

HERNE HILL HARRIERS VETERAN MEN'S ROAD & CROSS COUNTRY REPORT FOR 2007 TO 2008

Arguably the strongest section in Herne Hill Harriers, our veteran men's cross country and road running team deserve their own report, however brief. Aside from our vets enormous contribution to the success of our senior men's team, we have also been touring the country to win area and national titles, something I would dearly love to see our senior men making more of an attempt to do on a regular basis.

Back in September 2007 our M40-49 team won the South of England road relays for the 5th successive year at Rushmoor Arena in Aldershot. I can confidently predict a 6th victory as that has also already happened last month, but that should really be saved for next year's AGM. Our team of Vic Maughn, Keith Newton, Roger Alsop and David Robinson strode imperiously to the 2007 title some 40 seconds ahead of nearest challengers Bedford & County. Such was our strength we were able to allow our fastest M40 man Iain Lockett to seek a higher quality race in our team in the senior men's relay later the same afternoon.

The following month we contested the Surrey Vets Cross Country Championships, but with rather less success as our best guys preferred to save themselves for what they regard as bigger races. Vic Maughn did, however win the gold for M45 while Paul Stevens won the M40 bronze medal.

In November Iain Lockett put in probably the single best cross performance by a HHH runner when placing a superb 2nd at the British & Irish Masters Cross Country International in November at Stormont in Northern Ireland and led the England M40s to team gold medals. This was a great effort following on from HHH second claim man Dave Taylor's win in the previous edition of the event. Other HHH men who took part included Francis Marsh, representing Northern Ireland M40s and Roger Alsop running for Scotland M40s, although Keith Newton was inexplicably omitted from the England M40 team while showing very good form.

Into the New Year and in early February the HHH veteran men were winning things again. At the South of England Vets Cross Country Champs at the wonderfully named Mad Bess Woods in Ruislip Keith Newton took gold in the M40 race. This was achieved only just over a month before his 45th birthday, so not only was he the fastest man in his 5 year age category he was also one of the oldest. Mike Boyle will have been relieved Keith wasn't already 45 as he picked up the M45 gold in the same race finishing behind Keith. With Keith winning the overall M40-49 race and Mike placing 4th and Vic Maughn 11th overall when M40s were taken into account HHH comfortably won the team gold medals.

So by February HHH were South of England M40-49 champions for both road relays and cross country. Could we become National champions before the season was out?

In March the British Masters Cross Country Champs were held and this was our real chance to put HHH veteran men on the national distance running map. Iain Lockett and Keith Newton both came away from the muddy fields of Banbury with richly deserved individual silver medals in the M40 and M45 categories respectively (Keith was by now 45). When combined with the efforts of David Robinson, 29th and Mike Boyle, 49th, the team secured team gold, finishing 45 seconds ahead of Sunderland Harriers once all teams' times had been aggregated.

Both Iain and Keith's runs were of the highest order, Iain was beaten only by Rob Whalley of Bristol who until recently has been a member of the GB senior international cross country teams while Keith also performed very well compared to the top M45's in the country. With these runs both went a long way towards securing their now confirmed selection for this year's edition of the British & Irish Masters Cross Country International which will take place in Swansea next month.

Our next target was to have been the big one – the British Masters 8 stage road relay championships in Sutton Coldfield, where we placed 2nd in both 2006 and 2007, with Bristol beating us on both occasions. Sensing they may be a bit weaker and HHH a bit stronger we thought we might really challenge them in May 2008, but this theory was not to be tested as with illness to Iain Lockett and injury to Mike Boyle in the days leading up to the race our team was a non starter.

However, with Kofi Agyei since having become eligible to compete in these races, our squad is becoming stronger in numbers, although of course the guys are all getting older. You wouldn't think so the way they go about their racing as they continue to set the best possible example to their younger counterparts and team mates in the HHH senior men's road and cross country teams. Maybe May 2009 will see HHH back in the medals at the 8 stage relays and maybe we could even win a set of golds.

Here's to an even more successful 2008/09 - up the Hill!

Geoff Jerwood
HHH Men's Cross Country Captain
27 October 2008