

3. RACE SERIES AND CLUB RACES

2023 saw some very fine running, racing and times across all three of PRR's race series. Alas, this was offset by a season of very low participation in - and completion of - those series. This trend of lower competing is by no means particular to PRR. Entries and participation in club races - and even parkruns - up and down the UK remain markedly down on pre-COVID levels. Various theories abound as to why; none yet quite account for it. It may not just be us, but it is a concerning pattern nonetheless. Attendance was generally stronger in our traditional internal races, while two of our newer new annual fixtures became more firmly cemented.

The **Championship** is the club's Blue Riband race series and is held across its traditional ten selected races (plus an optional marathon for most). It commenced with the Alloa Half in March and - with no race cancellations or use of substitute races (as typified the 2022 series) - finished (unusually) at the scenic Glen Clova Half-Marathon in mid-November. The thinner field of competitors made for less compelling competition than last year (especially its historic Robertson-Riddell tussle). This said, the leading pair of ladies' Championship were separated by only 5 points at the conclusion of the series, with wins in both directions. Rhiannon Laing retained her champion's crown, with Lisa Aikman also repeating her position - as runner-up - of 2022. Caroline Duffin took the remaining spot on the (notional) ladies' podium, also securing the F40 title. In the first year of the new F40/50/F60 female age categories, Tessa Ward and Sue Bothwell were F50 and F60 winners respectively. Elliot Collins was virtually unchallenged in the men's competition, recording a series of very fine runs, a 2:47 marathon and dropping only 4 points from a perfect 800-point score. Dean Abberley took a very-well-deserved second place, ahead of Alan Rigby - also the M50 champion - in third. Barry Campbell and Alan Bothwell are the new M40 and M60 champions. Sadly, as mentioned above, attendance was sharply down again this year: the Championship of 2019 saw 37 series finishers; 2022 saw 13 and 2023 just 9.

The club's shorter, second-string - and generally more jovial - **Summer** Series saw arguably the most disappointing participation rate of the three series. It could typically be relied up for attendance by PRRs seeking warm evening races and oversized teas. However, the draw of the Crieff 10K, Milnathort Dash and other such summer classics seems to have become - in aggregate - rather less in 2023. The 2021 semi-virtual series saw 51 series finishers; 2022 saw 15 and 2023 just 9. This decline also arose despite (heeded) requests to make the series more accessible and flexible with a 6-chosen-from-8-offered race format. Elliot Collins again prevailed at the top of the men's series, with Lou Ella Cole claiming the ladies' quail. Clive Bowman and Ann Reed took second places, while the third spots were a family affair for the Hammersleys.

Following a vote at the last AGM, a new-look **Hills Are Alive** (HAA) duly arrived in 2023. Now expanded to offer 8 races (of which 6 must be selected to complete the series), the HAA now sports trail races alongside its established hill contests. Overall, this adaptation boosted participation and made for a more multi-dimensional contest, although the number of series finishers remained low (as is traditional here) at just 8 (with only 2 female finishers). A number of our own internal races were again used, including the customary struggle up into the mist of Ben Vrackie and a new (and very sinuous) trail race through Pitmedden Forest. The Mob Match (see below) was also used. Across the series, Elliot Collins again prevailed, ahead of Kenny Cairns in second and Mark Crawford and Dean Abberley in joint third. Paige Brown

ruled supreme in the ladies' contest, ahead of Fiona Manson and Fabienne Thompson. It is hoped that the new, trail-richer format will help to boost numbers taking on the HAA in future.

Invariably included in the HAA is the **Kinnoull Hill Race** (organised by our own David Knight and Perth Strathtay Harriers) which serves also as the venue for our PRR Hill Race trophy. On a fine evening, the trophies went to Paige Brown and Mike McConnell, the latter also taking the overall race win.

In the club's **internal competitions**:

- Newcome Harvey Mackie took his first PRR trophy at the **Duathlon** (organised as ever, but for the last time, by Kevin Rogers) in the fastest time since 2010. Rhiannon Laing had a comfortable win in the ladies' competition for the second year in a row. Attendance was again good, with 15 competitors.
- David Stokoe again hosted the always-slightly-weird **Target Zero** race, this year starting from Kilgraston School. Experience proved crucial as club stalwart Neil Muir collected the trophy, his 5-mile course time straying just 9 seconds from his estimate/target. Neil last won this event in 2012. 14 PRRs took part.
- The 2022 **Yahoo** (handicap race) was delayed into 2023 owing to freezing course conditions (twice). A field of 22 PRRs set out into a dark January night over the lumpy 9½-mile course. James Waldie returned in a lightning 50:49 as fastest man; Paige Brown in 64:53 as fastest lady. But the Yahoo is about the handicap which, as it emerged, was unduly kind to Lynn Gatherer, whose fine run saw her finish over a minute clear of the field. The club gazebo and vats of hot chocolate made an appearance on the North Inch. They will return for the 2023 race - the only remaining trophy fixture of the year's race calendar - on Tues 12th December.

Additionally, two new races became even better embedded:

- Kristen Bain again organised the excellent (and second-ever) **Bertha Relays** in early August: a two-up relay event over a 5K course at Bertha Park. Again, a very tight finish was engineered with Robin Livingstone and Dean Abberley narrowly taking the win. An excellent 24 PRRs competed.
- Battle was again joined between PRR and Kinross Road Runners in their second **Mob Match**. This was, this year, an away fixture for PRR (the hosting rights alternate) at Crook of Devon. A fabulous 95 runners (55 men, 40 ladies) contested this team-on-team struggle, which was followed by a fine get-together tea (and nervous wait for results) at Crook of Devon village hall. Alas, again (confound them), KRR were victorious in both matches – tightly in the men's race (606-669) and more easily in the ladies (178-243) – and annoyingly retained the Peter Rabbit trophy. The attempt to Regain The Rabbit now moves to the Murthly Estate next summer (August 20th). As observation rather than criticism, for all of the excellent participation by PRR, in each of the matches held so far, it is now clear that PRR would take victory at the Mob Match if just a few more runners were to take part.