

## **HERNE HILL HARRIERS SENIOR MEN'S CROSS COUNTRY REPORT FOR 2007 TO 2008**

The Herne Hill Harriers men's cross country team can report yet another successful winter season in 2007/08. We were able to defend our Surrey League and Surrey Senior Championship titles and we also won back the South of Thames 7.5 miles Championship shield that we had lent to Belgrave for a year the previous season when we had only finished second. Overall we were not quite able to match the heights of the previous couple of seasons, during which we had also challenged for area honours, but this was nevertheless an acceptable follow up to what had been 2 of the best cross country seasons in the history of HHH.

In October our Surrey League season got off to a start diametrically opposed to the manner in which we had begun 12 months earlier. In our victorious season of 06/07 we had killed the contest stone dead after one race with a massive 157 points victory. This time at Wimbledon Common we decided to make things much more interesting as we gave our perennial close rivals Thames Hare & Hounds a lead of 17 points and on the day we were grateful that the deficit was not bigger.

In the second fixture the following month we were again at less than full strength and were this time rightly punished with a defeat by a stronger Thames team on their home course. We were beaten on this occasion by 73 points, leaving us 90 points in arrears at the halfway stage after 2 of the 4 league races. A commanding lead for our main rivals going into the remaining fixtures in the New Year, one which would surely see them wrest the title back from us after we had been in possession for the previous 2 seasons.

Also in November we had contested the Reigate relays and relinquished that "title" as a number of our top men were instead in attendance at the wedding of one of our top team men Ben Paviour and Colleen. A team 4<sup>th</sup> placing at the South of Thames 5 miles Championship at Richmond Park was further indication of a very low key start to our season.

Then a funny thing happened in December, as the team finally sprang to life and gave our campaign a belated kick start with an emphatic team win in the South of Thames 7.5 miles Championship at Nork Park, Banstead just before Christmas. Maybe it could be a Happy New Year after all, as despite having nobody in the first 5 the now famous HHH packing, led by super-vet Keith Newton in 6<sup>th</sup> and with 6 more runners in the top 20 we beat Belgrave by 33 points to reclaim the magnificent shield that is presented to the winning team each year. We also won the Colman Cup, awarded to the winning 12-man team, for the first time since 2002.

Moving into 2008, we were suddenly in top gear at Lloyd Park as we won the Surrey Cross Country Championship for the 7<sup>th</sup> year in a row. Iain Lockett has the superb record of having been in all 7 of our winning teams during this period, although he was on this occasion a little below par having missed our South of Thames victory due to illness, but still made an important contribution to yet another HHH win at these championships. It was left to Matt Shone to spearhead our team as he placed a superb 4<sup>th</sup>, just missing an individual medal. Again our team packing was awesome as behind Matt we had Iain 9<sup>th</sup>, Rob Karn 10<sup>th</sup>, Ben Paviour 11<sup>th</sup>, Tim Elsey 12<sup>th</sup> and David Robinson 14<sup>th</sup> to secure a comfortable team win again, some 88 points ahead of Thames H&H.

A cautionary note regarding the Surrey Championship, as although we easily won the 6 to score team contest, we would have been beaten by Thames in a 4 man match that day and they have added to their Surrey qualified squad for this winter, so we will need to be at our very best this coming January if we want to defend again and equal Boxhill Racers' record of 8 consecutive team wins.

If our Surrey Championship team win on the first Saturday of 2008 was good, it still could not have prepared anybody for what was to happen on the second Saturday of the year. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Surrey League race was at Reigate, often a happy stomping ground for HHH in the cross relays and this was the day we got ourselves back into the team contest and showed we were not going to give up our league title without a battle.

At Reigate we were not looking in a great position at the end of the first of the 2 laps, but our scoring team members moved through the field superbly on the second lap to give us 5 men in the first 10, 7 in the first 14 and our 10th man closing in 30<sup>th</sup>. We were not going to be on the losing side on this occasion, but how much had we had eaten into the gap? Thames were also quite strong, with 6 runners in the first 16, meaning that only 3 runners from any of the other 7 competing clubs had been able to put themselves in between our leading lights.

The scores on the day were HHH 131, Thames 194 and in terms of the overall league standings this meant we had won on the day by 63 points and reduced the deficit going into the final race to a "mere" 27 points. There was still a long way to go (a 5.8 miles race in Richmond Park to be precise!) but this magnificent team performance took the title race to the wire. Kevin Quinn led the team in 3<sup>rd</sup> position, Iain Lockett placed 4<sup>th</sup> and first M40, Matt Shone was 6<sup>th</sup>, Keith Newton 9<sup>th</sup>, David Robinson 10<sup>th</sup>, Ben Paviour 12<sup>th</sup>, Rob Karn 14<sup>th</sup>, Francis Marsh 21<sup>st</sup>, Ben Woodd 22<sup>nd</sup> and Jeff Cunningham was 30<sup>th</sup> to close in a great team performance.

The final Surrey League race in February really was going to be tight and at the end of the 4 races there were only 6 points between the 2 teams! Fortunately for HHH we finished on the right side of such a close call having never led the league at any other point during this season. We were, however, the defending champions and this became the third season in succession that we have won the league title. This was a wonderful climax to a truly exciting league season - it really could have gone either way at the end and one has to feel for such quality and sporting opponents who scored a mere 736 points over the 4 races and still failed to beat our even lower tally.

Kevin Quinn again led the team in 3<sup>rd</sup> place followed in by Keith Newton's superb 6<sup>th</sup> place and another vet Iain Lockett placed 7<sup>th</sup>. Ben Paviour was 10<sup>th</sup> and was followed by yet another HHH vet David Robinson in 16<sup>th</sup>. Alan Barnes was 18<sup>th</sup>, returning after a hernia operation before Christmas, while our final 4 scorers were Rob Karn, Andrew Dunwoody, James Jarvis and Deron Fagan, who placed 21<sup>st</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> respectively. With 10 men closed in 25 we had not only won the day, we had also overhauled the deficit we needed to win the league. But only just!

Individually, pride of place must go to Keith Newton, who was not only the winner of the overall individual award for the best veteran runner over the 4 league races, but he was also the best senior men's individual in the league over the season. Keith was overall our best senior male cross country racer over the season, as he did not confine his excellent performances to Surrey League races alone.

In between our two marvellous Surrey League team displays many of the team chose to sit out the South of England Cross Champs at Parliament Hill Fields. A turnout of only 13 runners, of which 12 completed the course, was not quite what we would have had in mind as a team who have finished among the top 4 teams of 6 runners on 3 occasions in the past 6 years. This time we placed a lowly (by our own high standards) 12th of the 86 teams to close 6 runners (which include B and C teams). The battle to be our leading first claim HHH man to finish the race was fought between Rob Karn, Ben Paviour and Keith Newton, all of whom finished within 34 seconds of each other after 15km of tough running. Rob prevailed with a very decent run, placing 52nd in a field which has to be regarded as stronger in quality and depth at the front than in many recent years. Ben also made the top 60 in 59th position, but could never quite get on terms with Rob, while Keith was one of the highest placed M40s in the race in 63rd position.

Our cross season ended again with a disappointing team turnout at the National Cross Country Championships. Not even the lure of Alton Towers could persuade enough of our best men to combine to mount a credible challenge. Ben Paviour was our first man to finish in 139<sup>th</sup> as we placed 22<sup>nd</sup> in the 6 to score team contest.

Individually, although pipped for this year's overall award, Iain Lockett put in probably the single best cross performance by a HHH runner when placing a superb 2<sup>nd</sup> at the British & Irish Masters Cross Country International in November at Stormont in Northern Ireland and led the England M40's to team gold medals. The most notable of our club champions not already mentioned was a new man during the year Iain Yates, who won the club 10 mile cross country championship which was incorporated into the SLH organised Pirie 10 at Coulsdon.

To sum up, the season of 2007/08 was a success, at the very least at a local level as we successfully retained our Surrey League title for a 3<sup>rd</sup> year in the most dramatic fashion, won the Surrey Cross Senior Men's Championship for the 7<sup>th</sup> successive year and won the South of Thames 7.5 miles team race to cement our position as the club who has won this shield more than any other in the long history of this championship.

However, beyond all the tub thumping and well deserved pats on the back, we should be striving to make our mark further afield as well. Our male vets are showing the way by winning area and national road and cross country titles and we have a good enough squad to be challenging for senior men's area medals at the very least. I will be very disappointed if this time next year I am again commenting on our relatively weak team turnouts at the South of England and National cross championships. They are both at locations inside the M25, so travel will not be an excuse!

Finally, please can we remember that ALL of our runners, fast or slow, young or not quite so, have a BIG part to play in the continued success of the HHH men's cross country and road running teams. Together let's take it to another level...

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

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