

The summer season started in earnest for Mansfield Harriers this week with two big road race events and a number of athletes having their first track and field outing of the year.

One of the best performances took place thousands of miles away where Luke Cragg smashed the 5000m club record, recording a new best time of 13:54.65 at the Mt Sac Relays in California.

Cragg has had an excellent winter's training in the USA and this early season performance promises well for the summer. With surely more to come he should be looking for a top ten UK ranking spot by the end of the season. In a few weeks he increases his distance to 10000m where he will be looking to break 29:50.

At the same event Steve Lisgo had a strong debut this season over 3000m Steeplechase, recording a time of 8:46.35. Lisgo is targeting selection for Scotland in October's Commonwealth Games in Delhi and needs to run the qualifying time of 8:36 on one more occasion before August.

Closer to home the first fixture of the Notts AAA Road Race League took place at Epperstone, 372 runners completing the 5.9 mile course – the first of a series of five races taking place monthly throughout the summer.

James Mee was first Harrier home and put his marker down for the rest of the season with a third place finish in 31:59. Just behind him Mark Johnson continued his return to racing form with an excellent run to finish in fourth with a time of 32:14.

Luke Marshall again showed evidence of his hard work over the winter to take seventh place in 32:37 – the Birmingham University student now demonstrating his ability to hold his own with the senior athletes.

Pete Stafford showed little sign of the illness and injury that has troubled him for much of the winter, running strongly to take 13th position in a time of 33:56. Steve Grainger managed to stay within reach of Stafford for the first 4.5 miles but struggled over the last mile ending up in 24th spot in 34:28.

Darren Hodgkinson made a welcome return to racing in the Mansfield colours to battle it out with Chris Brown in the latter stages of the race. Hodgkinson just held Brown off, the duo taking 32nd and 33rd respectively in 34:53 and 34:58.

Steve Davies joined Stafford, Grainger and Hodgkinson as the scorers in a Veterans quartet that just missed out on the top spot on the night by 3 points, their 121pts just being beaten by Long Eaton's 118. Davies was 52nd in 36:20.

Jonny Lowe and Rob Smith came home as fifth and sixth scorers in a senior team that took third on the night, Lowe finishing in 54th in 36:35 and Smith, 57th in 36:48.

Jackie Massey, crowned County Half Marathon Champion at Retford last month, was the first lady home taking sixth spot in 37:47. She was joined in a Vets team that finished third on the night by Sally Smith (41st in 43:38) and Kahli Johnson (42nd in 43:47).

Helen Scott and Kirsty Huntington were the second and third Harriers back, finishing in 25th and 29th in times of 41:41 and 42:07 respectively. Sue Day joined these two, finishing in 52nd with a time of 44:42, to score in a Senior Ladies team that finished in ninth.

OTHER MANSFIELD FINISHERS: MEN - 64: Graeme Wilkinson – 37:18, 69: Chris Day – 37:36, 77: Mark Jenkins – 37:58, 96: Vinny Johnson – 39:24, 97: Trevor Hiscox – 39:25, 102: Phil Shaw – 39:39, 126: Pete Collinge - 41:08, 153: Colin Fell – 43:15, 164: Julian Wood – 43:31, 173: Keith Mellor – 44:08, 187: Clive Russell – 45:17, 213: Ivan Colton – 47:02, 229: Richard Massey – 49:07, 250: Alan Smith – 60:03. LADIES – 54: Mandy Corman – 44:49, 61: Maddy Collinge – 46:07, 63: Sue Watkinson – 46:29, 64: Hannah Colton – 46:42, 70: Carol Hartin – 47:32, 73: Claire O'Mara – 47:54, 80: Julie Grainger – 48:30, 86: Faye Gardener, 94: Denise Winfield – 50:03, 107: Chris Huntington – 52:31.

Just three days after the first Road race fixture many athletes were in action again at the National Road Relays, held at Birmingham's Sutton Park.

With the men's event held over twelve legs totalling 50.25 miles runners alternate between a long leg of 5.38 miles and a short leg of 2.995 miles.

Doug Ross was lead off man for Mansfield, using the long leg as his last preparation for next weekend's London Marathon. The early pace got the better of him on the second half but he battled well in the heat, bringing the team back in 59th spot in a time of 31:00.

Chris Brown was next out making it round the short leg in 16:48 and picking up two places before handing on to Darren Hodgkinson, who clocked 32:04 for the second long leg of the day. Tim Raynor headed out on fourth, recording 18:48 and handing over to Chris Dale with the team in 60th spot.

Dale produced a strong run over the 5.38 mile loop, making up 6 places and with a time of 28:58, handed over to Steve Grainger – who clocked 17:18 before handing on to Luke Marshall with the team in 52nd.

With the mid afternoon temperatures now soaring Marshall ran well to make up another place although was disappointed with his personal time of 31:03. Daniel Winter took over for the eighth leg, pulling out an impressive 16:38 and taking another two places.

James Mee, showing no real signs of tiredness after his third place finish midweek at the Notts AAA Road Race League, ran the ninth fastest leg on stage eight, clocking 27:35 and lifting Mansfield into 40th spot overall.

Callum Cullen took over from Mee, gaining two places and producing the fastest Mansfield short leg of the day in 16:13. Stuart King was the penultimate runner, just missing out on a sub 30 minute time.

King clocked 30:03 and lifted the team to 37th, a position that Club Chairman Steve Davies managed to preserve on the final leg – Davies clocking 17:43 to bring the team home with a final time of 4:44.11, an average of 5mins 39 secs for each of the 50.25 miles.

The ladies race was held over six legs, each totalling 2.995 miles and Holly Blount led off for Mansfield recording a time of 22:28, bringing the team back in the same spot as the men after leg one – 59th.

Kaye Raynor was next out, recording 22:00 with Helen Scott on third clocking the fastest Mansfield leg of the day in 20:59. Sally Smith (21:33) and Sharon Armitage (23:49) were on fourth and fifth before Holly Blount had to run again on sixth to complete the day – recording 23:39 on her second outing. Harriers finished in 42nd spot.

Ellie Maddocks continued her transformation from multi eventer to distance runner with two outings up in Lancashire. At the Lancashire 3 Bridges 10K she finished as 14th lady in 45:48 and then in the Pendle Fell Race over 4.5 miles with a climb to 1500 feet, finished as 12th lady in 47:45.