

Berry Hill Park hosted National Cross Country action for the first of 2 occasions this month when the British Masters Cross Country Relay Championships returned for the second successive year.

The event gave Course Director Pat Carlan a great opportunity to test out the course in preparation for the prestigious Saucony English Cross Country Relays which will see thousands of runners descend on the park on 31st October.

Whilst Saturday's Masters relays were a smaller event the race atmosphere was just as hot and, despite gale force winds blasting across the park, some great battles ensued.

With events staged across 7 different categories local glory went to Mansfield Harriers VM35 quartet, who seized a silver medal behind race winners Halesowen AC.

Mark Johnson continued his return to racing action leading off the Harriers team and, running the fastest local leg of the day with a time of 14:07, brought the team home in 4th spot but just 8 seconds behind the leaders.

Jason Gardener headed out next, making his cross country debut, and ran a promising time of 15:56 before handing on to Faz Fahy who's 16:18 for the 2 lap course lifted the team into bronze medal spot.



Mansfields Silver Medal winning M35 team!

Alan Crewe braved a calf injury to head out on the last leg chasing down a 22 sec gap to second placed Birchfield Harriers. Crewe closed the gap steadily during the first lap cutting it down to around 15 secs as he headed out on the second 2km loop before taking his chance in the woods and moving the team into second spot. He maintained the position to finish strongly in a time of 16:09 and take the silver medal by a comfortable 15 seconds margin.

Mansfield's ladies were more unlucky in the VL35 category, just missing out on the medals with a 4th place finish, gold here going to local opposition Redhill Road Runners with Chester-Le-Street and Notts AC picking up silver and bronze.

Kahli Johnson led out the team completing the leg in 17:57 and bringing them back in 4th spot, Eva Williams (18:26) and Clare Coombes (19:31) retaining that position. A "B" team of Carol Hartin, Tina Green and Jane Stafford finished in 7th place.

In the Mens VM40 category Doug Ross led off in the 6 leg race, returning in 6th spot with a personal time of 14:35. Against strong opposition Graeme Wilkinson, Phil Shaw, Mark Jenkins, Trevor Hiscox and Julian Wood were unable to sustain this and finished in 11th spot.

At the front of this race Leicester Coritania led from the start after the fastest leg of the day from Gordon Lee gave them a 38 second lead at the first changeover. A north-east battle for second and third followed with Sunderland and Morpeth chasing each other down, the Wearside club finally securing the silver.

Tipton Harriers took the glory in the VM50 event with the Harriers quartet of Terry Ashmore, Pete Stafford, Keith Mellor and Colin Fell finishing in 8th spot.

Mansfield's ladies had two teams out in the VL45 category, a race that was won comfortably by Bristol & West AC. Sue Day, Wanda Curley and Maddy Collinge finished in 6th with the trio of Julie Grainger, Denise Winfield and Michelle Peet in 7th.

Harriers will be in action again next weekend as the first of the North Midlands Cross Country League fixtures take place at Derby's Markeaton Park. This league has four fixtures, one a month running through until January's final race at Nottingham's Wollaton Park. Berry Hill Park hosts the December fixture with November's event going to Corby.

World Championship silver medallist over 1500m Lisa Dobriskey was the special guest at the annual Mansfield Harriers presentation evening. Dobriskey, who is the reigning Commonwealth champion and finished 4th in the Beijing Olympics, marries Mansfield Harrier and Athens 2004 Olympian Ricky Soos in December.

As well as presenting the annual awards to age group performers and improvers, Dobriskey was able to share some of her early memories of athletics with club members along with some of the highlights of her career to date. She also took part in a photo to recognise the achievements of the recent senior mens team in securing promotion to the British Athletics League, an event at which husband to be Ricky made his return to competitive action for Mansfield.

Highlights of the evening included the awarding of training bursaries to 5 athletes who have achieved national recognition as well as competing for the club in a number of league matches this year – middle distance athletes Chris Brown and Danny Barks and throwers – Rachel Gair, Charlotte Gair and Chris Clarke - were the recipients.

Senior performers of the year went to female hammer thrower Rachel Gair and male steeplechaser Steve Lisgo with Danny Barks picking up the senior consistency trophy for the 2008/9 season.

Margaret and Doug Ross were the worthy recipients of the Chairman's shield and, despite their shock, were delighted to be recognised in this way. These stalwart supporters of the club turn out at every event supporting not only their own two generations of offspring but always offering encouragement to anyone in a green and blue vest.