

SERPENTINES

AUTUMN 2007



INSIDE

The Serpentine Interview:
Jenny Gowans and Richard Melik
talk to Jelle Brons

Plus

- Karen Hancock's winter survival tips
- Abdifatah Dhuhulow – My life story
- Iron first timers – Going the distance

THE EDITORIAL TEAM



It's the Brady Bunch

You can always tell when autumn is here – the leaves turn red, the nights draw in and a new copy of Serpentines drops on your doormat. It is also a time for change and renewal, and this has certainly been the case for the

In with the new

magazine. Sally Hodge, who has edited Serpentines for the last five years, has decided to step aside and hand over to a new editorial team. The progress made in that five years is incredible – from a black and white, photocopied magazine to the all-colour, high-quality design of today. It has grown with the club to provide an indispensable, informative and entertaining resource for club members. This is down to Sally and her designers, led by Steve Brett, and we give them our wholehearted thanks for all their commitment and great ideas, and for having left us with such a good product with which to work. We also promise to leave them alone soon and produce the magazine ourselves!

Alongside the usual race reports and news items, this issue features Jelle's interview with Jenny Gowans and Richard Melik, Abdifatah Dhuhulow's amazing life story, an account of the Three Peaks Yacht race and

first time Ironman reports. With a coaching feature on how swimming can improve your running, a report on the Serpie Decathlon and an account of running Japanese-style, it truly is a multi-sport edition. There is even a piece on the psychology of pain by Marcus Scott to keep you going through the tough times (though some men may want to skip over this one!) We hope you are encouraged to try something new, whether that is a new race, cross country, officiating and volunteering or maybe even a new sport.

Thanks to all those who have written for this magazine or contributed photographs. We are always seeking more, so if you have any ideas, please contact the team at serpentines@serpentine.org.uk. And to those who have contributed to previous issues, we hope you enjoyed the rest and we shall soon be knocking on your door!

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Tension on the start line (photo: David Knight)

All life's challenges are lost and won in the mind

by **Abdifatah Dhuhulow**

I am a 26-year-old from Somalia. In 1991, as young boy of ten years old, I sustained a life threatening injury after civil war broke out in the Somalian capital, Mogadishu.

The ferocity of the war was intense and thousands of civilians were fleeing the city to the surrounding areas in order to escape the anarchy. But for some, including myself, attempting to flee from this chaos only landed them in further trouble. I was travelling on a lorry with my relatives when we came under fire. I was shot in my ankle and as I was sitting close to the edge in the midst of the chaos fell off. Then, suddenly as I lay on the ground, the back wheels of the lorry ran over my foot – crushing every bone of it. I fell unconscious and only revived after 16 hours.

The treatment of my injury was complicated by the fact that due to the war there were no public health services. Everyone was dependent on medical aid. I desperately needed an operation to adjust my broken bones, but for eight months I had to stay in bed, receiving only wound dressing from humanitarian organisations. Finally one organisation was able to provide me with a skin graft operation which sped up the healing process and covered the gaping wound. But the broken thigh bone and foot bone did not heal properly and the injured leg was now significantly shorter than the other. I needed further operations to reconstruct the damage to my leg. But this was of course impossible. So for years I had to endure walking difficulties and pain from my injuries. In addition to these physical problems, I used to ask myself. Will I ever recover? When will I recover? These thoughts plagued my mind. Then, in 1998 I was fortunate enough to arrive in the UK as a refugee. This filled me with hope that I would recover. I might soon be able to walk again free from pain I thought.

Shortly after my arrival, I was put on a waiting list for an operation to lengthen my left leg. While I was waiting, I focused on my education.

I was determined to learn English in order to overcome my language barriers and continue my studies, which had been disrupted by the civil war. I enrolled in a college where I studied English and computing. Learning English helped me to communicate with doctors and staff at the hospitals.

In July 1999 I had an operation to lengthen my left leg at St Mary's Hospital in Paddington. For the first time in eight years I was able to stand upright properly, which made my brothers comment that I looked taller! I could see the light at the end of the tunnel and only a year later I was able to walk unaided. My confidence was high. My education was also going well, and I had managed to secure a place on a computer science degree course at university.

But that euphoria and excitement was short-lived, as the problems with my leg resurfaced. I begun to feel pain in my foot and, before long, whenever I walked even for short distances the pain became unbearable. One day, I presented myself at the Accident and Emergency department at St Mary's. Four operations later, the only viable option was an amputation below the knee. I gave my consent to the amputation on 4 February 2004. It was not an easy decision at the time. However I can say now that it was the best I have ever made.

I was determined to resume my normal life. Only days after my operation, I turned down the offer of an ambulance to take me to the hospital and caught a bus instead. "The ambulance is for those in serious trouble. I would prefer to give the chance to those in a more vulnerable position than mine," I said.



On the road (photo: David Knight)

This approach was the start of a great relationship with the fabulous team of people at Charing Cross Hospital. My difficult background now came in handy; I had developed many life-skills that were necessary for my recovery: patience, resilience and optimism. This – coupled with the help of dedicated physiotherapy and limb-fitting professionals at the hospital – helped me recover quickly. I was walking sooner than expected and only four months after my operation, I was attempting to run! Thanks to the physios at the Charing Cross who not only helped me to walk but encouraged and gave tips on how to run.

For 13 years after my injury, I struggled to walk. Now with one leg I can run marathons!

I began to run around the perimeter of my local park which I could only manage once a week in the initial stages. I used to put all my weight on the good leg and this had been having a huge impact not only on the joints of my good leg but also on my weaker muscles which had not been put through similar pressure for 13 years. After overcoming the initial stiffness and muscular pains, my style of running, speed and stamina improved dramatically, and eight months after my operation I went to the Battersea running track to find how long it would take me to run a mile? There I ran my first mile ever in seven minutes. This precipitated me to start looking for an amputee running club to join. Unfortunately, there was no athletic club designed to cater for amputees (not just in London but throughout the country) and instead I ended up joining Serpentine, which I happened to know about through chatting with Battersea track receptionists.



Learning to walk again

When I first joined the club, my main plan was not to finish at the back! Even if I was second from last, I was happy. However, I later realised that I had been selling myself short.

The first session that I had with the club, I was wearing a tracksuit and only told the coaches that I was an amputee. The plan was to find out how far I could keep pace with to the other runners without anyone feeling any sympathy for me and slowing down. The session during that night was to run continuously

for ten minutes at a time as a group of ten and whoever happened to be at the back was required to run faster than everyone else to take up the front. When the first round had finished, one of the coaches came over to me, asked me how I was feeling and praised my footwork. Another runner was unimpressed and asked the coach: "Why are you only praising him?" The coach grinned at me and said: "This guy has got one leg and in fact was running better than some of you."

Realising that I did not need to look for an amputee running club to join any longer has been a turning point in my life, and has provided me with the grip to come out of my shell a bit more. However, I needed to overcome a few hiccups which I was discovering as a result of trying to pace (in a short period of time) with a group who were not as technologically advanced as I was! Running outside of my comfort zone at times puts a huge pressure on the stump and sometimes I would do half of a session instead of doing the full session.

Furthermore, walking back to the bus stop after a session was proving to be a struggle. To tackle the discomfort of walking back to the bus stop, I bought a bicycle to ride back home instead of limping to a bus stop. And although pedalling it with multicultural legs (one white and one black) had initially proved to be problematic itself, after a few rides in the local parks, I was confident enough at last to take the risk of riding on the main roads. As for only doing half of the session; perseverance, taking time off to tickle (massage) around the stump and visiting the hospital (garage) for M.O.T checks more often, has paid off and at last I was able to complete fully whatever the session.

And soon after, not only was I pacing with the second fastest group in the club, but I was taking part in competitive races: 5-kilometre runs, cross country and up to half-marathons. From not being able to walk for years without using crutches and feeling pain, I found myself competing against athletes with two legs and beating more than three quarters of the field (this however, does not apply to the cross country races as I have to spend so much time on negotiating with the race guards; the slippery slopes, aggressive mud and deep ponds whose job is to entertain more the portable leg wearers!)

Having improved so much over short distances, rising up the benchmark to push myself further did not seem a daunting task. And running Bedford half marathon seemed to be the starting point. Though it took me 1 hour and 48 minutes, not the time that I had had in mind, reflecting on what happened during that race provided me with valuable information which will stand me in good stead in tackling future half marathons. I found out that reducing drastically the speed at which I normally run instead of helping me, was actually hindering me as it was making my stump get numb quickly before a respectable distance had been covered. I stopped during that race 4 times. However, one or so month later I turned up at the Watford half and despite having had two pit stops, I ran in 1 hour and 34 minutes, which made one Serpie guy ask as a joke if I found a short cut!?

My next challenge now though is to run in next year's London Marathon in under three hours. After all, if you have a leg which looks like a hammer, everything else just looks like a nail! I may be too ambitious but everything is achievable provided that you mentally prepared for it and positively believe that there is no such thing as failure except when you stop trying.

I have come a long way and although I have a long way to go in life, to achieve what I have achieved so far would have been impossible to achieve without the encouragement and support from many including the adorable bunch of crazy people who united under the umbrella of Serpentine.

I might have queued to collect two gold look-alike medals after running in the British Open Championship for people with disability in Manchester Sport City on 16th and 17th of June 2007. I might have been featured in a newspaper in Southampton called Southern Daily Echo after running the Watford half and finishing ahead of the subeditor of that newspaper who later wrote "Towards the end of the race, I had in my sights a fella from the London based athletic club called Abdifatah. He was going pretty quickly and as hard as I tried to catch him, he pulled away. The fella finished in a time of 1 hour 34 minutes 42 seconds, just 20 seconds ahead of me, which was incredible running. It's the first time I've ever been beaten in a sprint finish by an amputee!...", I might have taken part in the Microsoft Challenge and won the multiability cup with a team in a four day event in Yorkshire. I might have been interviewed and appeared in Runner's World, but (though it might sound strange) these are not what I like most about taking up athletics!

Taking up athletics has provided me with an opportunity where I could rediscover myself, has provided me a place where I could let go of so much that I had been bottling up over the years and meet fabulous friends has equipped me with the discipline to accept to move from failure to failure without losing the enthusiasm to change, and above all has taught me that all life's challenges are lost or won in the mind.

The round the clock Norfolk relay

**17 Serpies, 3 people carriers, 193 miles,
1 baton and 1 roof mounted flashing light**

by **Mark Braley**

The Round Norfolk Relay took place on Sep 15th and 16th. For clarification, this is a relay, around the borders of Norfolk! It runs continuously, runner passing baton to runner, running through the night. Starts are staggered on the basis of teams' predicted times with the aim of all finishing at the same time on Sunday morning. Most of the Serpie team travelled up on Friday night, familiarising themselves with "Nelson's County" by tuning into BBC Radio Norwich, in the hope that Alan Partridge was a real person. In fact Alan's station was outdone by Radio Chiltern which advertised a shop with "quite possibly Bedford's largest back-to-school shoe selection".

Race start was 10am at King's Lynn after a somewhat uncomfortable night's sleep and rather small breakfast. Serpentine were toeing the line with British Airways and Ryston Runners. (OK, not that much point toeing the line in a 193 mile race). The RNR is of course all about "the taking part". However in the words of Conan the Barbarian it is also important to crush your enemies, to see them driven before you and to hear the lamentation of their womenfolk. And right from the start, it was clear that the womenfolk of either Serpentine or BA would be wailing later.



Alan Hall & Alice Rickford at a changeover
(photo: Rob Westaway)



Mark Braley eyes up the competition



And, leaving British Airways standing
(photo: Rob Westaway)

Legs 1-5 – off-road fun

First off was Mark Braley for 16.3 miles to Hunstanton. The comment from an unnamed support bike (Roger Coyle) that the cycle and the view were really very pleasant was a real morale builder! The back of a BA vest in sight (just) at the finish. Over to Alan Hall for the run to Burnham Overy (14.1 miles). By now the sun was high, but Alan put his spreadsheets and general admin-God duties to one side and kept us well in touch. Leg 3, including a lot of shingle, to Wells, fell to Alice Rickford, who took nearly 8 minutes out of the BA runner, and put us right back on their heels. And then ate an enormous ice-cream. Leg 4 saw Roger get off his bike and start running to good effect: covering his 12.8 miles to Salhouse in 1.24, a full 7 minutes ahead of BA. Over to Mike Garvin for 8.6 miles to Cromer: again BA as Sopwith Camels, Serpies as Spitfires, stretching our lead further. Already we had been going for nearly 7 hours.

Legs 6-9 – hard pounding

Leg 6 was Mel Pryke who had a poor quality print of her stage profile. So poor, that she actually believed the steep gradient shown at the start was just 8 metres – "a walk up the stairs". In fact it was 80 metres, from sea level to the cliff top! Next up was Tor Collins for 9 miles to Lessingham. Apparently the BA runner on this stage really hated being beaten by women. So Tor passed him after about 4 miles and then set a stage record! The sun was starting to set by now and, dear God, we weren't even half way through! Leg 8, saw Kyrin Hall set off into the gloaming for 7.5 miles towards Horsey. By now, the

RACE REPORT

The round the clock Norfolk relay

runners had a support cyclist and a support car (with flashing light) to run them down if they slowed down. Leg 9, for Hunor Albert-Lorincz was one of the classic Serpie-BA battles. Hunor gave the BA runner a 2 minute head-start and ate up the ground in the first five miles to overtake him. BA came back in the last mile into Great Yarmouth, overtaking Hunor with about 200 metres to go. Hunor kicked for the line and handed over the baton 1 second ahead of BA. Yes, 1 second, just 11 hours, 22 minutes and 45 seconds and 93 miles after we had started with them. By the way, in case you've never been to Great Yarmouth... it's a bit like Las Vegas, but probably not quite such a centre of excellence in forensic science. At this point some of the team headed off for some well deserved kip (and even a beer or two). Others, displaying the borderline-psychotic behaviour that runners are famous for, kept going...

Legs 10-17 – making it through the night

Leg 10 saw Rob Westaway finally get off his bike (I think he cycled about 50 miles of support) for a 15.1 mile run. Leg 11 fell to Greg Stevens – see below, but in summary an awesome destruction of rival teams. Andy Hibbert picked up the baton for leg 12 and 18.4 miles, at 1.15am – this meant that he would be running when, medically speaking the body is at its lowest. Not much sign of that as he breezed through in 2hrs 3 minutes. Leg 13 was Steve Brett, coming back from injury by running 14 miles through Thetford Forest. Yes, a forest, in the pitch black, wearing a head torch. And why not? Leg 14 saw Gargi Patel take on 8.8 miles to Wisseton. Alex Elferink had been scheduled to run this leg, but after some last minute changes had switched to leg 17. Alex stressed to Gargi how important it was for her to still run to his schedule. Which she did. Alex shut up. Leg 15, and the end was just about in sight. Mark Pinnick took 7.2 miles to Downham Market as the sun was coming up. After just shy of 21 hours running, we had a 7 second lead on BA. Leg 16, saw Clare Riddiford, stepping into the breach for the team and carrying an injury, pull through. While the night was full of heroes, a special mention to Alex for driving a support vehicle at about 8 mph for a 7 hour shift. Which sounds impressive, until you realise that's what London cabbies do every day. We will gloss over his attempt to run over a Serpie runner while having a snack. The final leg in fact fell to Alex, who ran 11.7 miles from Stowbridge back to King's Lynn, after no sleep. Alex had two main sources of motivation on his leg: 1) "There's no way a 65 year old is passing me" after spotting a, well, older man behind him and 2) trying to get away from Roger who offered him a gel about 50 times.

And so we arrived at the finish at 9.25am, a mere 23 hours and 25 minutes after starting and just 16 minutes outside our estimate, covering the 193 miles at an average pace of 7.17 min miles. We finished 12th overall and 9th in our category. All were stars, but particularly noteworthy was Tor's stage record and Greg Stevens covering his 19.6 mile stage at an age graded 78% at one o'clock in the morning. Alan Hall and Alex Elferink deserve a huge round of applause for undertaking the mammoth organisational task that RNR involves. Special thanks also to Ron Hagell for his cycle support, and to Helene Johansson who cycled and ran pace. The winning time was 21:50, or a pace of 6.47 min miles from City of Norwich AC, which is quite extraordinary considering the off-road and off-body clock elements. And the lamentation? Well BA pipped us, by 31 minutes. But just as the lamentation should have started, some champagne mysteriously appeared! As did cooked breakfasts, event T-shirts and cubes (always comes in handy, a cube). All in all, a classic event, many thanks to the organisers. Bring on next year!



Great teamwork guys, and raise that champagne!

...the night legs

"Lunch as dinner?!"

by Andy Hibbert

While the daytime runners were running their legs I had been spending the day trying to trick my body clock. I needed to be in a state where I could run further than I have for a long time, starting at somewhere round 1:20am, and consider that a reasonable thing to be doing. So having treated lunch as dinner, put myself to sleep with some quiet music around 8:00pm and woken myself up at midnight with some rather livelier fare I found myself stood next to a field, in the dark, on the edge of Norfolk. A car, bike and runner suddenly approached yelling "Serpies", around 5 minutes before I thought they would, and I was off.

Racing in the middle of the night felt very strange and was full of memorable experiences. At first I was running along an unlit road with no one else around except Alan, my cycle support. The view of the stars was incredible and I looked up at them regularly during the run. This view of the expanse of stars contrasted with a limited view of the road ahead lit by the headlights behind me.

Our nemesis British Airways started behind me. I'd not been following the race so didn't know this until their runner was next to me. This was a rivalry that had built up throughout the day before, with us exchanging places regularly, and he could not be allowed to beat me. But he did. I got a stitch by drinking too much cold water (a lesson forgotten from the previous winter) and slowed down. I convinced myself I'd catch him later. Once I



**“My enduring memory of Norfolk will be the sight of a stunning sunrise over the fens...
...accompanied by the sound of the rave in the barn on the other side of the road.”**

recovered I picked up the pace and started the chase. This led to another memorable view – at one point I could see 6 flashing yellow lights lined up on a hill. Each one was a runner to be caught. There is great motivation in seeing the convoy from a long way away and slowly catching up and passing them. My poor support car had to keep track of me as I passed through the mass of flashing lights, bikes, runners and cars. One of the early runners I caught in the convoy was a familiar sight – I’d caught British Airways. Naturally this spurred me on even more.

The finish was another random bit of road in the dark, just after my third junction in 18 miles, with a small crowd of people each looking out for their runner. We only had one car out so it had gone ahead to drop off Steve, who ran towards me as I waited looking a little lost at the transition point. He grabbed the baton and ran off. I jumped into the car and off we went after him.

Having sat in the car for the next leg I volunteered to bike the next one in support (this is the type of race where everyone plays every role at some point). It turns out cycling at running pace is much colder than running at running pace. The timing was great though – I was cycling as the sun rose. My enduring memory of Norfolk will be the sight of a stunning sunrise over the fens, reflected in the water on one side of the road, accompanied by the sound of the rave in the barn on the other side of the road.

“Little legs on a long dark leg”

by Greg Stevens

The night stages are rather surreal, running under a clear sky full of stars and the smudge of the Milky Way instead of London’s orange dome and also breathing in something weird called Fresh Air.

But we start outside a McDonalds watching teams come in and hand over their baton, wondering where our man had got to. Eyeing up the other runners and trying to assess how quick they look? Have I raced any of them before? How much head start do they get? Some of the slower teams are well over an hour ahead, and there must be some very fast boys behind us too. Finally our man comes in we grab the baton and tank off, and then remember this isn’t an Assembly League and we’d better pace it properly.

It’s odd to run a race with no other runners, just the van behind you and the team cyclist helping with water, navigation, pacing and conversation. The high spots are chasing down another team. Initially they’re just an orange flashing light way in the distance. Ron, my excellent companion, points them out and we reply “They’re Dead Meat”, and for 5 or 10 minutes nothing seems to change. Then you get to see a van which appears to have stopped. Closer still and you realise that the van is moving slowly but in front of it is a forlorn figure with their attendant cyclist. You steadily close and then you’re behind the van which moves out for you. A quick “Keep it up pal” as you pass and they are history and you search the darkness for the next target. The psychology is great! That they’ve come into view means they have to be moving slower than you are, so you will catch them unless they make it to the end of the leg first, but this is a very long leg and we reel in 7 or 8 including this year’s nemesis, British Airways who to their credit were the only team to try to stay in front as we ran them down.

Towards the end of the leg we lose the ability to count our haul or reply to Ron’s comments, we’re panting flat out and our legs fill with stabbing pains. The changeover is a temporary village of lights, people, cell phones, stopwatches, clipboards, cars and bicycles on the edge of a field. We run in, yell “Serpies”, safely hand over the baton and slump. So grateful we have a support crew and don’t have to do anything but sit in the bus and contemplate our pain and watch the semi-organised chaos that make these events such unique fun. We’ve gained about 5 minutes on the schedule, we should have gone quicker, but the race is going well...

Greg’s top tips

- 1 Norfolk’s roads are full of roadkill don’t join them!
- 2 Don’t try to race your cyclist, it’s too flat!
- 3 Resist that “BigMac Meal Deal” before you start!

BA may have been faster, but we had the best cheerleaders. You just had to be there to appreciate the incredible team spirit, which lack of sleep and mishaps along the way only seemed to increase rather than dampen.

Alan Hall



Haile Gebrselassie makes his move at 35km
(photo: Urban Bettag)

and shorter distances. I observed that the Japanese runners are not the most flexible, though they stretch for quite an unusually long time after training!

A trip to one of the running shops was very educational too. Art Sport just opposite Okachimachi station is the place to go. The Japanese love their racing flats, no Asics Gel Kayanos or other heavy running shoes with support could be spotted in the shop, but a wide range of Asics, New Balance and Mizuno racing flats. Japanese runners also like to use Phiten tape as well something I have not seen before in any other race I took part. The purpose of the tape (disc form) is to release pressure points and heat. Paula Radcliffe has been spotted wearing a necklace of the same brand. The science behind it is a bit questionable, though it seems to work for some.

The Fukuoka Marathon is one of those rare events which is still a men only event. The corresponding marathon for women only is the Tokyo International Marathon.

The course itself is a loop course with start and finish at the track. Most high profile events in Japan are like that and have a

Konichiwa Serpie san!

by Urban Bettag

After having run marathons in Europe and the US I thought it's time to venture east and head to Japan, the land of the rising sun. As everybody knows Japan produces some exceptional marathon runners and the country has done well in the World Championships and in particular in the Olympics. In Japan elite athletes such as Mizuki Noguchi, Naoko Takahashi or Toshihiko Seko are considered celebrities.

Amongst many marathons in Japan, Fukuoka clearly stands out. The Fukuoka marathon used to be before the arrival of the IAAF world championships the No 1 marathon in the world in terms of strength and depth of elite runners. Together with Boston and New York it was considered the "triple crown" of marathon running. Only one runner in history so far managed to win all three races, Bill Rodgers (1977). Ron Hill and many other British runners have tried to win the race as well, but only Bill Adcocks (1968) managed to do so. The race is sponsored by one of the biggest newspapers in Japan and still attracts many top runners from around the world, though only a very small fine selection gets invited by the organisers and a strict qualification time is required for participation.

Most recently Fukuoka has experienced a boom in terms of running. The 2006 World XC championships were staged in Fukuoka and the modern city situated on the northern shore of Kyushu island has ambitious plans for the future. Fukuoka is currently bidding for the 2016 Olympics.

Before the race I stayed a couple of days in Tokyo and ran the 5km loop around the Emperor's Palace where most of the runners train. I noticed many run very slowly and prefer to run in a track suit. Most of them were wearing white gloves too. Classic Japanese running school! The Japanese training system is based around: discipline, dedication, high volume aerobic running and precise pacing. There is only very little emphasis on speed work

trademark 360 degree turn around point. However, the "B" standard (sub 2:45h) does not have the privilege to start with the "A" group (sub 2:27h) at the track and have to start outside at the lake. Running on the path around the lake felt like a track with perfect surface like Mondo. It's also worth noting that the ratio between athletes and support staff was possibly 1 to 10!



Start of the 60th Fukuoka Marathon. No 23 Atsushi Fujita, course record holder 2:06:51
(photo: Urban Bettag)

Everything revolves around the athlete and the organisers ensure the athlete's needs are 100% catered for.

Luckily the organiser was kind enough to offer a discount and book me into the official race hotel. The Japanese running stars were walking freely around and so did Haile Gebrselassie (ETH) and Jon Brown (GBR). It was very nice to link up with Luc Krotwaar (NED) and Lornah Kiplagat (NED). Both are also involved in the Shoe 4 Africa project and we had a lot to talk about. Luc had a great run in the European Championships (4th place) and he was hoping for a breakthrough performance, while Lornah and husband/

"Gambattene!"

manager Pieter were there to support Luc. She recently broke the 10m world record and told me about her goals for 2007. The following day while jogging around the loop I caught up with Jaoud Gharib (MAR), 2x marathon world champion. I was surprised that even he can run slowly!

The evening banquet and official reception for all the marathon runners was pretty impressive as well. No need to buy a ticket for the pasta party. All the entrants were invited. Free sushi, noodles and pasta, even the beer (Asahi) was free.



Fabiano Joseph, 2x IAAF World Champion Half Marathon

The race itself didn't turn into a happy ending for me. I got slightly confused with the cut-off time and thought it would be 2:50h pace. After half way I was still en route for a PB. At the 25km check point, still ahead of the pace, but after 27km it was all over and the organisers showed me the red flag and asked me to stop. Perhaps a different race plan would have allowed me to finish in the stadium. Perhaps another time, it certainly makes me more determined to return to Japan to another fine race. There was a lot of support all the way and most of the locals cheered "Gambattene" (Do your best!) and waved the national flag.

In summary, I was very impressed by the friendliness and respect of the Japanese runners. It was a great race experience and had a touch of a true championship event. Very different, no fun runners, mega commercialisation, just pure sport. I can strongly recommend the race for every ambitious runner.

Please contact Urban, if you want to find out more about training the Japanese way and racing in Japan.

2007/08 Japanese marathon calendar

Nov 18th	Tokyo International (Elite Women)
Nov 25th	Lake Kawaguchi (Open)
Dec 2nd	Fukuoka International (Elite Men)
Dec 16th	Yomiuri Hofu Marathon
Jan 27th	Osaka (Elite Women) (provisional)
Feb 3rd	Beppu-Oita Mainichi (Elite Men) (provisional)
Feb 3rd	Ohme-Hochi 30k (Elite Men) (provisional)
Feb 17th	Tokyo Marathon (Open)
Mar 2nd	Lake Biwa Mainichi (Elite Men) (provisional)
Mar 9th	Nagoya International (Elite Women) (provisional)
Aug 24th	Hokkaido Marathon (Elite Women)

Positions vacant at Serpentine!

Contact the person or email address listed for more information on any of these much valued roles.

For general helping out email volunteers@serpentine.org.uk or see the website under 'Getting Involved'.

Clubroom posters

Sid Wills – member-liaison@serpentine.org.uk

Website content managers and developers / Volunteer liaison / Triathlon information liaison

Rachel Whittaker – communications@serpentine.org.uk

New Year's Day 10km – assistance with organisation

Nadya Labib – races@serpentine.org.uk

Organising social events

Mariana Ivantsoff – socialrep@serpentine.org.uk

Getting involved with running or tri coaching

Jen Lashua – trainingrep@serpentine.org.uk

Not forgetting the usual ongoing events – marshals always required so check the events calendar and keep an eye on the e-group and website for information: Marshals for Last Friday of the month 5km and NYD 10km.

Sid Wills:

A kind of magic

by Nicola Miller

"Running is magic". The words that sum up Sid Wills' philosophy may be familiar to Serpies who subscribe to the Serpentine e-group, since this is how he signs-off messages.

In fact, Sid may be familiar to anyone who's ever been to a Serpie club run on a Wednesday night. Hosting the weekly introductory talk for new members, followed by the pep talk for the popular two-parks run, as well as giving or organising talks and yoga sessions at the Health Weekend, has made Sid something of a 'famous face' within the club.

But 'getting involved' is nothing new to Sid: it's something he's been doing his whole life, unlike his running...

Born in Wallsend on Tyne in an air raid shelter 67 years ago, Sid grew up in Newcastle and got bitten by the running bug at an early age. Discovering he was a very good sprinter, Sid competed in and won many local events at the age of 13 or 14. He was even dedicated enough to join a running club, Gosforth Harriers, although he was not immune to the distractions common to all teenage boys. "I was supposed to join the Heaton Harriers but the women in Gosforth were better looking!"

Whilst a member of the club, he was responsible for helping fellow member Ann Oliver try to break the five-minute mile, which hadn't been done at that time. "We used to tear off at certain points to 'pull' her round the track, but she never broke it. Diane Leather did, but I always regretted that I wasn't able to be part of something major like that."

At 15, Sid became an apprentice 'compositor', which was a term for someone who works as a printer "picking up letters for print". He then went on to work as a printer for Newcastle Education Authority, where he joined the Young Printers' Guild and became assistant secretary. He also joined the Labour Party but was expelled at 21 for being a 'Trotskyist'. "I didn't even know who Trotsky was back then," Sid laughs, "but when I found out what it was, I think they were probably right."

"As an apprentice in Newcastle, I attended the Newcastle College of Art & Design two days a week. This had a big impact on me as I learnt about type, jazz, fashion, colour and exotically dressed women."

Around this time Sid got engaged, but splitting up with his fiancée led to a move to Manchester. He says he got a job on the Manchester Guardian, when it was still printed there, but unfortunately found he wasn't allowed to work there. "Union rules stated that these jobs couldn't be given to outsiders if there were unemployed printers in Manchester, which there were."



"Running is magic" (photo: David Knight)

It was also around this time, having now reached the age of 23, that Sid met his future wife Sarah – and stopped running. He hastens to add that, "I wouldn't say I was ever good – which is exactly as I am now."

"I think what stopped me running was that most of the cross-country races [that I took part in] were on Saturdays in the winter, and I used to come home just knackered. I started to realise that some Saturdays, I wasn't even going out after I'd raced. So I stopped. Regretfully."

Although he regrets stopping, Sid credits what was to be a 35-year rest as the reason he is running today.

"I think that, in a way, it's probably quite good that I stopped, otherwise I'd probably have run these legs into the ground by now. A lot of people who run continuously don't manage to keep it up."

But there was no let-up in Sid's passion for 'getting involved'. From leading a campaign to prevent a New Orleans jazz club from closing, to leading a delegation of printers to Paris in 1968 with the International Marxist Group, to becoming secretary of the North Oxford Labour Party when he moved there in 1967: Sid was always part of something.

"I organised constituency meetings in my house, which was in a very Tory area," Sid remembers. "Tony Benn even came and spoke at my house."

No stranger to controversy either, Sid was indirectly responsible for the first strike in 300 years at Oxford University Press. He was employed there as a reader ("One of my jobs was to read the Oxford English Dictionary and check for spelling mistakes!") but was also, 'father of the chapel' a print-related term that meant Sid was in charge of the workers' union. When Sid tried to investigate 'equal pay' (a fairly radical concept at the time, he recalls), they tried to get him out of the way to avoid any trouble.

"They offered me a really good job to move me to another part of the building, a job that was always given to someone who was a year off retirement. They were trying to move me so I couldn't converse with everybody."

Sid wouldn't accept the new role, so he was suspended "for refusal to carry out instructions." However, the strike had the desired effect, and after a week in the 'new' role, Sid was allowed to return to his old job and union representative role.

Not long after the strike he was given a scholarship by the Union to study at Ruskin College, just along the road from the University Press. Here he became involved in the setting up of the famous History Workshops, giving various papers to as many as 600 people.

In the early 1970s, Sid moved to Crouch End in London and became a teacher. Not surprisingly, this led to involvement with the National Union of Teachers, but also to a new skill that was closer to his athletic roots.

"In 1972, I finally learned to ride a bike and, for some reason, people would ask me for advice about cycling!" Even in the absence of running, it seems Sid was still someone people were drawn to when it came to support and advice, which may explain why Sid has had counselling training and worked on the NSPCC helpline.

By now, Sid and Sarah had two children, but in the early eighties, their marriage ended ("we're still great friends"). In 1986, he met his current partner, Alison, and during the years that followed, Sid took up yoga (Alison is a yoga teacher), played tennis ("deadly at the net"), spent time in France, Italy, America and India ("Alison has relatives around the world") and even went for a couple of runs.

But in 1997, a sudden stroke stopped Sid in his tracks. Looking back, Sid states, "This was a great event. I confronted the possibility of death. It's not an easy thing to do and I was very down for about a year."

On holiday in France was a key moment in mental rehabilitation. There's a big park in Lyon that will always be important to him, because it's where he was finally inspired to pick up his running again.

"Alison and I were having a picnic on a bench when several runners went by while we were sitting there," Sid explains. "I thought perhaps it was a race, but it turned out they were just out running. Alison turned to me and said, 'You used to run. Why don't you start it again?'" As soon as he got back to the UK, Sid rushed to John Lewis for a pair of running shoes (Sid did not at this time have the benefit of the Serpie website).

Sid didn't join Serpies until just after the Millennium seven years ago. He admits he trained before joining, as he was concerned that everyone would be much faster than him.

Of course, he soon discovered that Serpies is for runners of all speeds and abilities and became a fully-fledged member. But for someone like Sid, it wasn't enough just to turn up and run – he found himself getting involved and helping out.

"I started helping out Ron Hagell and Bev Thomas with the Wednesday night talks for the two-parks and beginners," says Sid, "I even took the training for the Level Two Coaching Certificate, though not the assessment as yet."

A few years ago, stroke-like symptoms led to Sid being diagnosed with Bell's Palsy – a facial paralysis normally affecting one side of the face. He even recalls running the Last Friday of the Month 5K wearing an eye-patch on one occasion.

But whilst some might have been held back by such a condition, for Sid, his running and being a Serpentine set him free.

"I decided it was good to be as involved as I was because it boosted my self-confidence. For me, running took away my anxiety and it was facing the possibility of dying that really kept me going. I enjoy that post-run buzz."

Whenever he goes away on holiday, Sid takes his running shoes. This summer, he ran in the Ugandan Hills with views of the Kenya Hills, and on the Congo border with views of wild animals.

Sid continues to host the popular cheese and wine evenings on the last Wednesday of every month, which he finds particularly satisfying because they attract people from all over.

"London attracts people from different places and I feel that, by doing something social, I can at least contribute to creating an inclusive atmosphere that people want to remain a part of, wherever they are from as the club should celebrate its diversity."

Surely that's why running is magic.

On his 'Running is magic' philosophy:

Sid refers to Bobby McGee, coach to several Olympic runners, who described running as "magical" and said, "I believe it is not the training but the spaces between the training that are the most critical."

Sid agrees wholeheartedly with this approach to the sport, which allows him to combine his love of yoga with 'creative visualisation': the technique of using your imagination to create what you want in your life.

"I developed a more serious interest in creative visualisation just over five years ago whilst I was in India studying yoga," Sid explains. "During that time, I ran alone, which I realised was important. I felt very relaxed and happy. I had begun to feel unfulfilled when running at home, nervous before races and running in groups." Sid returned from India to win the Tom Hogshead Trophy in 2003.

"Practiced correctly, yoga can be highly beneficial for runners in building stamina and flexibility, preventing and treating injury, helping prepare for a run and winding down afterwards."

"If you are to feel what I call a 'holistic' runner (whether elite or beginner), you need to devote some moments in the day away from training to just re-evaluate how you feel."

"Olympic marathon silver medallist Frank Shorter said that magical means 'creating a realistic, mental image of yourself and integrating it into your physical training programme.'"

"A hero of mine, couldn't have put it better: 'The man who has no imagination has no wings' – Muhammad Ali."

Sid's top 5 runs

- 1 "I love the two-parks course. I run the first part to Bayswater as fast as possible, then I fartlek."
- 2 The Parc de la Tete d'Or in Lyon, where his passion for running was reignited after a 35-year break.
- 3 St-Jean-Cap-Ferrat on the south coast of France.
- 4 The Corniche Road, Marseilles ("my favourite city").
- 5 "Ho Chi Minh Trail", north London: Course starts and ends at Sid's house in Highbury and winds around the back streets of Finsbury Park, Parkland Walk, Highgate Woods, Muswell Hill and past a block of flats on Ferme Park Road in Crouch End. "Ho Chi Minh used to live in one of those flats, in the days when he was a silver cleaner at The Savoy."

The three peaks yacht race

by Ben Cope

The Team: White Cloud IX (3 sailors, 2 runners plus 1 on-shore support crew)

The Challenge: 389 miles sailing, 35 miles cycling, 72 miles running whilst climbing 14,000ft

Early in June I replied to an email about filling a place on the Three Peaks Yacht Race. Now, I had heard of the challenge, considered the road-based version, thought the sea-based one was just for marines (or other nutters,) so why the hell not hey? No time to train but you only live once...

The next Monday I trundled off to a pub in Embankment to meet team White Cloud IX. The following few days were spent procuring off road runners, compeed and a small mountain of gels and malt loaf! 6.30am Friday morning came and I was at Euston station awaiting a train to Barmouth (just on the right after the end of the Earth). After 6hrs on three scenic train legs we arrived at Barmouth and boarded White Cloud IX (a formidable 35' racing machine). The town was packed with athletic looking fell runners, military fitness fanatics and keen yachting types. I overheard an interview with someone who had helpfully calculated we would climb/descend the height of Everest over the next 5 days. As I was handed a huge holdall of PowerBar goodies at the expo I wondered what I had let myself in for...



George and Ben looking forward to the next hill



*White Cloud IX sails to the Highlands
(photo: Three Peaks Yacht Race Co.)*

Snowdon (Leg 1)

On Saturday 23rd June the race began with a boat parade out of Barmouth harbour. We jostled for start line position then had a successful racing start as Max Boyce fired the starting cannon. All was looking good for team White Cloud IX as we rounded the Bardsey Head in pole position and headed for Caernarfon. After some supper the 'runners' (George and I) got some sleep ready for Leg 1 – a 23 mile jaunt up Snowdon. At half past midnight we jumped ashore (pumped up on PowerBar products) and headed for kit check. [I must mention at this point that we must carry, amongst other items, a sleeping bag, full waterproofs and a rather heavy GPS transmitter to keep track on us.] After a TV interview (we were proper film stars) the heavens opened and we were off into the night and soaked in about 30 seconds, great! The first nine miles was simple – follow the A4085 to the base of Snowdon. 1hr 15mins later we were beginning the Snowdon ascent following others' headlamps uphill which danced like fireflies in the darkness. A small group of locals climbing 'just for fun' at 1am (!?) helped us with some tricky navigation to the summit. Most surprisingly a film camera awaited us on the summit for another interview (the poor sod must have been freezing). The light picked up as we descended and a quick walk turned into a steady downhill jog – spurred on by passing another team we reached the bottom in just over an hour. A call to the boat informed us we had an hour to return before low tide... Following this was perhaps the hardest 8 miles I've ever run... with helpful road signs telling us we had 4 'country' miles to go 3 times at 5-10 minute intervals! We completed the circuit in 5hrs 8mins and most importantly our boat was the last to leave the harbour for 4-5hrs.

Scafell Pike (Leg 2)

It was now about 6.30am on Sunday as our boat trundled off through the Menai Straits. Going was slow as the tides were against us and the wind dropped (bad for a sail boat apparently). We resorted to oars and rowing much to the amusement of the film crew... The first bit of bad luck struck as someone (we won't say who hey skipper?) landed us on a nice bit of beach where we remained for the next 5hrs. Time for some dinner and kip! The sail from the Menai Straits started off rather pleasantly spotting wind farms off Morecambe Bay and oil rigs in the setting sun. This was soon to change as gale force 8-9 winds struck from the North West and the maritime safety broadcast rang out for rough seas... Back to the bunk to hold my stomach and avoid moving then – whilst kit flew out of bunks and around the ship. Meanwhile on deck our 3 experienced sailors battled the storm whilst 2 trusty oars broke and went overboard. Luckily we made Whitehaven at



A film crew? This must be Monte Carlo!

the end of high tide 40hrs after leaving Caernarfon, slightly shaken and very happy to put two feet on the ground.

The runners were up again as we headed off (after the obligatory TV interview) by mountain bike to Ennerdale Water. 16 miles of steady up and steep down hill cycling and we arrived at the YHA where we left our noble steeds to continue on foot. There was still 8 miles to the base of Scafell Pike, which included an 1800ft climb and descent over Black Sail Pass. Marshals and our support crew met us at the base of Scafell Pike with flapjacks, chocolate and water before we began the day's second big climb. The weather was glorious, though, as we climbed we heard wind warnings of 60mph on the summit. We almost crawled to the trig point, to avoid being blown off, where we stamped our mountain cards and saw more film crew. We then headed swiftly off the mountain to complete the climb in 2hrs 57... 'only' 30 minutes slower than the elite fell runners which made us happy! The climb back over to Black Sail and return to Ennerdale YHA was tough but we happily jogged back to our bikes as we passed runners on their outward leg... it was getting dark. The bike out of Ennerdale was steep especially for heavy legs on mountain bikes... from the summit it was a pleasant and steady 8-mile descent back to Whitehaven. That was 10.5hrs and 92kms covered for the second leg. A warm shower welcomed us along with a night in port after a mix up by the harbour master led us to miss the high tide departure slot and have to wait till 5am to depart. (After the previous night's rough seas we were all quietly satisfied by this!)

Ben Nevis (Leg 3)

I awoke as the boat was leaving Whitehaven and informed we were now way behind the leading 5 boats due to the harbour master's error the night before – great! Hearing of other boats ending up in Fleetwood, Ireland (!?) and the Isle of Man in the storms slightly healed the wounds. Ahead of us was a 200-mile sail to Corpach near Fort William. This involved a mismatch of high winds and no wind as White Cloud IX steadily made its way through the Scottish Hebrides. This was a magnificent sight as we sailed between mountains around the Isle of Jura. We were even gifted some sun for part of the way. The going remained good as we fixed our legs up for the final stint... About 6-7 miles from the end the wind completely died again and we resorted to the oars again (now only 2 after the storm). After a tedious last 2 hrs we pulled up in Corpach.

The final running stretch sounded simple: a 5-mile run to Ben Nevis, 5 mile climb (1 mile of ascent) and then back the same way for a round 20 miler (short compared to Leg 1 and 2). The first 5-mile run was a good awakener for the legs after sitting on a boat for 40+ hours but we made a respectable-ish 40-45 minutes. The climb was all about the calves (very sore parts of legs not small cows) and waiting to see other returning teams. After over 2hrs of climbing we reached the top which had large snow drifts in places and was at sub-zero temperatures. No film crew this time and after a quick food stop we started the descent. Now it was about sore quads and not slipping off rocks (very slippery after the rain which had just started). At the bottom we were met by the rest of our crew who informed us, helpfully, of a sprightly looking team behind us... OK so we couldn't let them overtake us after all this distance covered so it was heads down for a 5-mile 'sprint' to the finish. We managed this in 35 mins... We were so quick in fact that no one was at the finish to cheer us home and we had to restage it later for a photo. We finished in 6th place (out of 28 boats) in a time of 4 days, 7hrs and 19 minutes.

The 'sprightly' team behind us finished about 1hr 20 after us – I guess our team just wanted their supper. Unfortunately it was 10.30pm and Fort William was all but shut down so we settled for a case of Tennants (Scotland's finest beer) and corn-beef hash made with smash – not quite the steak we all had dreamed of but very welcome and it hit the spot! It felt fantastic as we received our medals and reluctantly returned our race bibs which they wanted for next year – I hope they wash them well first! (To find out more about the race visit www.threepeaksyachtrace.co.uk).



The bike quickly recovered after a rest and a thorough greasing

'Weather' to run the Paris marathon?

by **Hugh Torry**

It has been a year of erratic and often frustrating weather conditions, with a summer that most people would consider a non-starter; though, as someone who spends a lot of time outdoors, I've been quite happy with it, a bias that may relate to the lack of pollen in the air and the fact I don't live on a flood plain! But think back and you may recall a very warm start to the year, and a number of sporadic hot days. So now, with almost every long race I have done this year being muggy and in the high twenty degrees, I've been looking forward to the winter for a while. So to Paris...

I arrived comfortably by Eurostar the day before the marathon, with my travelling support team of brother, sister and mate Ed, and headed straight for the Expo to pick up my race number and T-shirt. The Expo itself was a fairly disappointing ramshackle affair, with nothing to get excited about, so after a short time there, we headed back into town for the afternoon, before meeting about 30 Serpies for a pasta dinner, and turning in for an early night.

"...never have I been so happy to finish. Now where's my beer!"

In stark contrast to the previous day's Expo the start is impressive, with the massive Arc de Triomphe behind, devoid for once of cars in the massive and hair raising roundabout that it usually forms, and the broad cobbled street of the Champs-Élysées stretching in front, closed only three times a year, for Bastille day, the last stage of the Tour de France and today. I'm not sure you could ask for better.

With the promise of the hot day ahead, the 8.45am start was welcome. I hustled my way over to my pen, passed the efficient wardens and found a spot to sit and try not to get too nervous.



Hugh... carb loading (photo: Ed Bozzard)

I soon saw one of my training partners, Alex Vero, in the pen in front, the French equivalent of the Championship area. We had a quick chat, and I felt more relaxed for seeing a friendly face. The five minute whistle went and we were all herded forward, bunching up, and I was soon less than 10 meters from the line... and we were off, crossing the line in only a few seconds, with the broad boulevard ahead I was soon in open space. I slowly brought my pace in check from the mad dash of the start so easy to get caught up in, and "sat back" and enjoyed the spectacle. I was soon joined by Alex, and finding out we were going around the same pace, we ran together, passing the occasional snippet of conversation.

A few kilometers into the race and we were in full sunlight, with the temperature rising noticeably. As the first feeding station came round I picked up a bottle of water, avoiding the array of goodies on offer: half bananas, orange quarters, packs of raisins, dates, and sugar cubes. I didn't see the cheese platter, but I'm sure it must have been there. I drank about a third of the water, wary of my stitch during the Amsterdam Marathon, using the rest to cool off and wash away the salty sweat, already appearing on my face.

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The race continued on, taking us out of the centre towards the official boundary to the city. Coming up to 10km I had my mind set on an isotonic drink, but to my great disappointment there were none, so it looked like it was going to be water and my first of two gel packs. Immediately after the station, we passed under the Périphérique, leaving the administrative area of Paris. This took us into the first of two parks on the route, Bois de Vincennes, and with it came the hope of some shade, but the thinly foliated trees and broad roads provided little of the sort against the steadily rising sun. The crowds were thin around the park, and at around 17km, Alex who had been nearby since the start, said he needed to stop and stretch a twinge in his leg, and I was back on my own.

After leaving the almost 10km loop of the park, the site of the half way point was very welcoming, with the crowd narrowing the path to two abreast, I passed my "support team" cheering me on. With spirits raised, I pressed on and tried to ignore that I had the same distance again ahead of me. The route then headed back towards the city centre, passing the Bastille for the second time that day, mere meters from where I was 18km earlier, and onto sites that I have a vague painful blurry memory of from 4 years ago, happy to be able to see and enjoy their beauty this time around.

Soon I was running the long stretch along the side of the Seine, again I hoped this would provide a respite, but with no cool breeze off the river forthcoming, the heat was really beginning to take its toll. At least the crowd support was much greater than in my previous experience, bolstered no doubt by the fantastic weather (for spectating!) The river trail was mostly flat, punctured by the occasional frustrating underpass, and the now infamous several hundred-meter-long Pont de l'Alma tunnel, which at least provided sanctuary from the sun.

Since half way I had been passing people paying now for their previous high pace, but coming up to 30km this progression was reducing, and I began to worry about my target time.

At 32km I ran the figures though my head, I had just under 40 minutes to spare, that seemed enough time for the final 10km, and comforted by this I ignored my increasing fatigue.

Leaving the river we were soon in the second park of Bois de Boulogne, and the 35 km point, still pressing on, but my pace was now noticeably slowing. My previous optimism soon faded, with legs stiffening and their pain increasing, each "minimum" target slipping away, 2:45, 2:48, 2:50... "oh, but a PB must still be possible!" My mind whirled with the frustration of a race so well planned but so poorly executed, exacerbated by a lack of understanding of the effects of the heat and dehydration. All my thoughts were now on finishing the race, that was the target... actually the target was a relaxing beer at the end, everyone needs a reward! I pushed on, trying to remember the meandering route though the park, easily resisting the offering of wine and cider from the farmers' stalls and imagining the finish. Finally, the last stretch arrived, and I could see the finish with the Arc de Triomphe behind. With no final spurt of energy available I seemed to shuffle across the line, 30 seconds outside my PB, and over 7 minutes off my goal.

The heat affected most. The race debrief with my fellow Serpies showed similar experiences to mine, but with additional stories of water shortages at the feeding stations, and the confirmation that however bad you feel, cider in the last 4km of a marathon makes you feel even worse! Many were short of their target time with a number of "personal worst" performances, all understandable considering the conditions. For myself, I have always aimed high, above my present ability or willingness to train, from the school of "yes I like the sound of that time, let's do it", so I have always been slightly disappointed in my marathon results, but this was the first time I have ever crossed the line with a broad grin across my face... never have I been so happy to finish. Now where's my beer!



Ok then, all stand in a line and say 'choo chooooo...!'
(photo: Lindsay Lloyd)

Race the train

by John Cullinane

Time is seemingly catching up with the steam train that plods up and down the Tallylyn Railway, as, for what we believe is the first time, 2 Serpies beat it in the annual Race The Train race in Tywyn, on the West Wales coast. A 14.5 mile mixture of road and off-road (a euphemism for varieties of mud), the race is now a bit of a classic,

attracting some high quality entrants at the front end, and many more who may never beat the train but who get to have a good time admiring the scenery and thanking the plentiful marshals.

Next year is the 25th anniversary of the Race, which will take place on 16th August, and the organisers promise something special – maybe a chance to race a Virgin Voyager or a double set from the post-race entertainer. With another train beater or two to join Mark Braley and Alan Hall, there is a good chance of a team prize, and the womens' team prize is certainly there for the taking. And it's another chance to set that elusive 14.5m PB. More details will surface on the website and e-group nearer the time, but this is a great weekend away in what is a beautiful part of the world even when it's raining, and there is a 10K option if 14.5 miles is that bit too far. There are rumours that this might be the last time the event is staged so run it while you can!

Club handicap

by Mark Braley & John Knox

The Club Handicap is entering the crucial phase, with three races left in the competition for the Tom Hogshead trophy. May saw two races, the real May race was won by Darren Nicolas, with Brian Pickles and Sid Wills completing the medal rostrum. This race was also notable for a new M75 record from Bob Davidson, knocking 3:31 off his own previous record. The second May race (actually the June handicap) was won by Ellis Kurland, followed by Keith Evans (in his 110th race) and Lula Rosso. Lula had scored well in a number of earlier races, and the 30 points from "June" moved her significantly up the table. Also scoring solidly in June was John Dsouza, getting his fifth >20 point score of the year.

In the July race, Ellis Kurland scored his second straight first place, with Alison Wright in second place and Helen James in third. Ellis now carries a punishing extra 2% loading for the rest of the year. Summer finally arrived for the August race with fairly hot conditions. Times unsurprisingly suffered: just 7 runners out of 77 non-scratch runners (9%) finished with total times sub 48 minutes (the time at which everyone should finish if the handicapping were perfect – god forbid!), compared with an average of 16% in the prior seven races so far this year and a whopping 24% in May. The race was won by Simon Coles, with Andrew Hibbert and Abdulrashid Abdi taking silver and bronze.

September saw Justin Lock's marathon training pay off, with a PB by over a minute to win the race. Chris Stagg and Patrick Foster (also a PB) fought out 2nd and 3rd places. Ominously John Dsouza posted a fourth place, with another PB to score 29 points. Jeremy Freer also managed a PB to keep in touch in the overall table.



John with Oct '07 winners. 1st Laura Denness, 2nd Peter Loveridge & 3rd Alice Rickford (photo: George Allen)



The handicap 'Dream Team' (photo: Mel Pryke)

So nine races in, the top 5 in the Tom Hogshead are John Dsouza (192 pts), Jeremy Freer (176), Lula Rosso (159), Sid Wills (145) and Gordon Robertson (133). All have now run 8+ races – remember that only 8 score for the year towards the Tom Hogshead, so once you reach 8, you start to drop lower scoring races, making it harder to radically increase the total score. For example John's "weakest" three scores at present are 17, 21 and 23 points. Even if John won all three remaining races, with PBs (3 x 32) he could only add a net 35 points. In contrast Lula's "low" scores are 10, 11 and 12 points, so she could theoretically still score another 63 points. A long winded way of saying... it's not over till it's over!

What else stands out this year? We've had lots of new runners and lots of PBs, both from our new runners and from some old-timers. The handicap is a great way of 1) improving your times, 2) meeting people, 3) being in with a shout of winning something! So far this year 201 PBs have been set and the times of people placing for medals have varied from 25:07 to 46:06.

We've also had some very fast outright times and a wave of new records. Fastest overall this year so far is Ian Druce at 23:09 (in September). This is the outright course record for the current course, which stood at 23.47 (Massimiliano Monteforte), until Ian broke it first in August (23.27) and then in September. Others who have broken 25 minutes this year are Andrew Reeves (in fact 23:48, a V35 record for this course), Urban Bettag, Andrew Davies (four times so far this year), Michael Wiggins and Robert Pugh. The best age graded performances have come from Anthony Stranger-Jones (6 races, 6 times over 80%), David McGregor (2 races, twice over 80%, including a V50 record for this course), Phil Kelvin (3 races, twice over 80%, including a FV55 record) and Bradley Cobb (one race, once over 80%). Anthony has the best age-graded so far this year, with 85.2% in May.

Idle chit-chat at the finish line in September established that to date the only person ever to have won the handicap having started last is... John Walker! This achievement – i.e. passing every single other runner – was achieved on the old course. Inherently this is basically impossible to "game" – you need to run fast enough in the first place to be starting last and then need to run so well that you overcome large absolute improvements by other, slower, runners. This has to be worth some form of special (and very rarely awarded) prize!

Blooming in the Spring

by Karen Hancock

The days are shortening at an accelerating pace, you have been thinking back over what you've achieved this summer, and you're marking a target event in your 2008 calendar for the spring. It could be a marathon – our club's local race up on Blackheath on April 13th or one further afield – or it could be a half-marathon, 20-mile race (Bramley has good age-group prizes), the National Cross-Country Championships or even a series of races. Whatever your goal once the daffodils are in bloom, you're more likely to achieve it if you make a plan.

A periodised and personalised training plan

A detailed plan does not make sense at this stage: instead what you need is a high-level plan with a framework which allows for some flexibility. Life, after all, has a habit of throwing up some unexpected surprises and every individual is different. So start by organising your winter-to-spring training into phases. Each phase should have specific aims for your athletic development and a different mix of training session types which will bring you to your peak when the sap rises again in the spring.



Karen sprints to the finish line

Period	Aims to improve	Duration/ Rough dates for April peak	Typical sessions
General preparation	General physical conditioning through increasing training volume to develop aerobic capacity; resistance to neuro-muscular fatigue; leg-strength; technical skills; tactical skills. Also aims to improve understanding of your nutritional and hydration needs in training and competition.	As long as needed – less if already pretty well-conditioned – October-mid-February. Don't wait until New Year's Day to start this phase.	Long runs at an easy pace; threshold runs; hill sessions; fartlek; cross-country and other low-key races; core stability; weights sessions. Build in cross-training if injury-prone – e.g. long bike-rides and vary routes and terrains for runs.
Special preparation	Further increases in aerobic capacity; develop speed and increase pace at VO2 max; develop pace-judgement especially at target race pace; perfect running technique and tactics.	6-8 weeks is enough – mid-February to early April, including Lanzarote week.	Long runs continue, but need to swap some of the threshold and fartlek sessions for more focussed speed-training at target race pace (at less than race distance), and some at faster than race pace – e.g. marathon-paced runs; 5k, 3k pace work. Reduce frequency of strength (weights or hills) sessions to 2 x per week. Races used for practicing tactics and developing pace-judgement.
Competition	Consolidation – or "banking" – of the work of previous training; reduced volume of training allows the creation of an energy and physical capacity reserve to use in competition; tactical, practical and mental preparation.	2 weeks (if peaking for single race); 6 weeks or so (if peaking for a series of races) (including taper).	Much reduced volume of training, but at high intensity to keep you sharp. Final massages, chiropody, mental rehearsal (visualising success; rehearsing dealing with difficulties), tactical preparation (develop race strategy), kit and race arrangements checks.
Transition	To allow body and mind to recover and regenerate and to review what has been achieved. Muscular fatigue likely to dissipate in about a week in well-trained runners, but Central Nervous System fatigue takes longer to go.	2-4 weeks of active rest and recreational, non-competitive activities.	Keep active, but only run when you feel like it and non-competitively. Massages are useful. Helping others who are less fast towards their fitness goals can be especially satisfying at this time.

A system of organising the training year into phases is known as "periodisation" and was invented in Eastern Europe in the 1960s. It was given more scientific backing by the work of Tudor Bompa in the 1970s and 80s and is still in widespread use by coaches and athletes aiming to achieve their best performances at a particular time. The table above outlines the various phases or periods of training which you should think about as the first stage of your planning.

Macrocycles for the general preparation period

Your main aim over the winter then is to build endurance, aerobic capacity and strength, without breaking down with injury or tipping into over-training. Training causes damage to the body, both physical and mental. Recovery is when your body rebuilds itself but stronger to enable it to cope with the next increase in training load. So recovery must be planned in too. You should do this at 2 levels: at the macro level and at the micro level.

First, divide this training period into macrocycles; sub-divisions of the different training periods lasting from 3-6 weeks, culminating in a cut-back week to allow the body to consolidate its fitness gains. Increase the workload week by week gradually within each macrocycle (measured by number of runs, weekly mileage and length of longest run), then cut back to 75% or less of the peak achieved thus far for the final week. Each macrocycle should reach a higher peak of training load, like successively larger waves crashing onto a shore.

I think of the cutback week as the time to bank your training earnings. I think it's useful and motivating to use the cutback week as a mini-taper and take part in a race to monitor your progress over the long winter period. So once you've planned your macrocycles, start putting some races into your plan, checking out the Serpie event planner for ideas for suitable events. But be prepared to be a bit flexible: the length of your macrocycle should be determined by you and how your body is responding to the increase in training volume. People respond to training differently, so don't worry about what others are doing – make your plan personal to you. Experience tells me that a 3 or 4 week macrocycle is as long as I can cope with: that is 2 or 3 weeks of increasing volume of training, before I need to scale back again, but you might need 5 or 6 weeks per macrocycle.

Microcycles

Within each macrocycle you can now start to plan your first microcycles (training blocks of about a week, but could be 5-10 days). Most of your training over the winter will be building endurance and your aerobic capacity and recovering from that. This is the training which enables you to go longer with less fatigue, brings down your resting heart-rate and the speed of your recovery from hard sessions, and develops mental toughness. Most of your running therefore should be at 65%-75% effort (or % of max heart rate) and you should be able to chat to your friends while doing it. But you need to mix in other types of training at the same time, partly to relieve the tedium of running always at the same pace, and partly to develop your cruising speed, strength and running technique.

Winter microcycles

Given everything I've said so far, the table below shows how you might structure your winter training week, making maximum use of Serpentine training sessions. More experienced runners with a higher endurance base should undertake more of these sessions – e.g. extra recovery runs. These sessions are optional for those with a lower endurance base and can be substituted with aerobic



Karen races ahead

Sunday	Long, slow run at 65%-75% effort or under-distance race in a cutback week. Vary routes and terrain and even company. Gradually increase distance by a few miles each microcycle. You should find your pace at any given heart rate or perceived effort level increases as the winter draws on.
Monday	Weights session (upper body and mid-section) + (30-50 mins recovery run).
Tuesday	Technical drills + threshold session or tempo run – e.g. 2-3 x 1.5 miles @ 85% effort/max HR with 2-3 mins recovery on a footpath.
Wednesday	(am) Core stability work. (pm) semi-long run of about 2/3 Sunday's distance at 75% effort – club runs are good for these. Conversation is more sporadic at this pace.
Thursday	(30-50 mins recovery run) + core stability work.
Friday	(am) Weights session (leg-strength). (pm) Steady run of 30-60 mins at 70-80% effort or easy run + 6-8 x 100m strides with walk/jog recovery if racing on Sunday.
Saturday	(am) core stability work + hills or fartlek session or cross-country race.

cross-training (biking, elliptical cross-trainer, swimming) for the injury-prone. But all will need to do the highest-priority sessions: the long run, the tempo run and the semi-long run. I haven't specified the lengths of runs because they will depend on your target event and your current level of fitness. But in general, the longer your target event, the more mileage you should be clocking up.

I've suggested including core stability work and weights training: both of these types of training will make you a more efficient (i.e. faster), less injury-prone runner, but only if your technique is correct. I strongly advise seeking specialist advice for these exercises.

Progression

Whatever you manage in week one of your winter training (logged of course in your training diary), you should be looking to make progress as the days get shorter. Long runs should get longer of course. Tempo runs might get faster, or you might aim to spend longer in the 85% zone by lengthening the repetitions or reducing the recoveries. In hills sessions, you might aim to do more repeats or do them on a longer or steeper hill. Use your imagination to change the parameters of a training session to increase the degree of challenge to your body and keep you interested and motivated.

Expect the unexpected

Don't be over-rigid with your plan and be a little bit opportunistic. Learn to monitor yourself for signs that you haven't recovered from your previous session sufficiently to attack another tough one (e.g. through a raised resting heart rate, or extra-sore or stiff leg muscles). So do an easy run instead or some cross-training even if it means swapping the days around in your plan. And if you have to miss a day altogether – even a whole week because say you had a cold or for some other reason, don't panic: it's not the training you do on a given day or week that makes a difference to your performance, it's the accumulated effect of months, even years of fairly consistent effort. It's part of distance running lore that it takes something of the order of 7-10 years of consistent effort to reach your athletic peak, so one day – even one week – won't change very much.

I hope what I've said here is enough to enable you to start to design a winter training programme that will be personal to you, your athletic history, your physical and mental propensities, your goals and your lifestyle. A personalised programme is the one that is most likely to work. And come the New Year, when you start to wonder whether you will ever be able to train without tights, gloves and hat ever again, you can start to plan the next phase of your training: specific preparation for your chosen event when the daffodils are blooming again in the spring.

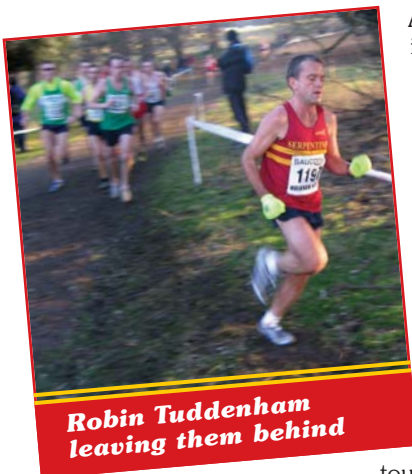


Southern Championship 2005 (All photos: Brent Plump)

Cross Country

by Malcolm French

Darkened skies, fallen leaves, the patter of rain on the window, the first frosts – ah! It's the start of the cross country season. Surely, this is the most hospitable and sociable of all the athletics disciplines, especially as everyone runs as part of a team.



Robin Tuddenham
leaving them behind

As well as being a great sport in its own right, cross country races also provide invaluable winter endurance training for any road races you have planned for the spring of 2008, be it the London Marathon or a 5k. Cross country works everything. It builds strength and endurance; it helps you develop an efficient running style; running across uneven terrain improves your core strength, thereby making you less prone to injury; it toughens you mentally; it's

great to be part of a team in a sport that is otherwise mainly about individual performances. And with most of the races taking place on Saturday afternoons, you still have Sunday free for that traditional staple of endurance runners, the "long run".

About 150 Serpies ran cross country for the club last season and I hope they also enjoyed the post-race socialising that is so much a feature of the cross country experience. Angie Palin and Malcolm French will be carrying on as your principal Team Managers.

As in past seasons, we'll be taking part in a wide variety of league, cup and championship races. In terms of the leagues, the



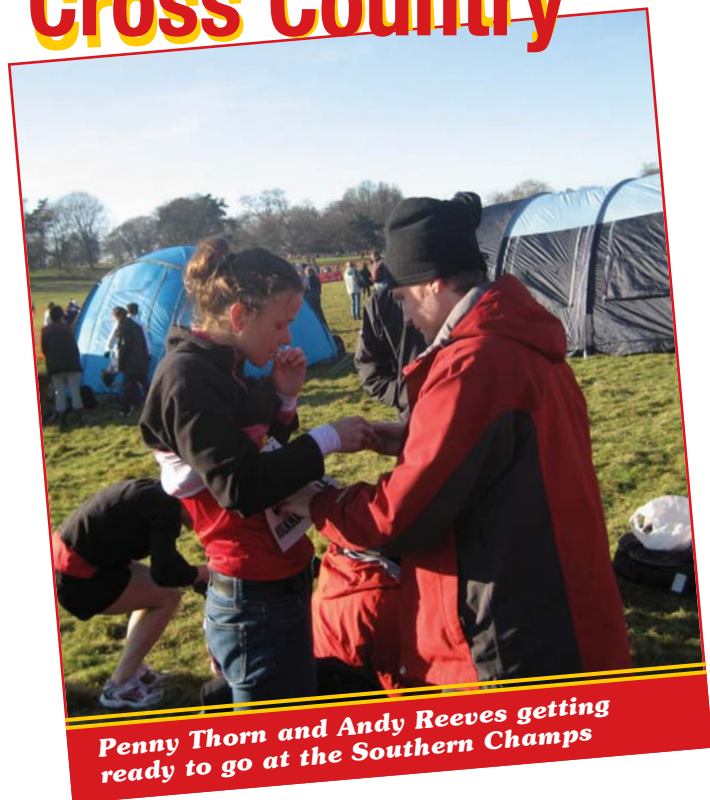
Barbara Yff, steaming ahead

Metropolitan League will be our main competition focus. The Sunday League is less competitive and the events are good ones for novices who want to try out cross country running. All of these races are open to all Serpies. The cup and championship races are also open to most club members.

Race distances vary between 5km and 8km for women and between 8km and 15km for men, depending on the nature of the event. Some of the courses are across parkland, others are wooded, some are in rural locations while others are within London. Virtually all are accessible from Central London by public transport, meaning you can head off to the pub before going home!

As with any winter running, you'll need to dress appropriately for the weather, especially if the day is cold or wet. If you're a novice and the autumn is dry you may find that you're able to run the October races in ordinary trainers. Thereafter, underfoot

Cross Country



Penny Thorn and Andy Reeves getting ready to go at the Southern Champs

conditions will become too soft and you'll need shoes that give you more grip, or you'll find yourself slipping around. A pair of cross country spikes, studs or fell shoes is a wise investment. The good news is that cross country shoes are much cheaper than ordinary trainers. You'll also need a large bin bag to put your wet and muddy kit in after the races!

How do I enter the races?

You do not need to enter any of the league races in advance. Just come along on the day – with your Serpie top. Cup and championship races require advance entry. Please contact Angie and Malcolm to let them know which ones you're interested in. The good news is that the club will pay the race entry fees on your behalf (except for the Watford Autumn Challenge): it's another membership benefit, so make sure you take advantage of it!

Where can I find out about the races?

All the cross country races will be on the Planner section of the Serpie website. Details of individual races will be posted on the Serpie e-group, in John Walker's regular Seymour Sentinel, or can be obtained from your Team Managers, Angie Palin and Malcolm French, on:-

Angie Palin – 07967 643976
angiepalin@hotmail.com

Malcolm French – 020 8422 3900
MalcolmFrench@aol.com

We look forward to seeing you at the races!

Fixture List 2007/8

Date	Event	Location	Comments
3 Nov	North London Championship	Horsenden Hill, Perivale	Women 6k, 2.00pm Men 5 miles, 2.30pm Advance entry req'd
10 Nov	Metropolitan League	Claybury, Woodford Green	Women 6k, 1.55pm Men 8k, 2.30pm
11 Nov	Watford Joggers Autumn Challenge	Cassibury Park, Watford	Combined race. 5 miles. 11.00am. Separate entry req'd
17 Nov	North of the Thames Championship	Kingsbury	Women 6k, 1.30pm Men 8k, 2.15pm Advance entry req'd
18 Nov	Sunday League	Digswell, North Welwyn	Women 3 miles Men 5 miles Joint start, 11.00am
24 Nov	Metropolitan League	Wormwood Scrubs	As for 10 November
1 Dec	Dysart & Ellis Cups	Pembroke Lodge, Richmond Park	Women 4m, 2.00pm Men 5m, 2.30pm
8 Dec	London Championship, inc SEAA Inter-Counties	Parliament Hill Fields, Hampstead Heath	Women 3 miles Men 6 miles Advance entry req'd
16 Dec	Sunday League Serpie Home Match	Grovelands Park, Southgate	As for 21 October
5 Jan	Middlesex Championship	Trent Park, Cockfosters	Women 8k, 1.45pm Men 12k, 2.30pm Advance entry req'd
13 Jan	Sunday League	Royston	As for 18 November
19 Jan	Metropolitan League	Horsenden Hill, Perivale	As for 10 November
26 Jan	South of England Championship	Holkham Hall, Wells-next-the-Sea, Norfolk	Women 8k, 1.50pm Men 15k, 2.50pm Advance entry req'd
2 Feb	Middlesex Veterans Championship, inc SEAA Masters	Mad Bess Woods, Ruislip	Women 6k, Men 10k Advance entry req'd
9 Feb	Metropolitan League	St Albans	As for 10 November
17 Feb	Sunday League	Cassibury Park, Watford	Combined race. 5 miles. 11.00am
23 Feb	English National Championship	Alton Towers	Women 8k, 2.15pm Men 12k, 3.00pm Advance entry req'd
t.b.a.	Mob Match v Thames Hare and Hounds	Wimbledon Common	Combined race. 5 miles. 2.30pm

Let's get... muddy!

Serpentine quiz

by Malcolm French

The first seven questions are about the 2007 World Athletics Championships.



Answers on page 39

- 1 In which Japanese city were the Championships held?
☐ A Kyoto ☐ B Osaka ☐ C Yokohama
- 2 Athletes from how many countries competed in the Championships?
☐ A 134 ☐ B 187 ☐ C 203
- 3 Athletes representing how many nations won medals?
☐ A 19 ☐ B 31 ☐ C 46
- 4 Tyson Gay won the men's 100m. Where was his coach, Lance Brauman, when the race took place?
☐ A In prison
☐ B Stuck in a traffic jam
☐ C Serving in the US army in Iraq
- 5 Bernard Lagat, representing the USA, won the men's 1500m. When did the USA last win gold at this distance in an Olympic or World Championships?
☐ A 1908 ☐ B 1948 ☐ C 1988
- 6 Australian, Nathan Deakes, won the 50km walk. At what was his father an Australian national champion?
☐ A Fly fishing
☐ B 10-pin bowling
☐ C Flower arranging
- 7 The winning time in the men's 800m (1.47.09) was the slowest in a global championship since the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. Which distinguished Serpentine member won silver in the Melbourne 800m?
☐ A Bob Davidson ☐ B Derek Johnson ☐ C John Walker
- 8 Who is the only man to have set four marathon world records?
☐ A Abebe Bikila (ETH)
☐ B Derek Clayton (AUS)
☐ C Jim Peters (GB)
- 9 In which part of London was the great decathlete Daley Thompson born?
☐ A Notting Hill
☐ B Stratford
☐ C Willesdon
- 10 It is generally considered that Britain is the birthplace of Paralympic sport. To coincide with the 1948 Olympic Games in London the first wheelchair games were held at which British hospital?
☐ A Hammersmith
☐ B HMS Collingwood, Fareham
☐ C Stoke Mandeville, nr Aylesbury

Can swimming improve running performance?

by Terence Collins

The answer is probably. Let's consider ways in which swimming could actually aid running performance. In a nutshell, swimming can facilitate loss of body fat, increase cardiovascular endurance, and reduce the risk of overuse injuries. This last benefit, the avoidance of overuse injuries, is the strongest argument in favour of swimming as a runner's preferred choice of cross-training activity.

Swimming can effectively increase endurance volume (yardage/mileage) within a training programme, without significantly increasing impact on leg muscles and joints. Arguably, these muscles and joints may also be benefiting from an active rest, whilst the heart and lungs continue to undergo a significant cardiovascular workout. Individual endurance runners' empirical evidence indicates that when weekly running volume within the training programme reaches a certain level, the risk of injury increases significantly. Overloading through cross training offers the runner the option to increase training volume with a significantly reduced risk of injury. For the compulsive runner who has a hard time taking a rest day, swimming not only gives potentially fatigued legs an active rest but it also provides the body with an effective upper body workout. Additionally, swimming is practically a zero-impact sport and therefore arguably the least stressful cross-training activity, consequently ideal to practice when returning from injury.

Swim training sessions, similarly to run training sessions, can be designed to take into account scientific principles of training, for example, sessions designed to challenge the energy systems: aerobic (endurance), anaerobic and ATP CP (speed/strength) and/or stimulate muscle fibre recruitment. The approximate equivalence between swim and run sessions is estimated as: swim $\frac{1}{4}$ of the run distance. In terms of interval training, for example, 100m repeats in the pool would be the equivalent of 400m repeats on the track. Moreover, the equivalent to a 5k run would be a 1,250m swim, 10k run would be 2,500m swim, etc. However, runners who are new to swimming or those who are compromised through basic swim technique skills may find it difficult to swim long distances continuously without experiencing significant technique deterioration. Moreover, muscles which are unconditioned to swimming plus inefficient swim technique may lead to decreased motivation and dissatisfaction with swim training. The ideal solution is to attend coached swim sessions that focus on swim stroke improvement which in turn will have a positive effect on motivation and goal achievement.

Heart rate (HR) differential is an important variable when comparing intensity values between cross-training activities. Swim HR can be 10-20 beats below those registered for the equivalent activity intensity on dry land (e.g.: cycling, running) due to loss of gravitational force, the body's horizontal position in the water, and the cooling effect of the water temperature. However, what truly counts is that the heart, lungs and muscles are still undergoing a significant workout.



Serpies splashing about in La Santa, Lanzarote
(photo: Brent Plump)

Optimum performance from double training sessions or brick sessions within the same training day (for example, swim/bike – bike/run – swim/run – run/bike) which include both speed/strength (e.g.: 20 x 200m sprints / hill running) and endurance training (e.g.: 800m swim interval sets), have traditionally been performed as: strength/speed session first followed by endurance session later. The logic being that the participant will be fresh for the quality workout and that it does not always matter if the participant were fatigued at the start of the endurance workout because that said fatigue would only add to the endurance effect. However, a recent sport science case study in the US indicated that there were no significant differences in terms of improvement of both strength and endurance when one group performed a strength workout before an endurance workout while another group did the reverse. These findings suggest that it makes little difference in terms of performance improvements as to which session comes first. However, if this logic is applied to run/swim or swim/run cross training, those participants who are new to swimming or whose skills are not robust may find it desirable to always perform the swim session first since it will prove to be the greater challenge to their motor skill development.

Cross training certainly makes sense to athletes, and anecdotal evidence supports the view that elite athletes are known to cross train effectively. However, runners who train moderately with little risk of injury may find that a more beneficial approach would be to do more of what they are already doing, applying the principle of specificity: i.e. add more running sessions to the training prescription to improve running performance. Nevertheless, the more committed runner whose goals include PBs and placing in races will benefit from cross training as a methodology to increase training volume without increasing the risk of injury. Additionally, it will add variety to training prescription and probably make training more challenging and enjoyable.

Terence Collins has a MSc in Sport Sciences from Brunel University, is a qualified triathlon coach (BTA level 3), swim coach (ASA level 2), personal trainer (level 3) and a member of BASES (British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences) and can be reached on 07879 401 550 or email: terencecollins9@gmail.com.

My first marathon

by Nicola Miller

Anyone who has completed a marathon – whether it was a one-off or it has become a long-term habit – will be only too aware that race day is just the tip of the iceberg. My personal experiences of training for that very ‘first’ marathon may differ from those of other Serpies but everyone probably has their own tale to tell. Mine involves this year’s Flora London Marathon, and I can see why it’s popular with first-timers like me. As a Londoner, if you’re going to run a marathon just once in your life, this is an obvious choice and I always said that if I did one, it would be in my home town. So I’m going to share with you my own top ten tips about training for your first marathon.

Ten tips for marathon first timers

1. Social life

Your social life will take a bit of a battering. I knew that all-night clubbing sessions were probably a bad idea before my weekly long run, but then I’d never been very good at staying up past midnight without turning into a pumpkin. Yet now, I found myself yawning in the pub before the finish line of last orders was even in sight. So much for that extra energy running is supposed to give you. I think that doesn’t apply with marathon training, at least, not to me. I was knackered most of the time.

2. Fun with fundraising

Which brings me to my next time-related point: fundraising. It may not apply to everyone, but if you are on a ‘golden bond’ charity place, you’ll be only too familiar with how much time this can take up of what’s left of your life after running. Whilst very rewarding, this can be almost as time-consuming as the training itself. I organised a Valentine’s Day party, pub quiz and car boot sale amongst other things.

3. Keeping your eyes open

You will be exhausted. By the time I was home and the clock had struck seven, I would be feeling like that pumpkin all over again and demotivated. People suggested maybe I needed to look at my diet or increase my calorie intake to boost energy levels, but mostly, I think my job saps my energy. Of course, nine times out of ten, I’d dragged myself out of the door to run and be glad I’d gone: it’s just overcoming that psychological barrier.

4. Diet and weight

One thing I got used to hearing when training for the marathon was, “you must be able to eat whatever you want!” Mostly a myth, I’m afraid. Yes, you can probably get away with eating more – in fact, you’ll have to consume more in order to get through the punishing training schedule. However, it’s easy to overeat under these conditions, thinking you need and can eat twice as much as usual but, as with any diet, you run the risk of gaining weight if you eat more than you expend.

5. Kit comfort

That favourite running top could end up consigned to the bottom of your laundry basket once you get into the ‘heavy’ section of your training schedule. What was once an old faithful will take on a whole new life as your runs get longer. Seams start to rub, items of clothing don’t wick sweat as well as they did over shorter distances and your shoes give you blisters where you never thought possible. Many people have told me they did exactly as I did: bought new shoes in good time for the race, broke them in and then had a panic and went back to their discarded ‘old reliables’ on race day. My own pair of ‘comfort blankets’ had the desired psychological and physical effect on the day.



Nicola – Glad it’s over...
for now

6. Becoming a packhorse

And in the same vein, you have to learn to pack light. You were fine with just your keys, a few coins and a bottle of water for those shorter runs, but now you’re taking on distances in excess of 16 miles, you’ll need more substantial ‘accessories’. Items such as energy drinks, bars, a phone, tissues, MP3 player are likely to join your carry-on luggage so you’ll have to work out how best to transport them with you.

7. Call of nature

You’ll become a walking encyclopaedia of all the public conveniences and receptive restaurant and pub owners on your running routes. No matter how many times you go before you leave the house, chances are, all that water and Lucozade you’re consuming on a three-hour training run will reach your bladder before you reach your front door.

8. Admiration and feeling like a fraud

To some people, the news that you’re training to run a marathon will always provoke admiration. This can be great for a while, but as my training progressed, I started to become very self-critical about what I was achieving each week. Running a marathon wasn’t as special as everyone made out, I thought to myself. Thousands of regular people like me do so every year. All the praise and ‘I could never run a marathon’ comments were usually met with a typically British self-deprecating response. The 26.2 miles still seemed such a far cry from the training I was doing, and it wasn’t until I started to do 16-plus mile runs that my attitude got the injection of confidence it needed and I started to feel like a marathon runner.

9. Inability to discuss anything else

It’s easy to become a marathon bore. It was a major, all-consuming part of my life for a third of a year. Hopefully you’ll be able to hang onto your friends once it’s all behind you and save the running chat for the relevant audience – and Serpies are great for this.

10. More support than a sports bra on race day!

Until race day, of course, and having an audience is the best tip I could give a first-timer. But it’s not until you’re actually taking part that you truly believe it. I can say with absolute certainty that, without my own posse of people cheering me on – not to mention the thousands of strangers who yelled my name (emblazoned across my vest) in encouragement – I would not have enjoyed the race the way I did.

An interview with iron couple – Richard and Jenny

by Jelle Brons

This edition of Serpentines is quite packed with Ironman-related articles – to make matters even worse for the pure runners out there, I thought it'd be a nice idea to interview a couple that have made Ironman racing their mutual hobby. On top of that they have another thing in common: they're very good at it as well!

Back in mid August I visited Jenny Gowans and Richard Melik in their apartment just opposite Hyde Park. Perfect for triathletes I guess, but they are thinking of moving to an even more triathlete-friendly environment (near Richmond Park).

I joined them for dinner (lovely!) and wanted to ask them about their background in sport, their successes and the way they choose to train for these events.

This year they had raced in IM Austria, finishing in 9:50 (Richard) and 10:15 (Jenny).

After having done IM Germany and IM Hawaii in 2006, why did you choose to do another one this year?

Richard: This all happened after a sudden rush of emails between friends of ours, and before we knew it we had entered. Actually there was a plan to take it easier this year!

In 2006 you both managed to qualify for IM Hawaii

Jenny: Richard really wanted to qualify in Germany for Hawaii, but I wasn't sure. But during the rolldown it suddenly became clear that Richard had taken the last available slot, I realised I had to go as well! It was great to go out there and both be racing.

How did you prepare yourself for that race, having only 4 months time left? What was it like out there?

Richard: we first had a pretty steady month and then picked it up quite hard. I trained hard for it, but then in such a way that I could race it and actually enjoy it. It really was an amazing experience. This big stretch of road climbing up is amazing; you see Normann Stadler hammering it down, it's fantastic to watch.

Jenny: I thought I was training pretty well, but looking back after the race I should perhaps have given it a bit more. I still felt great in the race, great swim and bike, but then got stomach troubles after 145k on the bike. I lost 8kgs during the race; I just could not take on anything anymore, not even water.

The race itself was amazing; the standard of the field is phenomenal. And then you realise you are just "ok"!

How long did it take you to recover?

Jenny: I felt really tired and run-down. We did nothing for 2.5 months! We went to New Zealand and drank and ate!

How do you normally approach your recovery after a big race?

Richard: We tend to do nothing for the first two or three weeks and then it depends on what we have planned afterwards. In any



Jenny looking comfy in her favorite chair
(photo: ASI Photo)

case we actually enjoying the training so it never seems like too much of a chore to start again.

Any negative things about preparing for or doing an Ironman?

Richard: One of the things I do not particularly like, is that you have to focus on one day for more than 6 months and there is less opportunity to take part in other races in the time before that, e.g. a club championship 5k or an adventure race, which I have done in the past. The few races that I plan now before an Ironman have to have a specific reason, rather than just for enjoyment, and that is a shame. This year I have done only 2 races, despite the fact that I love racing.

Jenny: With an Ironman you only have one shot at a great race per season, whereas with shorter distances it is possible to race more races.

About the preparation for an Ironman, what can you advise on that?

Jenny: You have to be incredibly consistent. You have to get a good base fitness first. I aim to have a 6-week block starting about 9 weeks out from the race where you do very heavy training. I'm not too technical about my training but I do think consistency is key. We normally start base training at the start of the year, to get back to fitness.

Richard: I don't know who said it, but I think it was Gordo (Jelle: Gordo Byrn from www.epiccamp.com) who said, "you have to

train to be able to train for an Ironman". A training camp around April is a great way for this. And then you have something like 10 weeks left to prepare for your "A-race".

So what does your typical training week look like?

Jenny: Well, I am actually coached by Richard Hobson. I try to fit in 2 swims, 3 runs and 3 bikes (2 of them turbos) per week. This year I focused on the bike, so I tried to build that to 4 bikes per week (with double rides in the weekend). I'm still behind the good girls on the bike, but with the help of these focused turbo sessions I did make some good improvements.

Richard: My training is probably slightly different, I tend to train more, mainly because I am lucky enough to have more time. I try to get 4 to 5 runs in per week, 2 bike rides in the weekend. In terms of longer runs, I left the long runs till spring. If you are training for an Ironman, there is really no need to run 20 miles in February (unless you are training for a marathon as well of course). We didn't start running 20 miles till June. Very few of my runs were actually more than 45mins during the winter, but I did them frequently.

Jenny: I'm sure a spring marathon could be part of training for an Ironman but would be hard to be a big race target as well as a summer Ironman. I would never get near the running mileage of Richard although I hope to be able to keep increasing this with more experience.

Richard: I've got a background in running though (25 years). I don't do any intensity, don't do any track work, I just mainly do steady running. Of course if you want to run a good marathon, then you should do tempo runs/speedwork, but for doing an 8 min/mile marathon in an IM (which basically feels like jogging), I just don't see the need for speedwork. But it's such a personal thing at the end of the day.

Jenny: Absolutely. I agree with Richard, but I don't have the same long-distance running background. What works for me, is to do 3 runs per week, adding a little bit of speed, but that is then 7 min/mile instead of 8 min/mile. Richard Hobson is a big believer that you cannot train at race pace for the whole distance, so with long runs I would go slower than race pace, but then with a few faster efforts built into it. Never the whole run at race pace. About

track work: I love it, but with Ironman training I just do not have the time to recover from these type of sessions, because the next day you have to get up early to do another big session.

Richard: Another reason I am not running hard in training is that my weaknesses are in swimming and biking, so it's in those disciplines I tend to include more intense sessions. You can recover from those more quickly as well as opposed to hard running. In terms of injuries it has helped as well to back off on the hard running: I have been injury-free for the last 2 years.

Jenny: It's really important to find the type of training that suits you. For me it's the consistency that is important, so I tend to follow a certain template every week, where I know on which day I swim/bike/run etc. I have to shift sessions sometime due to work but I try to move the swims and leave the bike and run sessions as set. I also use a 3-week build-up and then I have 1 week of recovery where I do about 60% of the previous 3 week's volume.

Richard: There is no question that with another year of training you will get better. It's really the consistency of training that counts.

About IM racing itself, any tips?

Richard: Everything you do on race day, should be geared towards the second half of the run. The whole key of your pacing, especially on the bike, is to be able to run well in the second half. That is where you can lose time so quickly.

Jenny: Indeed, the race is really about the run in the end. You have to be able to run on tired legs but you also need to come out of the swim with the feeling you've done almost nothing.

What about the taper period, how do you approach that?

Richard: 3 weeks out, I do roughly 70-80% of the previous week's volume. Next one is roughly 50% and the last week is just a few hours.

Jenny: The last week really doesn't matter at all, it'll be too late then anyway!

Richard, do you get coaching as well, like Jenny?

Richard: No, and I haven't been coached in the past either. I really enjoy the process of trying to plan how I should train. When I stop enjoying putting the plan together, then perhaps I would consider coaching. I have the advantage though of having more time than Jenny to plan.

Jenny: For me it is a great time-saver as I struggle to find the time to plan everything in advance. Also, it is great to have the knowledge of a coach to draw on. I think it is important to have a really good relationship with a coach for it to be successful.

How do you approach your swim training for IM?

Richard: I try to swim 3 times per week, and I try to make each session different. So one with more drills, one with more speed work and another swim long distance, e.g. 7,400m with warm-up and cool-down. Swim training is not that structured in my case; I just go down to the pool and make up my own set then. I did get some swim coaching though in the months after Germany, because I had such a terrible swim! That has been really useful for me.

When I hit the 10 weeks before the event, I really try to include 1 long swim in. I tended to go to the Hampstead Heath open water sessions. In the last 2 weeks of the build period I did a couple of 5k swims.

What has been your favourite triathlon race so far?

Jenny: I loved IM France, that was my first Ironman race. But I really enjoyed IM Austria this year as well and then there is Hawaii and plenty of other non-IM races I love.



Is that a grimace, or are you actually enjoying it Richard?! (photo: ASI Photo)



...and Jenny also smiling? These two make it look so easy! (photo: ASI Photo)

Richard: It is a bit predictable, but certainly my favourite race was IM Hawaii last year. But then again especially races done with loads of other Serpies are just great fun. It makes such a difference if you are out there with a group of friends. For example Nottingham or Milton Keynes in 2004.

What are your sport backgrounds?

Richard: I ran a lot when I was young. I did a couple of marathons in the early 80s and then I did sport like soccer. Then in the 90s I started running again. After I joined Serpentine, I started to do triathlon. I signed up for IM Switzerland, never having done a triathlon. I did Windsor before that and I got so excited, I thought "this is great". I had no prior swim experience in that year – I got coaching, because I would get out of breath just after doing 10 lengths. I didn't have any bike experience either, but I was lucky that in that year (2003) a few friends invited me along for a biking week in the French Alps. It nearly killed me, I had never ridden a bike for so long on one day, but it helped me a lot.

Jenny: I swam when I was young like all other New Zealanders. I did a short stint as a squad swimmer but then knee surgery following a ski crash ended that. My main competitive sport was rowing. I did this at a pretty competitive level but I got a bit too small. I'd always run and swum so triathlon seemed like a good idea and I got hooked.

So what are your plans for next year?

Jenny: Well, we are not completely sure yet – we haven't decided yet whether we'll do an Ironman next season. In any case there are not a lot of IMs with entries left!

Richard: We think we might not do an IM in the summer.

Jenny: Yes, we quite fancy the idea of not having to train hard until the summer arrives here (Jelle: if ever...). So perhaps an end-of-year Ironman, like Florida. I would be interested to see how a very long base-training period would play out.

Richard: I would also like to do some off-road races, like X-Terra.

Jenny: So more time to do whatever we feel like doing. Also it would

be nice to be able to catch up more with friends etc. We also fancy doing some real travel, like going to Central America.

However I am also quite keen to improve further. I still have the feeling that I haven't given it everything. Especially on the biking I can improve much more. I would also need to do a little more running to avoid some problems I have had on the run.

Richard: For me personally, I think I cannot really swim faster, perhaps improve a bit more on the bike and most on the run. But in my wildest dreams I think I could only do 10 mins better. My goal was to get under 10 hours and I have done that now.

What about PB's, are you focused to improve those?

Richard: I am really not focused on PB's; I wouldn't even know what my Half IM PB is.

Jenny: I'm like that as well – I am not too worried about PB's. I worry more about the girls I am racing against.

Richard: I am in a completely different position than Jenny in that sense – I have something like 120 guys ahead of me, whereas she is there with 8 or 9 other girls.

Do you think you will keep doing triathlon for the rest of your life perhaps, not necessarily Ironman?

Jenny: Definitely some aspect of it. I would almost certainly always run. I have also got really hooked on cycling. It's such a nice thing to do; also very social.

Richard: Me too. I also love the way triathlon is organised around age groups, which means you can still be competitive whatever age you are. I like the fact that I have friends who are 5-6 years older and are still so competitive.

Jenny: Also you can do it at different levels. I'd imagine the dedication towards Ironman is hard to sustain for a long time but there are plenty of other races.

Richard: I can't imagine myself in 10 years time racing as seriously as now, but I would probably still race.

Btw: Richard and Jenny both really emphasized that their approach to training is just their approach and it's not to be interpreted as advice or whatever. I hadn't intended that either, but I thought it'd be interesting to see how different people approach their IM training, especially when they have been so successful with it as well!

Richard and Jenny: thanks a lot for your time, and thanks very much for the pasta, I must have eaten half of all of it.



Piece of cake! (photo: ASI Photo)

Iron first timers Going the distance

Ironman Switzerland: If they can do it – so can I!

by Rachel Brough

In October last year I decided to sign up for my first Ironman (IM). Why? Well that year Justin (boyfriend) and Lars (just friends) had completed their first one and surely if they can do it – so can I! Deciding on which IM was easy, as over 20 people had already signed up for Switzerland, so I knew the support there would be great. Six months of training made time pass very quickly and it wasn't long before I was at the expo picking up my rather groovy bag, which has so many useful pockets!

On race day I was up at 4am eating bread and worrying about everything that could go wrong. A bus took us down to the start where we organised our transition area and put on wetsuits. Standing at the swim area was so scary as I had never been part of such a big mass start before. Everyone was looking into the path of the sunrise and asking where the first buoy was? People were pointing and saying 'out there somewhere'. Luckily there was a female-only beach to avoid getting knocked around by eager men making a beeline for the front. Swimming is my worst event. I had only ever swum the distance once before and that was in a pool with energy gels and a toilet break. My training hadn't really gone to plan since my second swim of the week was before work and I could never get out of bed. I attended Swim for Tri sessions on Thursdays evenings though, which I think was valuable for my survival in the early stages of this event.

I started somewhere in the middle of the crowd and when the gun went off I was forced into the water by the stampede. I have to say I hated the first 30 minutes of it. It was particularly bad when we merged with the men as it turned into a washing machine. There were swimming caps everywhere, which made me feel claustrophobic and so as not to panic I kept having to tell myself 'stay calm'! Even though I felt like stopping I couldn't because the swimmers behind were only going to push me under whilst trying to get past. Once the field spread out a little and I was in a rhythm things calmed down a bit and it was just a case of motoring on and reaching the next buoy of the two-lap course. This was when I realised how nice Lake Zurich actually was. It was so warm, clear



Pre-race Rachel, still smiling

and clean and it tasted nice! Around the finish area there was a narrow section where you had to swim around an island. This was slightly frustrating as there was a bottleneck effect meaning you had to slow down a lot. I also managed to get fishing line caught around my wrist and struggled to remove it whilst people were bumping into me from behind. The swim took me 1hr 18min and I was very pleased considering my lack of proper training.

After a 4-minute transition I was out on my bike, my favourite event. Most of my IM preparation had been cycling training. I regularly cycled with three girls (Megan Mullins, Julie Payne and Rosie Ingram), all of similar speed and who were also training for big events themselves. We would cycle all variations of the Surrey 3/5 hills, numerous times, forward and reverse to crank up the kms. For some speed training nearer the event we would cycle with the fast boys (aka Wayne Maurer and friends) and try to increase our average speed on the 3 hills route – that was exhausting and often left me drained on a Monday. My turbo trainer did not come out of the cupboard all year, although I did go to Dan's Serpie Spin class every Tuesday where I was

introduced to the Dirty Black Spider?! My cycling really progressed after two Lanzarote training weeks and 2 days of the Tour of Wessex (in the rain). So this should have been my best event and I was hoping to do under 6 ½ hrs.

As I exited transition there was a crowd of Serpies cheering and waving the flag and I waved back and braced myself for numerous hours on the bike. It was already getting hot and it was only 8.30 in the morning. The bike was a three-lap course, each containing 3 hills. I had been told prior to the race that the hills were just like Box Hill but longer. I am not so sure – they seemed steep to me! The lap starts off as flat as a pancake for around 15km, then it either goes up, down or flat again. With my new race wheels on the nice road surface I felt like I was flying. My strategy was to keep my speed above 30km/hr on the flat and not worry about speed on the hills (I don't do heart rate). I also planned to drink 500ml of energy drink and eat two gels per hour, which I picked up from the aid stations. The first lap was fine and it was great to see the fan club at the top of Heartbreak Hill towards the end of the first circuit, where there was a hose set up by one of the residents to cool the cyclists down.

On the way in and out of each lap you could see the competitors ahead and behind you so it was great for Serpie spotting which distracted the brain from the aches and pains that were starting to emerge. On the second lap I felt great, this time I could look around at the surroundings (the fields and the cows with bells on) as I now knew the route and there should be no surprises; until it started raining! Slightly confused by the sudden change in weather

I realised it was the guy cycling in front of me relieving himself! The last lap was by far the hardest. It was so hot and I felt so tired, my neck ached and my feet burned. I also felt a little sick from the 12 gels I had eaten along the way. When I was going up Heartbreak Hill for the last time I was thinking 'I really don't want to run a marathon now!', but the support crew were there to pick me up again and remind me that this was what I had been training for all year. I arrived in transition with a bike time of 6hrs 12min with wobbly legs and numb feet. I racked my bike, put on my trainers and sunscreen, grabbed a hat then popped to the loo and 6 minutes later I was running.

Run training for the IM had involved four runs a week, two long slow (at least 12 miles), one tempo and one a brick session (run off the bike). The longest run being 18-20 miles. The race route was a flat 4-lap course that mostly hugged Lake Zurich with aid stations every 1-2km. Strangely I can't remember much of it, I think I just got into the zone and plodded along. I had decided to walk through aid stations so as to take on more fluids and gels and when I couldn't face gels any longer I would try coke. The course did contain a few out and back sections, which meant that you could see everyone in front and behind you. A grunt had replaced the word 'hi' as we passed each other, which then turned into a nod by the end of the marathon. The last lap of the marathon was awful, I felt sick of energy gloop and I swore I would never do anything like this again. I had to run/walk the last 5km and looked and felt like a sorry mess. The supporters were great and were there to cheer me up when I struggled past crying.



The rest of the team

One of the things that kept me going during the last stages of the race was the thought of eating a pizza or a salty chicken when I finished. When I crossed the line with a 4hr 28min marathon and a total IM time of 12hrs 7mins I was so happy. I had my photo taken and then went straight to the food tent where I found... pasta... the last thing I felt like after carbo-loading for six months! After showering and examining the hot tubs full of naked men I joined the spectators to help cheer on the rest of the Serpies, the atmosphere was fantastic.

Completing Ironman Switzerland was probably the most awful and most amazing experience I have ever had. Will I do it again? Maybe... I'm just hoping that Justin doesn't decide to do an Ultra Man!

Iron first timers Going the distance



"Am I there yet?"

My view – Ironman Austria

by Alex Elferink

It's May 2006 when I first float the idea to a fellow Serpie. "So Ash, you've done a half Ironman, would you do a full one." Expecting the answer to be no, I am surprised by the resounding yes! This sets me on the road to Ironman. Bear in mind that at this point I have only done one triathlon and I don't even own a road bike. A couple of months later, I get a text, I've just signed up for Austria you in? 5 minutes later and I've signed up. July 2007 seems a long way away.

Fast forward 12 months

Race morning and I wake at 4am. I make my pre-race breakfast, porridge, raisins and honey. Outside and I meet other Serpies for the bus ride to the venue. There is time for a few photos before the bus arrives. We arrive at 6am with just 30 minutes until transition closes. With kit dumped I head out of transition to the beach. Now it's time to compose myself and think about my race plan. A lot of thoughts go through my head will I survive the swim, what about the heat, can I do it? I tell myself I've done the training, you'll be OK.

Swim

There is just 15 minutes to go before the start when the beach opens. The excitement is building and I'm a little nervous naturally. 5 minutes to go, the tape drops and we are allowed forward for the in water start. I swim out and then I hear the cannon go. Is that the start? No, it can't be, there are at least 3 minutes to go. I can't work out what is going on, so I start my watch and begin to swim. It's chaos at the start just like I had been told. I settle into the steady swimming rhythm. After about 15 minutes the chaos dies down and I have more space to swim. Round the top buoy and I begin to head back to towards the canal. Stay right I'd been told (some local knowledge from Serpies who raced here last year). Soon I found loads of space and I was swimming through the middle of a marina. Right but not that far right! I'm sighting all the time but I can't work out where I am meant to be going. Eventually I get back on track and into the canal where it became a scrap again. I got smacked in the back of the head a few times. Not hard but it wasn't in my race plan. I also cramped up. Not the best way to finish the swim. I could see the exit so eased back a little.

Out of the water and had a quick look at the watch, 1.15. Fantastic as target was 1.30. Jogged down to transition and dumped the wetsuit. I covered myself in sunscreen, stuck my gloves and helmet on and ran into the racking area to get my bike.

Bike

Left T1 and managed to get the feet into the shoes which I had decided to put on the bike. Not bad considering it's the first time



Definitely worth it! (photo: 'Pirate' Brian)

I've done that in a race. I started taking on water straight away as I knew it was going to be a warm day. Out onto the road and it started straight away, packs of cyclists passing me. I just kept saying to myself hold back, calm down, you'll see them later.

About 10km into the bike I decided to move up to the big ring as I kept spinning out on the downhill. I tried to move the shifter but the chain wouldn't move up. Pushed a bit harder and disaster! The shifter snapped. It had gone into the big ring but if I dropped to the small ring I had no way of going back to the big ring. So I set about riding the whole thing in the big ring. This was definitely not in the plan. For about the next 20km I rode in the big ring but every hill caused my heart rate to climb rapidly. I kept thinking of the bigger hills to come and realised I wouldn't be able to do the whole ride in the big ring. At 30km I dropped it to the little ring and set about spinning through the bike leg.

It actually wasn't that bad. I was fine on the flat and uphill. I only lost time on the downhills as I kept spinning out but as I wasn't pushing on the downhills I was able to have a rest and let my heart rate drop. Everything seemed to be going well. Through lap 1 and I resisted the temptation to push from 90km to 120km on the flatter sections as I knew I'd need the energy for the later hills. Into the hills on lap 2 and it was tough going but I started to catch people. I knew I was slower on lap 2 but I was still having a good day. Crested Rupitenburg (the big hill) on lap 2 in the heat of the day knowing it was virtually downhill to the end of the bike.

I pulled into T2 with a bike spilt of 5.48 versus my plan of 6 hours. I put more suncream on. Put on my shoes and hat and off I went consuming 2 gels straight away. My watch showed 7.10 as I left T2.

Run

I was targeting a sub 4 marathon and knew on leaving T2 if I did it I'd finish in around 11.10 versus my target of 11.30. Through the first couple of kms in 11 minutes and I was keeping a nice steady pace. At that pace I was on for a 3.52 marathon but figured it'd be around 4 hours due to slowing. I was walking through each aid station long enough to have gel + water or Isotonic drink.

I went through 10km in 55.30 still keeping the same steady pace. It was great coming back through the Ironcity and seeing all the supporters. Reached the city centre turn at 16km and headed back to the Ironcity. This next 5 km was the toughest mentally for me as I knew I still had a long way to go and I was also getting passed by people finishing including the leading women who went flying past like I was standing still.

I reached the half way point on the run in 1.56.43 feeling good. I figured I had a minute or so to spare to go under 4 hours for the run. Mentally it began to get a bit easier too as each point I passed I knew I would not have to do again. I just kept thinking you feel good, you are running well but when are you going to struggle. Just keep eating and drinking I kept telling myself.

SERPENTINE RUNNING CLUB

Through 30km and back out through the Ironcity. I knew next time I was back here would be to finish. Now I just had to decide when to push. Through 32km still good. At 34km I figured I might as well push with only 45 minutes or so to go. Now I was wondering if I could beat 11.02.36 recorded by Dan in IM Switzerland. Through 36km I was now inside his time on this pace. Reached the turn and carried on pushing. Through 38km and I knew a sub 11 was on. Through 39km and I knew I had to run the last 3.2 km (2 miles) in 15.45 to go sub 11. Pushed a bit more and then suddenly I was in the finish chute. I sprinted for the line to clock 14 minutes for the last 2 miles, a 3.48 marathon and 10.58:30 overall.

Alex's top 5 Ironman tips

1. Enter the race early

Austria and Germany 2008 sold out in less than 24 hours

2. Learn to love the bike

A 4 – 6 hour weekly long ride is a must for IM training

3. Have a goal and stick to it

Mine was 11:30 and never changed from the day I entered

4. Work out a nutrition plan in advance

For me the key was my home made flapjacks

5. Savour the finish

I sprinted for the line for the sub 11 but have a terrible finish picture!

My first time *Written in Haiku*

Sherborne town Dorset
Quintessentially English
My first IronMan

Into murky lake
Twenty minute wait for gun
Washing machine starts

Neoprene bodies
Arms and legs everywhere
Get me out of here

Swim exit in sight
Dizzy dizzy so dizzy
Helped onto two feet

Warm dry clothes it's cold
First steep hill will warm me up
On my bike at last

Pedal and pedal
Past the Giant on the hill
And his friend Homer

Pedal and pedal
Powerbar eat Powerbar
Red and gold ahead

Serpie supporters
Bring a big smile to my face
In the wind and rain

Hear a ping chain jams
Oh no gear cable has snapped
Is my race over?

Miracle happens
Can pedal in just five gears
Race is on again

Wind is blowing strong
Forty miles per hour I'm told
Crawling on the flat

Back at transition
So glad to be off the bike
Now the fun begins

Sun decides to shine
Running through the castle grounds
Up down up and down

More red and yellow
Serpies Serpies everywhere
Best support in town

Sixteen miles to go
Feeling stronger and stronger
Really loving this

Run run walk run run
Passing people all the time
On top of the world

Not far to go now
The finish line is in sight
Running faster still

Shouting screaming noise
Getting louder and louder
Almost almost there

Two point four mile swim
One hundred and twelve mile bike
And a marathon

It's been a long day
Now the finish line is here
IronMan at last!

Rachel Powell

Ironman Finland

by Andy Harrison

In a year when so many members of Serpentine have taken part in an Ironman race, what makes my experience any different or special? In many ways my experience was the same. I completed the race and felt the sense of satisfaction that you get when you have completed one of the hardest single day events in the world of sport.

For those of you that don't know the distances, the swim is 3800 metres, cycle 180km and run 42.2km a full marathon.

The race I took part in is in the Finnish town of Nokia (where the phones are from) and is the Finnish long distance triathlon championships. For many people the word Ironman means a race organised by the World Triathlon Corporation (WTC). This race is not run by the WTC and is a much smaller event as a result. With a start list of less than 100 people we weren't expecting the huge mass starts that you see at the larger events. Which is both a blessing and a curse. The mass starts are a big part of ironman races but they are pretty scary.

The race format involves 4 laps of a 950m loop during the swim where you exit the water at the end of each lap so your fans can see where you are. I started a bit fast which, combined with my lack of swim training, caused me to slow down quite a bit during the second half and I left the water in 1 hour and 5 minutes, which was a little disappointing (being a swimming coach you'd expect more).

The run through transition is quite a thing with roughly 50 stairs up to the car park where the bike racking is situated. Once I got into transition I managed to faff around putting on my aero helmet and mangling my ears in the process, a good start.

The bike course followed the theme of 4 laps. When I did this event last year I found the idea of doing 4 laps mind numbingly boring, but this year I had to concede that doing 180 kilometres with only 100 people was a lot easier when you can see other competitors on the out and back sections. Also with such a small field you get to recognise most of the faces as you go around, but going out for the third lap seems to do something to everyone's motivation.

After a conservative ride in almost perfect conditions I finished in 5 hours and 25 minutes: 20 minutes faster than last year. I managed a pretty quick T2 and headed out for the first of my 4 laps on the run. I must admit that running is my weakest discipline but I'd put in a hard year of training and was confident that I would do a 4-hour marathon. All was well – from the first two laps I was on pace and felt a lot better than last year when I "ran" a 5 hour marathon and reached a point when was not sure I'd finish.

As I headed out for the third lap I was feeling tired but confident that I'd paced myself well. Upon reaching the first rise on the course I thought "if I power walk up here I'll go the same speed but I won't pound my legs so much". So I power walked up the 50 metres of hill and something left my legs: the slow plodding rhythm I'd maintained for two hours fell apart and the soreness in my legs was VERY noticeable. From this point my Ironman started – this is where my fitness and character would be tested to its limit.



Getting ready...



...and there he goes!

This is the point normal people would stop but of course I carried on. We all carry on. We don't do all of that training the nights when we don't go to the pub so we can wake up early to train just to stop. So I plodded on, safe in the knowledge that all the people around me were hurting just as much.

As I was heading back for the last half of the last lap I realised I had 32 minutes to run 5.25 km to finish under 11 hours. On a normal day I could do this talking to friends and eating an ice cream but as my legs had become increasingly sore it was going to be a test. I had actually prepared for this while listening to my MP3 player on long runs. I had a secret weapon – the song I sing or listen to when I need to get "up for it". That song was "tire me" by Rage Against the Machine. So as I ran along I sang / shouted along to the song in my head. Which attracted a few strange looks, but less than when I sing out loud in Hyde Park.

Coming up the final slope into the stadium my legs were totally shot but I realised that I had just enough time to ham it up for the crowd and I finished in 10 hours 59 minutes and 47 seconds.

A special mention should go to Claire Gillvray who also did this race with me. As this was her first IM race we didn't know what to expect from her. We needn't have worried as she finished in 11.49 with a 3.51 marathon, which I'm sure you'll agree was an awesome result. It gave her second place in her age group, which meant that she won a nice pair of sunglasses and a 12 pack of kitchen rolls!??

So if anyone would like to do this race next year, I can't recommend it enough. It is possibly the cheapest Ironman race in the world (80 euros), is well organised and in a great part of the world.

If you want more information you can look at the website www.triathlonteam226.fi.

Currently the website is mostly in Finnish but If you want to know anything in particular you can email me through the cycling@serpentine.org.uk address and my wife can translate. You can enter pretty much up to the day before, unlike the M-dot races where you need to enter before this season is over.

Does it hurt...

The Oxford English Dictionary defines pain as “1: a strongly unpleasant bodily sensation such as is caused by illness or injury; 2: mental suffering or distress.”

The Oxford English Dictionary defines pain as “1: a strongly unpleasant bodily sensation such as is caused by illness or injury; 2: mental suffering or distress.” All athletes suffer from pain during training and racing and a high degree of masochism is most certainly a requirement for all successful athletes. Within our own sport of distance running there are many examples of heroic performances from athletes pushing themselves to levels of pain that few of us could endure.

In looking outside our own sport for inspiration there are many examples that stand out. High levels of pain and the risk of injury are common to running but running lacks the good old fashioned brutality of contact sports. This is where pain and injury take on whole new levels of meaning.

My own personal favourite comes from a sport which I played in my younger days – rugby. This particular event has inspired me time and time again while training. In 1986 France and New Zealand played out one of the most violent and brutal games of international rugby in the history of the sport. The game finished in an improbable French victory with many All Black supporters questioning whether such French ferocity could have been generated without the use of some sort of chemical enhancement. 20 minutes into the first half, Buck Shelford, the All Black Number 8 had the misfortune to find himself at the bottom of a ruck on the French side. The French forwards proceeded to ruck him to the point where he was left concussed, lost a few teeth and had his scrotum ripped open with a testicle dangling in space. Buck picked himself up, walked to the sideline and sat patiently while the All Black physio stitched up his scrotum. For the benefit of viewers a well placed sideline camera crew filmed in close up the entire surgery. Then Buck did what is expected of all All Blacks. He jogged back on to the field and played the remaining 60 minutes of the game. I always think of Buck and his torn scrotum when I'm fighting a minor case of stitch or cramp.

Boxing has more than its fair share of heroic incidents. Above all is the performance of Joe Frazier in the “Thrilla in Manila” fought with Mohammed Ali in October 1975. They had fought twice previously with the record at one win each and there was bad blood and real hatred between the two fighters. The venue was little more than a giant tin shed with no air conditioning and little ventilation and the temperature at ringside soon reached 50 degrees celsius. Ali began the fight by unleashing a flurry of blows at Frazier but could not stop the smaller man from coming forward and became increasingly frustrated at his inability to hurt Frazier. It was reported that during the seventh round, Ali whispered in Frazier's ear, “Joe, they told me you was all washed up” Frazier growled back, “They lied.”

What no one except Frazier and his trainer knew was that Frazier had a cataract and could see nothing out of his left eye. He was so desperate to punish Ali that he kept this secret to avoid a postponement. It was not until the 11th round that Ali was able to exploit this, as a cut on Frazier's forehead caused blood to run into his good right eye and blinded him completely. At the end of the 13th round the referee had to guide a clearly sightless Frazier back to his corner. By the end of the 14th round, after 42 minutes of brutal combat, Frazier's trainer stopped the fight. Ali stood up from his stool in celebration and promptly fainted. Ali later stated that he had never come so close to death and said “Joe Frazier, I'll tell the world right now, brings out the best in me. I'm gonna tell ya, that's one helluva man, and God bless him.”

So, fellow Serpies, hit the streets and fields of England armed with these two inspirational stories of fighting through sporting pain. And, should you ever find yourself suffering from a near castration during a marathon, please ensure that there is a camera nearby to record it for posterity.

...when I do this?!

by Marcus Scott

Serpie Decathlon

by John Cullinane, Simon Coles and Ian Payne

The 2007 Serpie decathlon championships took place on 21st July, 25 intrepid athletes braving the occasional downpour in a highly competitive contest. Jasyn Savage won the men's event from Jamie Nelson, both scoring over 4,000 points, with Dan Bent third. Best individual performance went to Simon Barrett, not for his epic airport-to-Battersea charge, but his 744 points gained in the 1500m. The ladies champion was Pam Rutherford, on 2,053 points, chased home by Rachel Whittaker and Jen Marzullo. Unfortunately, there was an injury to Alicia Heeneman, which prompted a trip to hospital for her and JT. Undaunted, though, she remembers the day thus: "The rest of the world find it strange that I was pole vaulting, clearly they don't understand." Exactly.

This is Simon Coles' view of his first decathlon, with added comments from Ian Payne – get your earplugs ready:

I am at the Battersea track and today I walk in for free – the place is a Serpie haven for our decathlon. I have never attempted a decathlon – rumours that Daley Thompson drops in to the stadium from time to time are more of a worry than an inspiration. Here is my day:

100m – a great opportunity to get an accurate time for this event and to try starting blocks. Both aspirations for me beforehand. I have

“How do you get the spikey end to stick in the ground?”

previously tried timing the distance with my watch but with arms flying around at speed it's not possible to get more than an approximate reading and even then it is at the expense of seconds

in trying to hit the stop button. How close could I get to a sub 10? Not close, but I only miss it by, say, a few seconds.

Long Jump – a runner likes to... run. It's a really unnatural feeling to jump at the same time. You have to suppress the running instinct and think back to that school sports day years ago to rekindle the memory's synapses. Not sure a long run up is a good thing either as the faster I ran the less I wanted to jump – just wanting to continue running right on through.....

Shot Put – the crucial thing here (for me anyway) was to make as much noise as possible to try and detract all attention away from the end



Dan Bent, wishing he hadn't eaten beans!
(photo: Alessandro Brandimarti)

result. In the men's event Ian Payne was just awesome with an immense and seemingly endless lion's roar which frightened women, children and (especially) dogs in the park for miles around. Epic. (Ian remembers it like this: "I'd have been better advised to concentrate more on throwing than roaring, as it didn't



J T Wong, Alicia's hero!
(photo: Alessandro Brandimarti)

seem to make the implements go any further. However, as JT said there would be a prize for the best roaring, I thought this might be my best chance of winning anything all day, and if it works for the pros...")

High Jump – you get a nice curved run up, bouncing on the balls of your feet, then....suddenly you are confronted with this bar and, er, forget to jump. Runner's instinct taking over again here for me. I hear rumours from the women's event that one girl found the runner's answer – tackle the bar head on at full speed, treat it like a hurdle... and combine the high jump and long jump as one event. Lateral Serpie thinking at its best.

400m – many of us have done it but pretty impressive to see some guys actually needing starting blocks. Not quite so much fun for me to run a PB of 81.9 and find the decathlon scoring starts at times below, er, 81.9. So that's nil points then. Oh, cheers. Maybe I needed those blocks after all.

110m Hurdles – definitely for maniacs. Have you ever walked up to a hurdle in the men's race? Try it. You may be left with the feeling that it might just be possible to get over one with a good run up and preferably a spring board too. (Ian did compete: "The hurdles were slightly daunting, especially given that they were only 35cm lower than the height I'd managed to clear in the high jump, but I was determined to complete every event, and it was a great feeling getting to the end without knocking a single one over!")

Discus – whatever you do, don't spin before trying to hurl it into the blue yonder. Not unless you know what you are doing. If you try and you manage to a) not fall over before you let the thing go or b) avoid clattering the side supports with the sound of a pistol shot echoing around the whole stadium, then you are all but guaranteed to step out of the front of the circle in a dizzy daze and foul your attempt after letting go.

Pole Vault – First time I have ever tried. Must be easy to clear 1 metre for goodness sake? It isn't. It is all about commitment and that doesn't come naturally, not for blokes anyway. You have this ridiculous bendy pole thingy that has a soft side (don't we all?) and you are hammering along holding it out like some sort of Blue Marlin hunter's fishing rod about to take the bite. Then what do you have to do when you have achieved terminal velocity? Well, stick it in the ground of course. Then the fun really starts. Now you have to get your feet in the air in

front of you, hang on for dear life, let your weight compress the pole and wait for lift off. If you do get over the bar (which I did actually manage on my third attempt) you will then probably find you have forgotten to jettison the fishing rod which has now taken the bar off behind you. Now you know how the Blue Marlin feels.

Javelin – how do you get the spiky end to stick in the ground? Well, best not to worry about it as it won't anyway. "Throw it like a cricket ball" someone says – I mean, does it look like a cricket ball? (Ian:

"Ashok's enthusiasm impressed me, and obviously none of us felt the slightest bit aggrieved that he got so many lighter implements to throw!")

1500m – phew, back on home ground. Not quite so easy as usual though after what has gone before. Manage a sprint finish though in an attempt to completely destroy the body.

Daley Thompson's best at the Olympics was 8,847 points. Trying for yourself makes you appreciate just how good top-line athletes are. I manage a meagre 1,202. Oh well. Just hope he wasn't watching.

Track & Field

Rosenheim League (women)

by Rachel Whittaker

Rosenheim league is the only competitive athletics league that Serpie women under 35 can currently take part in (though all age categories can come along). The six matches take place on Wednesday evenings May to September at tracks around London. The 7pm weeknight slot is not ideal for most of us with busy jobs but for those who are able to make the effort it's a great chance to monitor your progress at shorter distances, sharpen your speed, and give some of the more esoteric events a try! Pam Rutherford was the star of this summer's T&F, the ladies' winner of the decathlon and the only Serpie lady to make it to all of the Rosenheim matches. She said "I've loved doing Track and Field

mainly because it's a chance to try out loads of different things I can't imagine having the opportunity to do anywhere else. I hadn't done anything since school so this year was my first year as a grown up. I've always had in the back of my mind that I would have liked to do more T&F at school so this is a perfect place to give it a shot (ha ha!)".

Serpie ladies won the Rosenheim league this year, not so much because we are particularly good but because we give everything a try. The regulars this summer were Pam, Rachel Whittaker, Jen Bradley and Jen Marzullo. There were some brilliant performances but mostly it was just a lot of fun! In Pam's words again: "I'd want to encourage anyone who fancies it to try Rosenheim because it's so relaxed and you can do non scoring events to see what it's like – also it's very friendly and encouraging. One of the highlights was the steeplechase in the pouring rain and coming second to last to someone who was using her asthma inhaler on the way round!"



Pam jumping for joy at her fantastic achievement
(photo: Alessandro Brandimarti)

Next year we're thinking of trying to get a ladies team together to enter the Southern League which will take place on Saturdays, and is more competitive but still open to everyone. Would you be interested? It's a great way to make the most of your track training and get involved with the club. We will only do it if there is interest so please email me if you would be keen – we'll try and have some get-togethers over the next year and some targeted training sessions for track and/or field events. Thanks to everyone who did come out and compete for the Serpie ladies this year, look forward to seeing you next May!



Eric Philips walking on water
(photo: Alessandro Brandimarti)

Rosenheim League (men)

by Miguel Branco

After running over 117,000 miles (i.e. more than 470 laps of the track), jumping 80m in distance and 14m in height, and throwing various implements over a total distance of 512m, the Serpie participation in the Rosenheim league drew to a successful close. On seven Wednesdays, several keen track-and-fielders went out of their way to enjoy a relaxed evening of what is for most people a terrible flashback to school days. This league sees the widest range of abilities and has always been the perfect environment for newcomers. Whether Serpies came down to get a PB, try hammer throwing, or simply to muck about, the general feedback was that they enjoyed it. And with some impressive performances throughout the season, we saw the men take 2nd place in the eastern division to qualify for the final, and the ladies win the division. So well done and thanks to everyone who came down, athletes and officials, and to Rachel Whittaker, who organised the ladies team. And since I went through the trouble of getting the stats, did you know we averaged 5m 33s per mile, which would give a 2h25m marathon?

Track & Field

Southern Vets' League (men's team)

by Simon Baird

In a move to standardise the age categories between men's and women's competition the 2007 season saw the introduction of a new M35 classification. This seemed to suit certain clubs more than others and combined with injuries to key performers we found ourselves slipping down the order from last year's consistent high finishes. Nevertheless our final position of third was only one place lower and we finished only half a point behind St. Mary's Richmond despite having a higher event score. Herne Hill continue to be the dominant team in the division and won every meeting.

On the positive side more Serpentine men competed this year than last even though the weather conditions were often very unpleasant and we have uncovered some hidden talent in the new M35 category. There are also areas where we might improve, such as the M50 field events (where poor Ashok often has to compete in every event) and the jumps in general. On a couple of occasions a single M50 throw was all that stood between us and a higher placing which would have resulted in us finishing overall second in the league.

Overall I think we have a strong and competitive team and with luck and fewer injuries, we will be looking to challenge again for the top positions. Thanks to everyone who competed and officiated and see you next year.

Southern Vets' League (women's final)

by Jan Farmer

We didn't come last!!! Some of you who've been around a year or two may remember a similar comment in last year's report – but this year was something else altogether. You may have noticed my pleading email before the final. The unseasonably early date for the fixture, the clash with the club's summer league and at least one illness had decimated our team. Never in all the years we've been going to the Southern Vets League final – and Serpie Ladies have made it to the final every year since the league was set up in the early 90s – have we gone with such a small – and such an old – team!

There were 42 slots to be filled on the programme – excluding the relays. And as the track events in the V35 category have A- and B-string runners, 24 were in the V35 category. We took a team of just 12 competitors, of which only 3 were under 50!! So all sorts of courageous goings on took place – including a V65 – Sue Lambert – running the V35 3000B – and coming second in it! Everyone who was there deserves plaudits but I have to make special mention of Sarah Knox, the one person who decided to come with us after my begging email. She took on 6 events and even managed to clear 1.15 on the high jump having not jumped since school! Ruth took on 7 events – 3 of which were on the go at the same time – and she still achieved an 8 second PB in the walk! The weather was quite mixed, with one major downpour, but the Julie Rose Memorial Stadium at Ashford is a great venue – it even has a 60m indoor track which some people used for warm-ups.

Serpentine Ladies came 6th out of 7 with a tally of 133 points – 20 points behind Herts Phoenix but 55 ahead of Hastings. The contest was won by Blackheath, who scored 238.5. Very well done all – and also big thanks to those of you who helped us to the final and couldn't be there on the day – especially Bev Thomas.

Southern Men's League

by Charles Lescott and John Cullinane

Division One

The Division One team came a very creditable 15th of 25 teams, and were pipped for 14th by Kent AC by a sole match point. Highlights this season included a win in our home match at Battersea Park, easily beating Ashford AC by 22 points, and which took us well away from the relegation zone. Thanks to all the athletes and officials, and to Robin Kindersley for his excellent team management.

Division Three

2007 was the first full season for me as Division 3 captain after filling in wherever I was needed in 2006. To justify my place in my own team I had taken on the hurdles and pole vault as the trickiest two events to fill. I hoped that by leading from the front I could inspire my team to greater efforts.

The first two meetings were home matches yet despite this, and some valiant efforts, we lost both. It was in Portsmouth where I enjoyed my first finish as captain off the bottom...We came third out of four! Not bad with such a small team. The next match we were joint third (last) but in the last match we had our best result. Having poached Jasyn Savage from Div 1, who were getting lost in Devon, and Aaron Gaulke from Div 4, who were doing amazingly in Horsham, we put out our best team and quite rightly came second. A first place is surely only a season away.

Our field competitors had been decimated through injury throughout the season. Tony McGahan, of pole vaulting fame, became a regular thrower and was accompanied occasionally by various of my running team mates and me with mixed results. Chairman, John Walker, also stepped in with a hammer throw before getting his starter gun. We were grateful for Ashley's one outing and hope he can return fully fit next year. Lippy made two fixtures and helped immensely with results throughout the season. I was particularly grateful for Jason MacKenzie for making one event on a flying visit from Glasgow. The highlight in the throwing was Jasyn Savage's javelin, a truly scary sight. Hugh Torry also discovered he could throw in the Rosenheim League but forgot to tell his Div 3 captain.

On the track I was particularly pleased with the addition of sprinter Rashid Mohammed who got better throughout the season, and was excellently accompanied by JT. In our final match in Hastings they dominated the 100m and 200m and brought both relays home in second in impressive style. Ian Druce joined us for one race pulling out the fastest 5,000m of the season in my team, and the third fastest of all divisions. Andy Reeves continued to do what he was told on the track and was fast too. I was grateful for Miguel's middle distance efforts before getting injured and notwithstanding his mix up in the relay. If he can be tempted back from Cambridge he has a spot in my team any time.

We finished well clear of the drop zone but it was touch and go for a while. Next year I hope to make a flying start building on this year's momentum.

Division Four

The Div 4 team finished an excellent 5th, despite often being up against club first teams. Proving that a little goes a long way, points were picked up wherever possible by a happy band willing to try their hand at anything as we usually filled most of the events – on occasion we had some tremendous results along the way, no more so than Eric Phillips' dream day out at Crawley when he won all the track events between 800m and 5000m. As well as getting points in all the jumps, and both the hurdles even for good measure. Other budding decathletes include Mark Pinnick, Ben Bye and Jaran Finn, and Alessandro proved expert at marshalling his troops and getting them to the right event, usually at the right time. As Justin said in his last match report: "The team had an excellent season that proves how much can be achieved when people come out and have a go. We were never the most talented team, but were often the best one!"

New committee members

Richard Jones

Richard is a Chartered Accountant working for the National Audit Office making sure our taxes are spent wisely. He describes his sporting background as “all very recreational and none requiring a great deal of fitness,” though certainly diverse, from athletics at school through wind-surfing to softball. This changed very quickly four years ago when he bought a bike to commute to work, and thought about doing an Olympic triathlon. “So I started doing some swimming too. I put off running for a while as it didn't sound like much fun and I was convinced that I'd get injured.”



Richard Jones

Overcoming these fears, Richard took the plunge to join a running club. Why Serpentine? “If you Google ‘running + london’ then it's usually the top of the list. The website also mentioned triathlons and the club was on my route home from work. All in all an obvious choice. I was quickly converted to this running lark and in my first year ended up racing in many handicaps, two 10ks and five half marathons.”

Three years later, Richard is now committee rep for kit and facilities. “I volunteered and was co-opted after the AGM as there were still vacant posts on the committee. If by sharing the burden the club continues to attract and retain the individuals that make it work so well then it will be worthwhile.” Summing up the strength of the club, Richard says “I'm constantly amazed by the talents that come together, voluntarily, to make the club what it is. Ever entered the club handicap? The results are sent by text message to your mobile within hours of the finish. I've yet to find another race, even ones vastly more expensive, with a better service.”

“I'm constantly amazed by the talents that come together, voluntarily, to make the club what it is.”

Keenly supported by his wife Jenny and son Sam, what plans does Richard have for the future? “I joined the club with no intention of ever running a marathon, but ran two in 2006. I also didn't dream of completing an Ironman triathlon, which I did this year. Maybe I should list what I'm also not planning to do instead. I would like to race in Davos again, maybe in the marathon this time, but in the short term I'd like to improve on my half-marathon PB.”

And the kit? “I think that we have a great range of kit with no obvious gaps which can now be maintained and developed organically.”

Jen Lashua

Jen is the club's new coaching rep on the committee. After moving to London from the US just over a year ago, she joined Serpentine “initially because I wanted to find people to train with (for the Berlin Marathon) but have stayed a member because of the really great training programmes and the friendly and supportive people I've met.” She has, though, been running for a long time: “I've loved running since I was little. My dad and I used to do 10Ks together, including a New Year's Day 10K along Lake Erie (near my hometown) where the goal was usually simply to finish before becoming frozen! I grew up in the States on the East Coast so I'm well accustomed to really cold weather (including snowfalls of 3-4 feet at a time).”

There have been no such worries in some of her other races. “The first race I ran outside the US was a half-marathon in Jo'berg, SA, about 4 years ago. What a different experience that was for me! Once I got over the shock of being served Coca-Cola during the race and realised that being considered a ‘Senior’ (in the US a senior is someone over age 65!) was not an insult to my appearance that day, I managed just fine.” Other travel highlights have included Croatia and Italy, and seven years of living in California mean “I'm a big wine fanatic and love good, fresh food.” A typical Serpie then!

“I'm hoping to bring energy and enthusiasm to the role!”

Thrilled to have recently become an aunt, Jen's sporting ambition is to complete the World Marathon Majors series – “I've done Berlin, Boston and London, so just New York and Chicago to go.” Talking about her new committee role, she says, “I'm hoping to bring energy and enthusiasm to the role and really just happy to be in a position where I can give back to what I believe is a great organisation.”

And how would she sell the club to a new member? “I like it because there's something for everyone. Whether you're a beginner runner or an experienced athlete, both will find something to their benefit in the club.”



Jen Lashua

Serpentine's 25th anniversary summer boat party

by John Cullinane (photos: Darren Over)

I have to admit I panicked a bit arriving at Embankment Pier for the Serpies 80s-themed Summer Do. Across the road were some normally dressed and quite casual looking folk – not the sort of crowd in which I would blend in with wearing my white linen suit. A quick scan to the left and all was well – suddenly I felt the suit was a bit understated compared to the rather more eccentric Serpentine dress.

Writing several months on, some details escape me (though perhaps that was the beer) but highlights included Lucian Wild's purple LL Cool J outfit, Angie's legwarmers, a womble, two Ghostbusters and John Walker's original Serpie T shirt. Not forgetting a history lesson from Ian and Sally about their 80s escapades. Congratulations too to the organisers for booking models to play Serpies playing Robert Palmer's backing band. But the outfit of the night was surely Dan Bent's roller skates and tight shorts combo – a place in the next Starlight Express revival awaits.

Thanks to the organisers for a fantastic night, food, drink, music and Serpies as usual made for a fantastic combination. Now for the Hilton!



**Saturday
8th Dec**

SERPIE XMAS PARTY

**Saturday
8th Dec**

Surprisingly, the highlight of the Serpie calendar doesn't involve running! Every year, over 200 Serpies get together for drinking, dancing and the usual Christmas party shenanigans.

Once again, the party will take place in the Kensington Hilton and will open with dinner and drinks. Afterwards, you can impress fellow Serpies/Serpettes on the dance floor with your fantastic footwork.

Tickets go on sale in November, but save the date now to avoid missing one of the best Serpie social events of the year!

HELPERS NEEDED FOR THE CLUBROOM ON WEDNESDAY NIGHTS

We need more helpers to keep the Wednesday night club run well organised. There are two shifts to choose from: checking membership cards on the Seymour gate 6ish-7pm (before your run), and minding the bags 7-9pm (maybe if you are resting/injured).

Helpers are rewarded with a meal voucher for the Victory, a volunteering point towards eligibility for a club FLM place, and the gratitude of hundreds of club members!

If you can help out regularly (every couple of months) and could be part of our rota please email nlabib@serpentine.org.uk

In olden times

by **Malcolm French**

Serpentine Running Club celebrates its 25th Anniversary this year. In my last article, I looked at the club's formation and now, with the help of Hazel Paterson's 10th Anniversary book, I'd like to reflect on the early months of its existence.

The late months of 1982 saw the raising of the wreck of the Mary Rose. Henry VIII's flagship had sunk on the Solent in 1545 and after many years of painstaking underwater archaeology, the wreck was finally raised from the sea. It is now preserved in a museum in Portsmouth.

The end of 1982 was notable for the launch of both Channel 4 and ITV's breakfast television service TV-am. Steven's Spielberg's film ET was released and in early 1983, Richard Attenborough's film "Gandhi" won 8 Oscars, a record for a British film.

Also in early 1983, it became compulsory to wear a seat belt in the front seat of a car and in February of that year, the new Thames Flood Barrier was raised for the first time.

In sport, the Derby-winning racehorse Shergar was kidnapped. A ransom of £2 million was sought: the horse was never seen again. England's Mike Gratton and Grethe Waitz from Norway won the London Marathon. The tennis player Bjorn Borg retired, age just 26 and Australian, Christopher Massey set a water skiing speed record of 143.08 mph (228.9 kph).

On a bizarre note, the police launched a hunt for Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Geoffrey Howe's trousers after they were stolen from him while he was asleep on a train.

Serpentine Running Club's members continued to meet in one of the car parks close to the lake. However, there was a pressing need for a permanent base. Various options were considered including the Lido and the Bowling Club. The now defunct London Road Runners Club was operating from Alexandra Lodge, originally a Park Keeper's house, close to the Royal Albert Hall. After lengthy negotiations, it was agreed that Serpentine could operate from these premises, with LRRC as the lead organisation.

The Lodge was certainly excellently located but the building was in need of repair, particularly to deal with damp in the lower ground floor. Renovation work eventually went ahead, although the financing of this was reported to have been a source of friction between the two clubs. These difficulties were overcome and improved changing and showering facilities were achieved.



Interestingly, even at this early stage in the club's existence, it was felt that the accommodation was too small, especially in bad weather, when people weren't inclined to use the garden surrounding the Lodge. Nevertheless, the Lodge provided an hospitable base.

The next challenge was to come up with a club logo. The first club newsletter had the above design from Jim Cockburn.

A competition was launched to find a permanent logo. A special meeting was held in March 1983 when all the designs were pinned on the railings surrounding the Lodge. The preferred design was that by Alan Woodward's brother, Ron, which featured a serpent in the shape of an S and this became the official logo.

The first Handicap race was held in August 1982, when the winner was Rodney Lewis. Initially, the race was held every other month, but it moved to the current monthly format at the start of 1983. I was interested to see that the earliest of the club's current members to win the Handicap was Kathy Crilley, who triumphed in February 1983, while our President, Hilary Walker, first won the race in August 1983.

Serpentine's ladies had the distinction of winning the club's first team award in an open race, coming third in a 1982 race around the Silverstone motor racing circuit. The team included one of our Life Members, Wendy Wood. Running overseas was popular from the outset and the first trip was to the 1982 Paris 20k. With 2008's cross country races in mind, I was interested to see that the 1983 South of England Championships were at Trent Park where one Serpentine member reported that the course "was a lesson in mud-pie building. I can't imagine how something which was so liquid managed to lie in pools at the bottom of hills, at the top of hills and every point in between." So that's something we can look forward to in January 2008!

SEYMOUR CENTRE

One of the many extra benefits of being a Serpie is that you have free access to use the Seymour Centre's changing facilities and showers at times outside our usual Wednesday and Saturday club runs. So if you want to run in Hyde Park (or along Marylebone Road if that takes your fancy) before work, you can leave your bags at the Seymour and shower afterwards at no extra cost.



There continues to be no problem for Serpies wanting to use the Seymour facilities "out of hours" – leaving bags in the lockers and using the changing rooms and showers after a run. The Seymour management have asked, however, that this is limited to individual Serpies or small groups of up to 5 people, so that they are not inundated with large groups except for regular Serpie runs.

If you want to use this facility, the staff at the reception desk will ask you to show a valid Serpentine membership card, and to sign in to a book. This will allow them to monitor the level of Serpie use of the centre. Members who are also members of the Seymour are, of course, exempt from this.

Don't forget that on Wednesday nights and Saturday mornings there are lots of people using the Seymour and we have committed to storing Serpie bags in the clubroom instead of using the lockers in the changing rooms.

The Seymour is a great facility for all Serpies, and, if we play by the rules, we'll keep it that way.

For more information about the Seymour, see the Seymour page on the website:
www.serpentine.org.uk/pages/location_seymour.html

Sunday Runs in Richmond Park

If you're training for a spring marathon, Sunday morning long runs in Richmond Park are a great way to do your weekly Long Slow Distance (LSD) run. The path round the perimeter of the park is about 7.2 miles. Some people do one lap, some do two (and some do in between). There are a number of groups running at different paces.

We meet in the car park next to Pembroke Lodge, near Richmond Gate – there's a map on the website:

http://www.serpentine.org.uk/pages/training_run_sun.html

There are toilets and refreshments on site, and water fountains on the route. The run will start at 9.00am and if you want to join us for a warm-up, please arrive at 8.50am sharp.

Please just come along (no need to warn us you are coming), but if you'd like to ask us anything, email sunday@serpentine.org.uk

WANTED

Fast Serpies for road running championships

If you're one of our faster Serpies over 5K, we need you for the Spring Road Relay teams! The Southern (SEAA) Road Relays are scheduled for Sunday 6th April in Milton Keynes, and we'll be putting teams of 12 men and 6 women together for this highly competitive event. If you're a man whose 5K time is 18 minutes or under, or a woman with a 5K time of 20 minutes or under, please keep a note of the date.

Contact Ian Hodge at ihodge@serpentine.org.uk if you'd like to be considered.

If we're successful at the SEAA races, we'll be eligible to race at the National Championships at Sutton Coldfield on 19th April.

2008 Club Championships

The Serpentine Club Championships are a series of races of 1K, 1 mile, 3K, 5K, 5 miles, 10K, 10 miles, half marathon, 20 miles and full marathon. Some of the dates for the 2008 Championship have already been announced.

At Club Championships, not only do you get to compete to be Serpie Club Champion at that distance, but also your result counts towards the overall 2008 Serpie Age-Graded championship. The championship is awarded to the first claim member with the highest average percentage from 6 of the 10 championship races. To qualify, you must run all events in club colours, with the exception of the marathon, where we would ask you to wear club colours if possible. All events must have been entered under your own name.

There are always lots of Serpies taking part in Club Championship races, so they're great events to plan to do, but don't forget that some of these events fill up very quickly, so don't delay in getting your entry in. You can find the events on the Race and Event Planner on the website (<http://www.serpentine.org.uk/events/planner.php>) where they are highlighted in yellow. Keep an eye on the e-group, planner and news on the website for updates on the rest of the series.

NEW YEARS DAY 10K

Start 2008 with lots of Serpies and other runners in Hyde Park. Our New Year's Day 10K and 3K Fun Run are a great start to the year for many runners and we need your help to make sure their New Year's resolutions don't fall at the first hurdle.

The 10K starts at 11.00, with the Fun Run following at 12.00, so there is plenty of time for that recuperative coffee before heading for the Hyde Park bandstand.

We'll need marshals around the course, helpers at registration and at the finish area, people to give out goodie bags and lots more besides.

If you can help out, please let us know. You can do this either by using My Events on the website, or registering as a helper on the NYD10K page on the website.

Keep an eye on the e-group and website for more information on the race in the next couple of months.

Are you a budding photographer?

If you take a fantastic photo at your latest event, why not send it in to us at

serpentimes@serpentine.org.uk

It could appear in the Spring issue!

Front cover photos

Round Norfolk Relay: Rob Westaway
Jenny Gowans: ASI Photo

Malcolm's quiz answers:

1=B 2=C 3=C 4=A 5=A 6=B 7=B 8=C
9=A 10=C

SERPENTINE

CONTACT DETAILS

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**John Cullinane, Mel Pryke
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CLUB KIT



Photo: Alessandro Brandimarti

We have a fantastic selection of high quality running, tri, cycle, and casual kit available at great value, in a range of sizes to suit all.

Kit can be purchased from the kit room in the Seymour Leisure Centre.

The kit room is open:

- Most Wednesdays, usually between 6.15 and 6.40pm, except the last Wednesday of each month, when it is open after the run (around 8.30pm).
- Most Saturday mornings after the run (except the first Saturday of the month which is the Club Handicap).

Watch the e-group for notices on exact opening times.

Please note we do not provide a mail order service for kit.

If you have any questions please email: club-kit@serpentine.org.uk

Vests	£20
Cotton T-shirts	£12
Kids' cotton T-shirts	£10
Coolmax T-shirts – short sleeves	£20
– long sleeves	£23
Waterproof jackets	£15
Stormtech jackets	£35
Ladies' crop tops	£18
Tri suits	£50
Tri shorts	£30
Tri tops (sleeveless)	£30
Cycle jackets	£50
Cycle jerseys – short sleeves	£20
(summer weight) – long sleeves	£25
Cycle shorts	£25
Gilets	£25
Serpie 750ml water bottles	£3