

Top class cross country action returned to Berry Hill Park last weekend with the Saucony English Cross Country Relays bringing over 3000 athletes to test themselves over the nationally recognised course.

The fast undulating course offers a real good early season test for the country's best cross country runners and yet again course director Pat Carlan and his team didn't disappoint. With 10 races across different age groups the course held up well and provided some excellent entertainment.

Mansfield Harriers took the advantage of the home location to field no fewer than 25 teams with pride of place again going to the Under 13 girls who bagged a bronze medal.

In the biggest race of the day 188 teams lined up for the start of the Senior Men's race with 4 athletes per team each running 2 x 2.5km laps of the park. GB international Steve Vernon of Stockport Harriers set the early pace clocking a swift 14:51 lap to bring his team back in first place and to record the fastest leg of the day.

It was all change on leg 2 as international fell runner Andi Jones took Salford from 8th into 1st with a leg of 14:58 to record the fifth fastest individual leg. Wells AC moved into 5th place on leg 2 and then rapidly accelerated into first position through the efforts of 2007 National Cross Country Champion Frank Tickner.

However victory for Wells AC was never going to be as they had no 4th leg runner and the running was left to Neilson Hall of Bedford and County AC who moved Paula Radcliffe's club up into the top spot. Hall was one of 3 Bedford runners in this year's team who had taken bronze last year – Matt Janes and Darren Deed being joined by Owain Matthews.

Triumphant Bedford and County were 20 seconds clear of Newham and Essex Beagles who made up 3 places on the last leg to move into silver spot with the bronze medals going to Morpeth Harriers. Notts AC were 4th and Sale Harriers completed the top 5 line-up.

Carl Emery returned as Mansfield men's Team Manager and got the selection of the 3 teams spot on. Carl has been missed by the club during a period of time away and athletes will now be hoping he's back for good this time. Stuart King led off for the A team finishing strongly in 16:21 handing on to Danny Barks making a welcome return to the team action.

Barks completed the 2 lap course in 17:32 and passed over to another athlete making a welcome return to a blue and green vest. Semi-finalist in the 2004 Athens Olympics 800m Ricky Soos looked very comfortable as he picked off 21 athletes and clocked 16:10. Chris Brown anchored the team home into 39th position with a personal time of 17:06 showing that his winter training is beginning to pay off.

Pete Stafford led out the B team and his 17:57 remained the fastest leg in that team. Doug Ross was out second clocking 18:07 before handing on to Darren Hodgkinson who made up 14 places and recorded 18:10. Steve Grainger was anchor man for the B team, his 18:32 time taking a further 10 athletes bringing them home in 83rd place with a cumulative time of 1:12.48.

Harriers' C team was led out by Faz Fahy clocking 18:36 followed by Rob Smith, fresh from a strong performance at the Worksop Half Marathon, who just missed

the 19 minute mark coming home in 19:01. Doug Flett and Dave Peet completed the line up recording 19:09 and 19:50 respectively for a 114th place team finish.

The Senior Women's race was contested by 94 teams – each athlete running one lap of the 3km course. Charnwood AC turned the tables on Havering Mayesbrook AC and took gold with the girls from Essex having to settle for silver which Charnwood took last year.

Windsor Slough Eton and Hounslow were the early leaders with Charnwood back in 11th and Havering in 12th after leg one. Woodford Green took the lead on the second leg and so it was down to Juliet Doyle and Faye Fullerton to make up the ground on the last leg. Despite Fullerton clocking the 4th fastest leg of the day against Doyle's 6th this wasn't enough and Charnwood took the honours convincingly by just over 15 seconds. Kendal AAC took bronze.

After being beaten on time twice recently by Natalie Yates at the Midland and National Road Relays Liz Lilley was looking for revenge over the country as these two took on the first two legs for Mansfield Women's A team. Lilley came home in 11:09 with Yates in 11:25 and with this sort of friendly rivalry the winter augurs well for Mansfield's women. Kahli Johnson anchored the A team home into 38th spot with a personal time of 13:08.

Harriers B team of Helen Scott, Eva Williams and Claire Coombes finished in 61st position clocking 13:36, 13:26 and 13:52 respectively. Team manager Wanda Curley led out the C team returning in 13:51 handing on to Tina Green who clocked 14:10 before Jane Stafford brought the team home with a time of 14:21 to take 67th spot.

New Marske Harriers took the Under 20 Men's title pushing last years winners City of Norwich back into the silver medal spot with Liverpool Harriers taking bronze.

Mansfield's James Mee recorded the 9th fastest leg of the day in this age group with a fine run of 9:06 on the first leg bringing the blue and green vests back in third spot after leg one. Sean Ledger ran 9:36 to retain a top 10 spot before handing on to Craig Woods who put in a valiant effort on third leg clocking 10:22 and bringing Mansfield home in 22nd place.

Luke Marshall led the B team off returning in 10:27 to hand on to Mike Mumford who ran 10:33 with Matt Bath recording 10:54 on 3rd leg.

The Under 20 Women's title saw gold and silver go to Aldershot, Farnham and District with the trio of Lily Partridge, Emma Pallant and Charlotte Purdue – all nationally renowned and names to watch for the future – coming home a clear 66 seconds ahead of their B team.

With a B team that included Steph Twell who competed in the 1500m at this years Olympic Games in Beijing this was no mean feat. Twell's 8:00 for the 2.5km lap was the fastest leg of the day.

Mansfield's team of Jodie Bestwick, Nikita Pembleton and Daisy Baugh finished 28th with individual times of 10:18, 10:39 and 11:01 respectively.

Aldershot, Farnham and District completed a clean sweep of all 6 titles in the junior races going one better than their five from last year.

91 teams lined up for the start of the Under 13 Girls race in which 3 athletes each

ran a lap of the fast 2km loop. This was set to be a good race with several teams determined to reverse positions from the recent National Road Relays.

Early leaders were St Helens Sutton AC with Mansfield's girls being led out by Chevelle Baxter who ran the sixth fastest time of the day on the notoriously difficult first leg to bring Harriers back in 5th spot.

Leg two saw the lead change with Liverpool Harriers taking it on, Tonbridge AC moving into second spot and Aldershot, Farnham and District moving up from 11th to 3rd. Caelidh Ross took over from Baxter in the blue and green vest and had an excellent run, returning in 7:58 and having moved harriers up to fourth place spot.

The strength of winners Aldershot, Farnham and District showed on leg three as Harriet Preedy took over and with only 10 seconds separating the first six teams at the changeover she soon broke away and opened up a gap.

It wasn't long before Tonbridge and St Helens dropped off the pace but a strong run from Zoe Fincher on the last leg for Halesowen brought them into the frame with Liverpool and Mansfield fighting it out for the silver and bronze spots.

Molly Johnson's battling spirit on last leg for Mansfield moved them up into 3rd place spot and she showed real determination not to let it go despite the late Halesowen challenge. With Aldershot clear winners by 24 seconds Liverpool took silver in 23:26 and Mansfield the bronze in 23:30 with Halesowen in 4th and Windsor Slough Eton and Hounslow in 5th.

Tamsin Smith, Claire Norris and Abigail D'Aguiar made up the Mansfield B team clocking 8:12, 8:36 and 8:57 respectively for a 38th place finish. Meanwhile the C team finished 57th through the efforts of Hazel Blount (9:15), Holly Smith (9:16) and Robyn Foster (8:27).

Aldershot Farnham and District's trio of Starling, Watson and Arnold recorded 3 of the fastest six legs of the day as they stormed to a 26 second victory in the Under 13 Boys event. Tonbridge AC and Chiltern Harriers both improved on their 10th and 4th placed spots last year to take silver and bronze respectively with Kingston upon Hull and Wirral in 4th and 5th.

Sam Johnson led off for Mansfield's A team on the tough first leg clocking 7:38 handing on to David Wilkinson who ran 8:00 before Bailey Wardle anchored them home in 32nd place with a cumulative time of 23:22 and recording a good personal time of 7:43.

Lewis Ashmore led off for Mansfield's B team running 8:15 with Jake Lancaster having a good run on second leg to clock 7:59 before George King brought them back in 48th place recording 8:11. The C team of Jordan Boam, Joseph Ashmore and Sam Raynor were 60th with individual performances of 8:43, 8:54 and 8:13.

Aldershot, Farnham and District secured their 3rd victory of the day in the Under 15 Girls race through an excellent last leg from the highly talented Emilia Gorecka. Early leaders Marshall Milton Keynes had to settle for bronze with East Cheshire Harriers and Tameside taking silver. Bedford and County AC were 4th and Ipswich Harriers 5th.

Claire Talbot was lead leg runner for Mansfield's A team returning in 34th place with a time of 7:50. Rachel Brandham went out hard on leg two making up 17 places and clocking 7:39 before handing on to Demi-Jade Jakymelen who recorded 8:03 hanging on well to bring the team back in 19th position.

Harriers B team of Charlotte Bellingham, Hayley Silver and Hannah Hardy ran consistently all running legs of just over 8 minutes. Bellingham clocking 8:06 on first, Silver 8:09 on second and Hardy 8:03 on third to bring them back in 31st place. The C team of Alice Mortiboy, Emily D'Aguair and Jess Smith were 58th with individual times of 8:34, 8:39 and 8:50 respectively.

The Under 15 Boys race was the biggest junior race of the day with 115 teams lining up for the start. Early leaders were Ealing Southall & Middlesex with Leeds City, in second place after leg one, taking over on the second leg.

However neither of these two teams was to occupy medal spots with everything changing on the last leg where Aldershot, Farnham and District moved up into their now customary number one spot. Tonbridge AC moved up from 7th to 2nd with an excellent last leg from Robbie Farnham-Rose and Windsor Slough Eton and Hounslow from 5th to 3rd.

Ryan Saxton ran an excellent first leg of 6:41 for Mansfield to bring them back in 15th spot, Tom Wragg and Will Stone following up with solid runs clocking 7:17 and 7:12 respectively to give the A team a very credible 26th place finish.

Tom O'Mara led off for the B team coming home in 7:25 with James Morel and Jack Foster clocking 8:24 and 8:37 on second and third legs.

Another clear win for Aldershot, Farnham and District was secured in the Under 17 Women's race run over 2.5km where they defeated second place Vale Royal by a 32 second margin. Rotherham Harriers took bronze with Winchester in 4th and Royal Sutton Coldfield in 5th.

Hannah Wragg was lead off runner for Mansfield's A team and ran well to secure a top 10 placing after the first leg. Wragg recorded 9:20 before handing on to Emma Wilkinson who ran 10:29 and Dea-Anna Davey who clocked 10:15 bringing the team home in 14th place.

Amie Grainger led off for the B team recording 10:08 with Laura Brown running strongly on leg two to run 9:52 and Sophie Ward on third coming home in 10:37. Christie Childs had a good run on first leg for the C team returning in 9:52 with Kate Raynor and Gina Radford making up this trio and clocking 10:34 and 11:10 respectively.

The Under 17 Men's Race presented more of a battle for Aldershot, Farnham and District than their earlier triumphs with victory being secured by just 7 seconds.

City of Norwich were the early leaders and as the 3rd leg runners went out for the final lap of the 3km course they retained the lead with Owls AC in second and Aldershot in third. As the race unfolded the order reversed itself and with Jonathan Hay running the second fastest leg of the day of 9:19 the red, white and green vest of Aldershot came home to secure the clean sweep of the junior races. Tonbridge were 4th and Sale Harriers 5th.

Mansfield's A team trio of Richie Talbot, Adam Sansom and Ryan Childs finished 64th with individual times of 10:49, 11:09 and 10:42. The B team of Daniel Ward, Jack Longstaff and Ales Heath were 76th clocking 11:59, 11:54 and 12:24 respectively.

Several Mansfield Harriers warmed up for the National Cross Country Relays with

a trip to Birmingham for the McCain Cross Country Challenge. In races with disappointingly small fields the blue and green vests certainly boosted the numbers.

Pride of place on the day went to Alex Rieley who won the Under 11 Boys race in 5:28. Top 3 spots were also secured by Chevelle Baxter, third in the Under 13 Girls in 11:06 and Ryan Saxton, third in the Under 15 Boys in 10:42.

Other Mansfield finishers: Under 11 Boys – 7: Ben Hardy (5:45), 10: Harrison Smith (6:14). Under 13 Girls - 7: Elle Saxton (11:49), 10: Tamsin Smith (12:18), 21: Holly Smith (13:41). Under 13 Boys – 8: Jake Lancaster (12:32), 15: David Wilkinson (14:15). Under 15 Girls – 9: Claire Talbot (12:33), 15: Demi-Jade Jakymelen (12:48), 18: Charlotte Bellingham (13:08), 21: Hannah Hardy (13:31), 24: Rachel Brandham (13:58), 27: Jess Smith (15:40). Under 15 Boys – 12: Tom Wragg (11:27). Under 17 Girls – 6: Hannah Wragg (15:17), 11: Dea-Anna Davey (16:41), 13: Emma Wilkinson (18:04), 15: Gina Radford (18:54).

Away from the cross country and Mansfield's seniors were in action at the Worksop Half Marathon where Darren Hodgkinson continued his return to form and became the first Harrier home, dipping under 80 minutes to record 79:04 and taking 17th place. Rob Smith is another athlete it's great to see getting back into racing form and Rob was next back in 34th place in 81:53.

Steve Davies warmed up for his race in the New York Marathon with a solid run of 84:56 for 67th place. Trevor Hiscox and Dave Peet both finished in under 90 minutes and in the top 100, Hiscox finishing 87th in 86:38 and Peet 96th in 87:11.

Miriam Tedder was first home for the ladies, her time of 1:33:28 bringing her back in 190th overall.

Other Mansfield finishers: 273: Keith Mellor (1:36.48), 299: Philip Shaw (1:38.13), 338: Colin Fell (1:39.15), 354: John O'Reilly (1:39.06), 414: Dave Rose (1:41.27), 590: Maddy Collinge (1:46.19), 635: David Robertson (1:47.32), 691: Dave Ward (1:49.18), 820: Carol Hartin (1:51.53), 868: Michelle Peet (1:53.53), 990: Susan Watkinson (1:58.39), 1132: Christine Huntingdon (2:07.38), 1166: Maz Lee-Cerrino (2:08.14), 1167: Rowena Lee-Cerrino (2:08.15), 1247: Amy Woodcock (2:15.35).

The Men's team made up of the 6 first to finish was second overall with counters being Darren Hodgkinson, Rob Smith, Steve Davies, Trevor Hiscox, Dave Peet and Keith Mellor. The ladies team of Miriam Tedder, Maddy Collinge, Carol Hartin and Michelle Peet were fifth.

Five harriers also took part in the accompanying Fun Run with Bronwyn Ward first back in 89th place in a time of 25:20. Niall O'Reilly was 107th in 26:55, Lynne O'Reilly 165th in 33:09, Ewan O'Reilly 166th in 33:09 and George Reid 176th in 34:27.