy Evans (158th), Dave Lockley (204th) and Francis Upcott (230th). Croydon Harriers placed 121st, with their first man home being Alan Dolton who finished 374th.



The 1983 National Cross-Country Championships at Luton

10 YEARS AGO: LOCAL ATHLETICS IN WINTER 2013

Striders produced a good team performance to place seventh in the Surrey Cross-Country Championships, held on 5 January at Lloyd Park. Striders were led by Iain Harrison who ran very well to place 38th. He was closely followed by Lee Flanagan who was 39th. Krzysztof Klidzia was 52nd, John Foster 72nd, Taylor Huggins 98th and Chris Morton 108th. Earlier, Striders' women were led by Josephine Thompson who ran well to place 60th, while Debra Bourne was 78th and Linda Daniel 100th.

In the penultimate Surrey Cross-Country League Division Two match of the season, at Mitcham Common on 12 January, Striders finished sixth. They were led by Lee Flanagan, who produced his best run of the season to place eleventh of the 167 finishers, covering the five-mile course in 31 minutes 33. Krzysztof Klidzia also ran well to place 30th (32:47), while new member Matthew Smith made an impressive debut to finish 49th (33:45). He was closely followed by Damian Macenhill in 53rd (33:51) and Simon Ambrosi in 56th (34:00). John Foster ran well to win the over-50 category and place 59th overall (34:05). Darren Bird was 64th (34:28) with Taylor Huggins 66th (34:31), Steve Starvis 72nd (35:00) and Lee Wadsworth completing the scoring team in 79th (35:16). Striders also had seven non-scorers.

Earlier in the day, Striders' women also finished sixth in their Division Two match on the same course. Striders were led by Steph Upton who placed 80th of the 320 finishers, recording 39 minutes 40. Josephine Thompson was 104th (41:10) with Debra Bourne 140th (43:13), Alice Ewen 159th (44:03) and Stephanie Moss 183rd (45:18).

Striders produced a good team performance in their final Surrey Cross-Country League Division Two match of the season at Dorking on 9 February. They finished fourth of the nine clubs in the match, and finished fifth in the final Division Two table. Striders were led by Lee Flanagan who ran very well to place tenth of the 162 finishers, covering the undulating five-mile course in 33 minutes 06 seconds. Iain Harrison also ran well to place 14th (33:24) with Krzysztof Klidzia just behind him in 15th (33:26). Damian Macenhill was 39th (35:01) with Darren Bird 51st (35:51) and Taylor Huggins 57th (36:17). John Foster ran very well to win the over-50 category, placing 59th overall (36:22). Simon Ambrosi was 75th (37:11) with Mick Turner 83rd (37:37) and Barry White completing the scoring team in 84th (37:38).

Earlier in the day, Striders' women also competed at Dorking, in the final Surrey Women's Cross-Country League match of the season. They placed 11th in the Division Two match, and finished ninth in the final Division Two table. They were led by Steph Upton who finished 83rd (42:39), just one place and one second ahead of club colleague Josephine Thompson. Linda Daniel was 190th (50:04) with Sarah Fisher 202nd (51:06) and Isabelle Kita completing the A team in 232nd (54:51).



Striders faced strong opposition in the South of England Cross-Country Championships, held at Parliament Hill on Saturday 16 February. They did well to place 18th of the 31 competing clubs. Their best performance came from Iain Harrison who placed 126th of the 541 finishers, completing the very muddy 15-kilometre course in 59 minutes 36 seconds. Krzysztof Klidzia also ran well to finish 166th (61:42). Taylor Huggins was 263rd (66:11) with Barry White 306th (68:47), Chris Morton 329th (70:05) and Simon Webster 353rd (71:06). Steph Upton ran well to place 118th of 256 finishers in the women's race, covering the five-mile course in 39 minutes 24.

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