

# TRENTHAM RUNNING CLUB

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## Navigation

[Home Page](#)

[About Trentham](#)

[Membership Details](#)

[Training Groups](#)

[Trentham 10](#)

[Dave Clarke 5 K](#)

[Werrington 10K](#)

[Cross Country](#)

[Junior Section](#)

[Older News & Reports](#)

[Club Championships](#)

[Club Records](#)

[Useful Links](#)

[Contact Details](#)

[News & Events](#)

## January 2014 Reports and News

Happy New Year :-)

### Droitwich XC Birmingham League

Thanks to Craig Taylor for sending in this report hot off the press from Saturday's race at Droitwich. Both the Ladies Midlands League and the Men's Birmingham League races were held at the shared venue so a real team day out to the West Midlands. Read on to see how it was if you were not there yourself:

Ahhh what better way to spend your Saturday morning after a long week at work then travelling back down the M6 to Droitwich. I've never been the place before and there was some slight confusion whether we should be heading off to some fictional place called 'Dorich' as our beloved Captain Mr Pickstock famously pronounced it and has been roundly destroyed for doing so ever since! Bless his little cotton socks!

Anyway, before this XC season and joining Trentham I hated XC with a passion. Almost as much as I hate taxi drivers (sorry Lee,) lorry drivers (sorry Janson) and people who don't indicate (half of the nation, it seems.) As these are very much team events and wanted to give back to my club I have done every single one of them to date and managed with a bit of sweet talking and grovelling managed to get us into this Birmingham and District League some four months after the deadline for entry had passed.

Our first two races and Leamington and Stafford Common had seen us run away with the league so far and because of this a big win at Droitwich would have seen both the A and B teams pretty much wrap it up with one fixture left which is fair going if you think about over a short (sorry Dave) format.

My last two XC's both at Stafford Common in this Birmingham league and also at the Staffs XC Championships have been a bit of nightmare as I totally lost my shoe in the mud in the league race knocking me back a good few minutes and then last week at the Championships the thing got sucked off my feet four times which I had to stop and put it back on. Needless to say I have been mercilessly ridiculed particularly by Paul Burslem ever since!

My car on the way down there was full of the likely lads, me, Captain Pugwash, sorry, Pickstock, Tom Hallway, Scotty Minshall and the legend that is Roger Taylor. I only found out that weekend that Rog had successfully completed the Bob Graham Round. Ultimate respect. After erecting the tent in some fashion that was maybe not as slick as previous erections due to it being a little soft at one side some of the lads took a reccy of the course. The verdict? Very muddy with tarmac. Excellent - my rather rubbish spikes can do one, it was time for the trail shoes to take centre stage. And they WOULD definitely stay on my feet. I hoped.

We watched the ladies strut their stuff and again some great individual and overall team performance. Richard has got them working like a well-oiled machine. Special mention for Mandy, Laura, Debs, Christine, Jodie and Lauren. Great stuff girls. As we were limbering up for the off I wasn't really expecting much my last two XC disasters had knocked my confidence a bit although I actually ran well in them when I wasn't busy sorting my footwear out. We had a pretty strong team out too so to finish in the top 6 of the first team was going to be a tall ask. I also noticed that I was the only one wearing gloves so felt a bit of a Jessie but hey, they are my running comfort blanket! We were told the course had to be changed due to that good old phrase health and safety. Wonderful. So we would do 2 small laps, a medium lap and 4 big ones. I was already worried I was going to forget how many laps

☒ I had done as being a bloke multi-tasking aint a strong point of mine!

And we were off. As per usual everybody seemed to go flying past me. Not to panic a XC race like this one is more about strength and endurance and not knowing the course there is no-way I was going to go bombing off like a loon. The first two small laps were over fairly quickly and I had already past a few of those who had shot off. We hit the first bit of tarmac and then through the woods which were a horrible mix of roots and thick mud. Plus the sun was blazing in your eye line and you literally were running blind in parts. It was also tricky to overtake so it kept me at a steady pace. I was in a group and just behind Ed and Roger. Both have been running very well lately so I had a feeling I was doing ok at this point. Middle lap complete it was the start of the 4 longer laps. More thick mud, more tarmac in places. I was really glad I had opted not to wear my spikes at this point as they would have come clean off my feet.

There is one little drop on the course with a river right at the bottom of the bank with my gangly legs trying to turn in a seamless flowing motion was none existent, 4 times out of 4 I nearly ended up swimming with the fishes! Just at the end of the first lap I overtook Roger which I thought at this point may have been a mistake, that boy is good so I fully expected for him to come back at me at some point. I didn't want to run anyone else's race anyway and the whole aim of XC is to catch members of the opposing teams so I just kept my pace and rhythm going. I caught up to Ed and gave him a shout on telling him to push and catch those in front. And boy, did he. Halfway through the second lap the lad put his foot down and gained a good 25 yards on me. That was that, no catching Ed today then!

I overtook a few more people and the group I was in had been pulled apart. I couldn't hear footsteps as such behind me but every time we went past marshals and spectators I kept hearing cries of 'go on Chris!' This wasn't so much annoying me as piddling me off by the third lap. If this Chris dude was planning on doing me on the last lap he was going to be very sadly mistaken. The 4th lap came around pretty quickly to be fair and a major sense of déjà vu accompanied it. Talk about groundhog day! I overtook a fair few back runners and encouraged them on. I can't be someone who doesn't talk in races, as competitive as I am I always try to say well done to others. No matter what position they are in they are also working as hard as me even if the finishing position doesn't reflect it. Plus I don't shut up talking so that may be another reason why I guess!

We hit the last 800m and there is a small patch of grass maybe 150m long where I put my foot down a bit to show my mate Chris somewhere behind me that there was still another gear that I could shift up into if I needed. We hit the last 300m of muddy, waterlogged grass and then it happened, some doughnut had to say it... 'Go on Chris you've got him, don't let him get away now!' Well that was it, get away I did. I hit the accelerator to the extent I actually went off course and off to do another lap! Shouts of 'the finish is this way!' from the crowd steered me back and probably cost me a second or two but I hit another gear and pulled away from This Chris dude quite comfortably.

I finished in 18th position, my highest XC finish yet, and 5th overall my second placing in the A Team out of 3 races. Carl, Tom, Phil and Ed in front of me had great races, Roger had made up 6th team place finish which gave us a strong collective points total and saw us finish as overall winners on the day and extend our lead at the top. Just as impressive were the rest of the Green Army, some superb runs from everyone including Terry, Paul Orry, Greg Julian and the rest of the boys. It has been great to see so many runners turning out at these team events and giving it their all. What a day, what a great team performance. I was pretty chuffed with my performance too but as always, I maybe could have done a bit better. Now back to the surface I love, tarmac for a few weeks!

Thanks for that Craig and well done to all those that ran at Droitwich, or Dorwich or Doorwitch or wherever it was, haha! Gloves though? I can well understand why you got a 'bit of stick', just don't ever wear leggings!!!! Well done to the team and things are looking good ahead of the Midland and National XC championships.

Don't forget, if you would like to submit a report from any race or event then send to the email on the homepage!



# Helsby Half Marathon

Always a race to sell out fast and hard to get an entry into, one lucky fella that made it to the start line was Craig Taylor. Read on for Craig's view of the day :

The road racing season is back! Yay! After months of mud, losing my shoes and generally doing my best Bambi on ice impressions it is back on the road. And Tarmac... oh how I love tarmac!

What a better way to kick off the new year than a half marathon. A bit of context as to why the half marathon is my favourite distance. Back in 2008 I ran my first ever race which was the Potters Half Marathon to raise money for the Dougie Mac who were looking after my inspiration and the bravest person I have ever met in my life, my Nan. I clocked two hours and eight seconds that day and learned a lesson and a half. A year later I came back, got a bronze and so it all started.

Back in 2011 I got a 84:38 at Stafford, I was really coming on at that point before I got poorly and needless to say, I aint been near it since. I entered Helsby as I had heard it was a decent course and I fancied a race out of the area with a fast field to pull me along and different faces. A spare number came up late last week as unfortunately James Fowler picked up an injury. My mucker and Captain Dave Pickstock took it up and on Sunday morning off we went up the M6. On the same day last year it was snowing and the event cancelled, this year it was glorious sunshine and perfect conditions. Gotta love England and its much fabled weather system!

I won't mind telling you I have been incredibly nervous about this race for over a week. I must have had a maximum of four hours kip Saturday night and woke up at 3am after a dream that I missed the start of the race. So I was feeling pretty tired as we got to the venue and hearing Pickle bumping his gums about the conditions being perfect and me having no excuses to have a go at a PB were only adding to the nerves! It all seemed a good set up, Dave got some running socks with little teddy bears on the front (sorry Captain) got his number changed, had a natter to Michelle, Wendy and Rachel from Newcastle and Mick Hall and then we went off for a warm up. Again, I wasn't really feeling the love during the warm up, my legs felt sound but I just wasn't getting 'warm' at all! Even the strides didn't seem to help.

Luckily the phenomenon that is runners belly kicked in during the warm up and as there were only two toilets back at the clubhouse it was an astute decision to frequent the facilities at the local Tesco on the run back. Only problem is the other six in front of me in the queue had the same idea! Feeling a good half a stone lighter we trotted (no pun intended) back to the start, wished Dan Maddock and Phil Thomas all the best and got the Green vest on ready for the race. We got a half decent position near to the front and saw a lot of South Cheshire Harriers lads and the faster guys too! There were some serious runners here today.

After what seemed like an age of waiting for the claxon, off we went. Dave shot off like a rocket and due to me not wishing to go A over T on the potholes within the clubhouse driveway I got boxed in a little. No panic however it is a 13.1 mile race after all. I had a quick glance of my watch after 400m and it was a little fast so I just eased off a touch. I quickly got into a sound rhythm and chuckled to myself as Dave disappeared into the distance. So much for not being fit! I was really glad I had not sat on his shoulder at this point I can't live with his pace at the start of races.

I was in the middle of a group of scousers from Knowsley and others from Fazakerly who were encouraging each other on and giving it the big 'un, so to speak. They were apparently part of the "1:22 express" and "stick with us boys!" Hmmm such arrogance usually doesn't bear fruit I tend to find. And by mile 3 I was right. I was making up ground fairly quickly on the runners in front, quick glances every now and then at my pace told me I was running out of my comfort zone but I felt good, my breathing was sound and my legs felt good so why not? Mile 5 came around and a quick check of my watch showed it was a sub 31 minute job at

At this point so that was a first for me, I've never gone under 31 minutes. A big plus for the day already.

I caught up with a South Cheshire dude at the 6 mile point and after a bit of a natter checked in at 10k - 38:15. My second fastest 10k time only bettered by 10 seconds at Telford last month. I could also see James Simpson up ahead and Pickle a bit further on at the 7 mile mark.

The road had started to incline slightly and it does become a lot more noticeable when racing fast and I knew I had slowed just a little but this was deliberate more than anything else, I was waiting for this hill to appear and to give myself enough in the tank to get up it whilst maintaining a fast pace.

I went past James around the 8 mile mark and I got a bit excited at this point, James is a really nice lad and such a brilliantly consistent runner and someone I have looked up to for a good couple of years so to overtake him in a race for the first time was a big thing for me. I went past Dave around 400m later and he was looking strong after his injury lay off. I know Dave can really kick on during the latter stages of a half marathon so expected him to come back at me probably pulling my golden, flowing locks as he did!

The course was now undulating and after mile 9 had been some bloke in a ruck of 3 said we had done this hill that was supposedly a tough one. Now I had either gone up it with my eyes closed or someone was yanking my chain but if that was a hill then come and run a few races in the NSRRA calendar! I hit mile 10 and the clock was on 62 minutes, I didn't catch how many seconds but again this was another PB for 10 miles, I had set 64 minutes at Flying Fox a few months earlier. I calculated 6:30 minute miles for the last 3 miles would see me hit a good, decent PB time of just under 83 minutes all being well.

I pushed on, some downhill stretches confirmed what I already know, my downhill running needs some work to say the very least but the inclines coming out them I flew up and put yards between myself and others. I overtook another couple of runners in the last 800m and still felt very strong at this point, I turned the corner into the finishing straight and saw the clock which I thought was at 82 minutes and counting until I looked a bit harder and saw it at 80 minutes and counting. I put my foot down a bit and ran over the finish line like I had won the race I was so happy and totally in shock in what I had just done. Dave came in with a cracking time of 83 minutes and was quite rightly very pleased with his efforts, an excellent result. I won't put on here what he called me when he saw my time!

Writing this report and going over the race again I don't really think it has quite sunk in yet. Maybe it will, maybe it won't. It is just another target to try and beat now. Reality sunk in when I went out at half 5 this morning in the freezing cold! Not as glamorous as yesterday but equally as important. See you all at Alsager 5!

Thanks for the report Craig and well done on what I'm guessing is a big PB time. I reckon it's all that hard running in mud that has stood you in good stead for the roads, so don't knock it :-)

Just like busses 2 come along at once after a good wait, and it's the same with race reports, Phil Thomas as mentioned above was also running in the same race so here is Phil's version of events:

As I stepped over the finish line at the 2012 Portsmouth Marathon I quietly said to myself 'that's it now; no more running for a while!' A few days later I was offered a number for the 2013 4 Villages half marathon, of course I said yes straight away; so much for taking January off! It was a hard and long winter and like so many events last January, the 32nd 4 Villages Half Marathon was cancelled due to the amount of compacted snow on the course. Fast forward to the end of 2013 and I decided that the 4 Villages Half was unfinished business and made it my first race of 2014.

Throughout Christmas I worked really hard to keep up my fitness and strength in the gym while running more. Things went very well until New Years Day when running at Hanley Parkrun my left calf tightened up and got worse to the point I could hardly walk. Being stupid comes naturally to me so I didn't pull out of the parkrun despite knowing I was in

☒ trouble; c'mon I'm aiming for my 100 t-shirt! The left calf continued to trouble me throughout the next week or so and I moved to plan B for the race which was to just get to the start line and hope for the best. It's a plan that's worked well in the past for me! Always have a plan A, plan B and a getaway plan!

Anyhow on the day of the race I was in a confident mood that I'd be fine and the weather seemed to match my mood. As a runner whether you're at the top end of the field or like me near to the back you couldn't have hoped for better conditions to run in. We basked in the warm sunshine tempered by the cool winter air as we waited near the start. We were treated to a fly past by the goliath of the skies, the Airbus transporter plane or for any plane spotters the Airbus A300-600ST Super Transporter. This, we were told flies to Toulouse and back twice a day with the wings for the huge Airbus A380 which are made locally at Broughton.

My self and Dan Maddock had travelled up together and made a rough plan to run at the same steady pace throughout, we met up with Dave (Pickles) and Craig at the start and wished each other well. It was a huge race for a local event and seemed more like one of the mass participation races and as the air horn sounded we walked forwards with lots of jostling for position and as we got to the timing mates the pace increased to a steady trot and then it was on down the road with all 1800 other runners. There was lots of crowd support as we all snaked our way through the first village of Helsby and Dan and I ran at just under 9 minutes per mile for the first 3 or 4 miles and though we felt comfortable it was still a good 30 seconds faster than Dan was aiming for. He is after all running every day in January as part of Janathon.

As the race moved along and the miles passed by I never grew tired of looking around at the scenery, the pleasant Cheshire countryside meets the Northern point of the Sandstone trail around this area but what I didn't realise was how much climbing I was doing until the road opened up to reveal views across to Merseyside and the Cheshire plains. In the sunny conditions it was quite beautiful. By the time I past the 7 mile marker I felt the dreaded calf muscle start to complain so I was thankful for the scenery and conversations with Dan to distract me. I was gutted to feel the calf go again and knew I'd be in big trouble if like at the parkrun it got steadily worse. I feared my very first DNF (Did Not Finish) was a possibility. I quickly banished all negative thoughts and ploughed on past miles 8 and 9 which had the steepest parts, though again nothing to trouble a seasoned runner from North Staffordshire. We know hills in these parts.

My calf didn't seem to be getting any worse; though my pace had slowed we still maintained a decent speed and as we past the 12th mile the course moved into a gradual downhill section before hitting a housing estate for the finish and I was able to make up some time as I hoped that I might still dip under two hours which is always a minimum standard for me. Plan B was get to the start line intact and plan C was to finish, by now I think I'd moved to plan C.2!

In the home stretch I saw Dan shoot off like a bullet and I made a effort to stick with him, it was tough on the calf but I knew I'd be able to rest and sit down soon after I crossed the line. Or at least I hoped I'd get to rest after, more on the post race endurance later but for now we had done it, my Garmin said 1:59:49, but it was 2 hours on the clock so I wasn't sure if I'd got under the 2 hour mark officially.

Once through the finishers funnel and having never ran the race before I was unsure of the set up and to be honest it seemed a bit chaotic. I picked up my goody bag, spotted a guy giving out gingerbread biscuits and then Dan saw another chap giving away the medal coins which I'd assumed would be in the bag. Lucky we spotted that otherwise I'd have been very disappointed to miss out. After all I do love a nice medal and this one was a beauty. Then it was a game of follow the crowd; the finish was a short walk away from the start at Helsby Rugby club and it wended its way through a narrow passage between two houses and came out by the club.

It was then that we saw a long line of runners huddled in their foil blankets waiting penitently in the sun to collect their bags from the baggage area! We double checked that

This was the queue and stood in line; it would be close to an hour later when Dan and I finally collected our bags from the now under pressure and at times shouted at volunteers who'd given up their Sunday to help put this race on for us. Though I was shivering and my leg was very painful by the time I got my bag and I had no idea what had gone so badly wrong I thanked the young chap and girl who helped find my bag for me and then sat in Dan's 'Maddock' mobile for a few minutes warming up.

I think our core temperatures had dropped a wee bit in the hour after the race waiting for the bags. I was surprised that I had a text telling me my time which was 1:59:48 chipped. Knowing I'd just scraped in under two hours was a great relief and helped make me feel a touch warmer. So I'd paid £20 entry fee; £30 would have got me a tech t-shirt but that seemed a lot of money for a half marathon. For the standard entry fee I got a sports bottle, a quality commemorative medal and a few entries for North West races. Oh and a mars bar and oats, but at the end of the day we don't do this for the mementos; we do it to run, to push ourselves and enjoy running a new race or different course. It was well marshalled throughout and well supported in parts.

The whole course has some stunning scenery and though it has a few undulations the Essar Four Villages Half Marathon is a good race to go for your PB.

Thanks for that great report Phil, it's always good for folks to hear about the goings on around the race as well as the race itself. Congratulations on getting the 'Sub-2' and good luck for the rest of the season.

If you have a report and would like to submit it then please follow the link on the homepage.....

[Back to](#) [Top](#) [Homepage](#)

## Alsager 5

It's good to start off the year with so many interesting race reports and we have another treat from the Alsager 5 with two race reports, and also a race report from Stourbridge which you will get to later on. First up then is Ken Pearson's race report from Alsager which is the curtain raiser for the local Road Running calendar and a guage for everyone's winter training programmes. Read on to see how Ken's race went:

It's always interesting at the start of the season, the first race of the NSRRA calendar and you have little idea who is in your group or how well their, or your training, has gone. In my case there is the added bonus of no races for 8 months, not a lot of motivation and a knee that doesn't like running fast! I don't really think I've been training over the winter, more like going for a series of runs each week with Walter just to keep fit. Compared to previous years I'm much nearer the back of the group in training runs, this is probably because I'm slower and the rest are getting quicker. In the last couple of years I have raced a lot quicker than I trained so I'm not too bothered about the training speed but the only way to know is to race.

I have been in NSRRA for many years and moved up to D in the last few years. Probably due to not racing much last year and an injury I'm in E group this year. It's also some 10 years since I raced at Alsager. So there are lots of unknowns that will be sorted out in the 40 minutes of the race. I found it so easy to get back in the routine of racing. On Friday night I put the race number and group letter on straight, picked out my favourite shorts and socks and the lightweight racing shoes in a rather bright shade of red. I even remember to get my pre-race drink (with caffeine) from the fridge on Sunday morning and take it with me.

Not having raced for a while I'm not sure what my race time will be, given my training I reckon about 38 minutes so 7:35 per mile is my target. On these shorter runs I like to aim to keep roughly the same pace through the race knowing that I will start off a bit quicker and finish a bit slower but I'll put a bit of effort in at the end to keep the pace up. The pace usually depends on whether any of my group runners are nearby or if there any Trentham runners that I want to beat. Its nice to see old faces again as well as a big contingent of

Trentham runners and supporters. Most runners seem to have the same thoughts as me that they are not sure what their pace will be or how well their competitors will run. The pre race organisation is very slick with no problems parking and virtually no queues for the chip or T shirt when I arrive.

It's a different course to the last time I raced but there are directions to the start so no problems. I am still confused by my Nike + watch and have it set on heartbeat on the main display. Unfortunately I am not running with the HRM band today as it seems to work erratically so I'm not sure what the display will show and you can only change it when the watch is connected to the computer. I remember how to deselect the HRM option though. A learning point for the next race, get my watch sorted the day before. My laces come loose on the way to the start so I retie them and arrive at the start and have a chat with many old friends.

I make sure my watch has found the signal and for some reason I'm quite near the front, with some of the runners who were quicker than me last year. Was there a pre race talk that I missed, because suddenly the race starts? I always start my watch at the gun except for today when I start my watch at the start gate! My watch shows Pace on the main display (hooray) and so I'm keen to see what pace I am comfortable with. Just after the start I am lucky to be just to the left of a faller, presumably caused by the congestion with the large number of runners and the usual small number of slow runners at the front. It's a bit stop start but the congestion clears quickly and the race settles down. 6:45 says the watch and it stays at 6:45 for a few hundred metres. Much too fast but luckily my shoelace comes undone again just before half a mile and I have to stop to retie both laces and double knot them. Another learning point for the next race that double knotting has to be part of my pre race preparation. I probably lost 20 seconds or so and that probably just put me back a bit behind where I should have been to start with! Think positive!

I'm back in the race and the watch now says something under 7:30 pace which is just about right and I'm slowly overtaking the other runners who passed me at the lace stop. The watch pace varies quite a lot although I don't think I'm changing pace that much and I'm still slowly overtaking other runners all the time. It's quite a good feeling and I sort of ignore the pace and concentrate on just slowly catching the runners in front. 2 miles gone then 3 and I'm still at the same pace not fading and pass Rose Wilson and Alan Lewis as well as a couple of other E group runners.

I run with Lee Jones for a while but even though he's taking it easy as it's his first race back from injury he pulls away. Just over 4 miles and I overtake Dave Piper who is spurred on and overtakes me again. I notice another E group 50 m ahead but I now have a pain in my left calf and decide on the assumption that there are a few E runners ahead of him it's not the time to push to catch him for the sake of just 1 point. Up the finishing straight and I just have to overtake Lee before the line. My watch shows 37:35 so well under my target, what would that have been without a lace tying stop?

Loads of Trentham runners have all had good runs with a few PBs which is a really good start to the year. Paul Orry has a stunning run in just over 33 minutes so I've no chance of winning the group but the likes of Simon, Jill and Jodie are only a minute or so in front of me which is encouraging. So I am encouraged by my time, with a bit more "training" I think I can get back to somewhere near last years times and catch a few more Trentham runners. The results show I was 9th in group E but the 4 in front are only a minute ahead and I can improve by that much before Newcastle 10k. Paul Orry will get put in group D so really I was 4th!

Thanks for the terrific report Ken and I think you're probably right, Paul should go up a group ;-) Well done on a good start to the season, and another one having a good start to the season is Craig Taylor. Here is his report from Alsager:

Well, here we go again! The start of the NSRRA season after a two month break and we find ourselves at the curtain raiser, the fast and furious Alsager 5. There has been a lot of talk amongst the Trentham mens team about some fast times being aimed for, lads aiming to complete all 20 races and the reserves races on top, winning their particular group, etc... which just creates an electric buzz within the team and some friendly but serious competitiveness. For me coming off the end of the year on a high with some new PB's and

Being part of an excellent men's XC Team that has dominated the Birmingham and District League and performed very well in the North Staffs XC league it was time again to lace up the road shoes. Did I mention I loved tarmac? If I could send a Valentine's card to anyone it would be the dude that invented tarmac!

I get really nervous before a race, days before a race, and I know I am an absolute nightmare at home from Friday onwards up until race day. I ran a decent time at Helsby a few weeks ago (see previous report if you are bored at work and fancy a brew and biscuit) and being promoted back into Group B wasn't really making my already fragile nerves feel any better.

Rewinding a little to 2012 I was promoted to Group B and let's just say due to my poorly belly

I never finished higher than second bottom in any races with a letter 'B' on my back that year. To say that 2012 in Group B was one of the lowest points of my whole life, never mind running, was an understatement. So again, wanting to show people what I was now capable of was making me even more nervous! Needless to say, the maker of Andrex toilet rolls would have seen an upsurge in business this weekend as truly the throne became my seat of choice along with a copy of the Sun. And no, not the Daily Sport. That is for birthdays only!

Race day arrives after the usual sleepless night but at least my little girls managed to stay in bed and sleep through the night which is always an unexpected bonus. The usual routine follows which I won't bore you with but this time the wife, Kerry, is also racing in Trentham green and it is her first NSRRA race to boot. Kerry seems calm, I am not. Having a hamstring which is tighter than Andrew Vickerman's pocket and a calf that is as sore as David Pickstock after his face-first mudplant at Leamington Spa XC last weekend again wasn't helping matters much. Can you see a common theme? My nerves ahead of races aint good people!!! My old man picks us both up and off we go.

We get there in plenty of time and collect our timing chips just as the rest of the green army stroll in looking cool and up for the race. I've got to give a mention here to Lee Jones who has been struggling with injury, plantar whateveritis called on his foot. He is determined to do all 22 races this season as part of a challenge he has set himself and he somehow made it to the starting line and completed the race. I have been told I have more guts than brains but in this case I think sheer determination pulled Lee through the race. Well done mate. Anyway, back to me now... I saunter off to get ready and find the rest of the lads ready for the warm up. I always carry a spare roll of Andrex with me just in case as the warm up's generally do things to me that a pack of laxatives wouldn't. Luckily, 7 mins into the warm up a wooded area appears. So I disappear. Just as I am going about my business in what I incorrectly assumed was a quiet and secluded area in the woods, Paul Burslem appeared from nowhere also wishing to relieve himself! Tell you what you can't go down to the woods today without anyone knowing you can you?

I re-join and finish the warm up and head off to the start with the wife. I was quite late in getting to the start so had to push my way to near the front as getting a decent start was important with it being such a crowded area. All of the Trentham lads seemed to be around me so lots of best wishes were passed along. Off went the claxon and despite nearly going A over T twice in the first six yards I got away. I glanced at the watch, 5:25 pace. Definitely too quick so I shortened my stride and slowed it down a notch. As I expected it seemed hundreds went galloping past me. Dave Pickstock and Paul Swan were up ahead, Scotty Minshull a few yards in front with Scott Bang Tidy and then Mandy Vernon came past looking strong. I carried on at my pace which was easily sub 6 minute miling and managed to get into a rhythm.

I quickly started to overtake some runners who had gone off like an express train and had quickly gone into oxygen debt and settled into a good pace behind Mandy. I hit a 5:48 first mile which was a bit quicker than what I had hoped; I could hear Dale Colclough in my head telling me that the first mile was 10 seconds too fast. I couldn't let Dale or myself down so I was absolutely determined to get the next 4 miles right and go sub 30 if I could. I pulled away from Mandy just before the two mile mark and quickly caught up to Dave. I tried to encourage him on and pushed on again as we turned onto the main drag through the high street.

I remember blowing up here last year after going off too fast but felt fine this time around and was being careful not to get dragged into any personal little duels with those around me.

It was my race and I didn't need to race anyone else other than the clock. I overtook dozens on this stretch and as the halfway mark passed by it soon closed down to the four mile mark. I quick wave to Andy's daughter Elizabeth and wife Emily who shouted me on and then past a load of Trentham supporters including Lisa, Janson, Gaz, Christine, Richard and others I hit the four mile mark. Massive thanks to all of you!

The drag back up towards the school seemed to go on forever; it was windy at this point and psychologically I was feeling the pain of a hard four mile run with just another mile to go. A quick glance at my watch and a calculation in my head meant I knew I was on for it but it could all go belly up in this last mile if I didn't play it right. I bobbed in behind and then overtook runners coming up this stretch and hit the corner turning into the street where the church is. Another two overtaken down here as I turned on what was left of my turbo's and believe me it felt more like a Reliant Robin than a Ferrari, turned the corner before heading back up to the finish when Christine shouted another 300m to go. This gave me another spurt so I overtook another few here and then pushed onto the finish and raced and beat a lady in just before the line.

29.44 was my official time, a new PB by over 90 seconds. I was, and still am writing this, a little bit proud of myself. It was an awesome sight seeing the rest of the green army come home with amazing times, Matt Plant, Ed Wilson, Scott Zikmanis, Greggles Julian, Paul Orry, Shaun Weston, Mandy Vernon, Pickles, Kirsten, Jodie..... the list just goes on and on! A special mention to Kerry too, 45:03 for her smashing her PB by a country mile! All of my teammates inspire me on so to witness that yesterday was amazing. Proud of you all yesterday, well done.

Now back to business and the final XC fixture of the season down in Walsall on Saturday to help the team bring the league winner's trophy home. As far as weekends go this one was definitely made by Carlsberg!

Thanks Craig, and well done on getting the PB, and I also hope you enjoy getting back to the mud this weekend :-)

[Back to](#) [Top](#) [Homepage](#)

## Stourbridge Stagger

This one comes in from Debbie Thomas who was passed on a fast, flat, tarmac race and instead headed south for this 10 mile Multi-Terrain race. Read on to find out how Deb's race went:

I did this race two years ago in deep snow and had always said I would do it again (snow or no snow) as I had really enjoyed it and the longer distance suits me better. I had intended to return last year but I accidentally won a free place for Alsager 5, courtesy of a raffle at Bournes Sports, so I had to take part or else it would seem ungrateful, even though I am not a big fan of Alsager 5 (too flat and too crowded for me). The Stourbridge Stagger is hosted by Stourbridge RC and starts at 10.30am and is around 10.3 miles of a testing rural course, but as it takes in a total climb of 187 metres, the distance is actually equivalent to running approximately 11.1 miles on the flat. Funnily, it takes in areas such as Dinosaur Beach, Horsetail Bank, Joan's Delight, Slop Gully and Step Hill!

This year I would be the only TRC representative as the race had become full far earlier than the last time I did it, so any chance of a team mate coming with me had long gone. I jumped into the car at about 8.20am, got petrol and then hit the motorway (M6 then M5) and thanks to my James Bond driving (haha) I was there in around 70 mins and parked up on the college car park, which is a 5 minute walk away to the race start at Mary Stevens Park. You could park in the park if there was space, around the park on the street or at a school, but I decided with the college as that is where I'd plotted my directions to. As there was 40 minutes to go before the start, and as it was a cool morning, I decided to walk the route to the start so I would know where to go and I would also warm up, and I also wanted to use the loos.

The walk was easy; turn right out of the car park, walk up the hill and the park gates were right there, simples! The park is fairly vast and there were lots of runners about as well as locals using the park to walk their dogs or children, or feeding ducks in the lake. The queue for the ladies at the park centre was too long to wait so I strolled around until I found somewhere suitable (ahem) and then I called into the centre to ask if I could stash a jacket whilst I was running as I knew I would go cold quickly after the race. I was told "yes that would be fine, but don't leave any valuables in the pockets". I then walked back to the car, passing the car park marshal who was very cheery, and removed my warm clothes down to my race kit but keeping my club jacket on.

I jogged the route back to the park and followed a few of the paths around the park to warm up. Then we were lined up on the start line by the bandstand, I was on the front row! The race starter advised us that since last year more kissing gates had been installed along the course and that at the road crossings, if we were told to stop then we should, because it was for our own safety, etc. Then we were counted down, 3-2-1 and off, and just at that second a guy next to me slipped and half fell onto me! He apologised and we laughed about it, and we continued around the large field heading out of the park, across the road, around another field then onto the road through a housing estate before cutting across another road, up a hill and then onto a trail. The early stages of the course is where the runners start to space out although you can get a bit held up when the paths begin to narrow.

There is also a ladies only 7km ran within the beginning of the 10 mile race, so seeing all the ladies in front it was difficult to know my position until they turned off. For the first  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile I had a lady runner alongside me from Brat RC, she was only wearing racers however, so I did wonder how she would get on in those with all the off road and sludge, as the fields we had started on were wet so it was slippery underfoot! I left her behind once we hit the trails and then I made sure to keep the pace going but not to go mad now because I would need all my leg strength for every part of the course. Miles 2 to 3 were undulating, very muddy and wet on the paths and in one part we had to run up some steps, and it was sometimes a balancing act as the paths were dipped in the middle, so you were running on the edges for most part.

At one point we had to run past a few horse riders which was a bit dicey! They asked how many people were running through, I answered "200!". After the race, a few people said they had had to stop to pass them as the horses were spooked and the riders had asked everyone to walk!!

I chatted briefly to the runners around me, and apologised on occasions for almost knocking into them! Everyone I passed said "well done, good run", as I did for them when they came past me. Around mile 3 there is a steep embankment to climb, the grass was wet so I struggled to get grip, and about half way up my thighs were burning so I reduced to a walk and ran off the top. I looked back to check where the girl from Brat was and she was around 100 metres behind. Then we went down the hill, which was a relief to the legs! We continued to run up and down extremely muddy and wet trails, I was covered in mud, and I was careful with my pace not to push too hard, or else I risked being worn out too soon. Each marshal I passed was congratulating me on being first lady, but I didn't count on keeping that just yet, there was a long and tough run to go still!

Mile 5.25 to 6 there is a most welcome road section, and slightly downhill, and I made sure to pick up the pace a little. I passed a few guys on this section and one told me well done for running fast, around 6.20/pace! Then we were turned right onto more trails. A section just before mile 7 was particularly tough, the mud was over my ankle socks deep, sticky and thick and the course was uphill; I had to resort to walking through it, as did other runners near me, as it was taking all my leg power and I was getting breathless. I was passed by three runners I'd overtaken on the road section, "first lady is stuck in the mud!" they said "maybe we should carry her up" I said "yes please!!" but they didn't take me up on it...naughty boys! I made it through and was thankful of the flatter path at the top, although it was a short lived relief. I spoke to the guy runner close by and he said he was struggling to remain upright on the muddy sections...just then was another muddy part and as we both slipped, he dropped off the pace.

There were no mile markers on this course, you just ran and followed the paths. That wasn't an issue, but I was glad to have my Garmin to know how much further I had to go. The last 2.5 miles I was feeling tired, but by now I was told I was clear of second lady so that was a

Relief, and I had company of a guy runner who was helping me to keep good pace and he told me there was another road section coming up before we would return on part of the course we had begun on. I was feeling ok at this point, just very ready to finish!

Coming into the finish, the marshals were congratulating me on being winning lady and told me I was well clear and just to keep going. I followed the road downhill and swung right into the park, around onto the field to the finish line which was crowded with people cheering me in, so I had to smile as I came through! I was so happy to win and to finish, it was a good feeling! I was pleased to have won for another reason too; I'd have faced the wrath of a few people who had told me to "make sure you win" (Jill Phillips, Dan Jordan and Pete Bailey: who trains me at the gym!) Apparently "second or third isn't good enough"! Haha! I walked through the finishing funnel and was handed a souvenir green hand towel, which was a perfect reward; I wiped my face on it and then wore it over my shoulders to keep warm.

At the end I was approached by some of the guys that I'd ran parts with, we all shook hands, congratulated each other, and then what the heck, we had a hug! We chatted about the race and laughed about how all over the place I'd been in the mud! I was advised to invest in some Innov8 mud shoes for next time, as I'd have kept more grip. I appreciated the advice, I think I will look at getting some better mud shoes. It was annoying to have been skidding and skating across the mud so much! Not long after, the second and third ladies came through; the Brat runner was third in the end. They told me they'd tried to catch me but I'd made good progress in the second half... I'm glad I didn't know that when I was running, the pressure would have turned me to jelly!

When I started to feel chilled I got my coat and half walked/half jogged back to the car, grabbed my bag and walked back to the park to get changed in the centre. I was told the presentation would be at 1pm, so I had an hour to kill, but that gave me time to rinse my legs off and get warm clothes on. The presentation was short and sweet, and I came away with a lovely glass trophy. I was really happy with the day, and strangely my time of 1.17.39 was only ten seconds faster than the year I ran in the snow! However it is a PB for that course, and at the presentation the presenter mentioned that the time of the winning man was 7 minutes slower than last year, so maybe the extra kissing gates and mud had had an impact on everyone's time...

All in all this is a very well organised race with good marshalling, good parking and changing and shower facilities (although the water was a trickle!). There is such a great atmosphere at this race, I didn't know anyone there but everyone was friendly and chatty, it was heart-warming. The course itself is challenging but takes in fine scenery and is just a pleasure to run, I've always had fun here no matter what the conditions. There is also the Stourbridge Stumble in August, which is a shorter course, but one I would recommend, and I would of course recommend the Stagger, but make sure to get your entry in fast! Definitely one race I hope to do again next year...

Thanks Deb for the report and massive congratulations on the race win :-). It sounds like a terrific course and also sounds very popular too which makes the victory even sweeter. Please keep these reports coming in folks and if you're racing this weekend please let us know.....

[Back to Top](#) [Homepage](#)