

Three Day Eventing (Radcliffe AC 3 day series, July 2010) - by Richard Butterwick

One of my many targets for this year was to complete a 3 day event. After missing the Rochdale 3 day series due to injury and the last two thirds of Midsummer Madness due to other commitments, it was extremely kind of Radcliffe AC to launch their new 3 day event this year. Whilst still carrying an injury, not to mention being a little unfit and 10 pounds heavier after 3 months out, I was finding that by running a lot slower than normal it wasn't aggravating things *too* much!



Day 1 Thursday – Bull Hill Fell Race – 5.5 miles 1100ft

The first race was an established evening fell race at Hawkshaw near Ramsbottom. A glance back at earlier results showed that only one Toddie had run it in 8 out of the last 9 years (not the same one!). I kept the tradition going joining a record field but would highly recommend a future GP listing. It's just enough of a real fell race for the hard core, but not too tough for newer runners. (Think of a short Turnslack without the last two hills).

On registering for the series, I was slightly unsure about being given two numbers - the usual race number for the front but also an age category plate for the back. However, this turned out to be an excellent idea as it allowed you to identify who was doing the series and if in the same age group.

After a very steady start, I discovered why everyone else had rushed off as there was a small bottleneck stile to negotiate. It was then a fairly fast loop over Bull Hill and around Holcombe Moor on a mixture of rough tracks, rocky sections, and very dry moorland paths. I'd been working my way through the field slowly to catch a couple of series v40s when I glanced up and one had vanished. Surely he can't have pulled away so quick? Then some waving bracken gave away that he'd fallen off the path! With instant Contador-like ruthlessness, I took the opportunity to zoom past the other v40 and pressed on up the final climb to pass a few more. Once on the other side of the stile it all went wrong as my energy vanished and crossing once boggy ground that had been heavily trod by cows and then baked dry for the past few months was an 'interesting' challenge for tired ankles and a sore achilles, so I lost around a minute on those just in front.

On balance was fairly happy with an opening mark of 17th place in the series and 3rd v40. First v40 was leading overall, but 2nd v40 was only 3:43 in front and optimistically catchable. Despite my poor finish the next v40 was 44 secs behind.

Day 2 Friday – Giant's Seat Summer Cross Country - 5 miles ~700ft

No idea what to expect for this new race and on arriving at the Scout Camp there just seemed to be a grassy field. However, it turned out to be 4 laps of a constantly undulating twisting course in the surrounding dark forest, including a stream crossing and a stiff climb back out for a loop of the field each time. Even hotter and more humid than day 1.

Managed to settle in with target v40 in sight a few places ahead and decided to familiarise with course on lap 1 – twisted ankle in a rabbit hole but nothing serious. Felt good on 2nd lap and closed right up behind mv40 whilst plotting my tactics for clawing back some time. On 3rd lap - after an ankle twist in same rabbit hole as lap 1 - decided to go for it and half way round squeezed past and shot downhill towards the stream – a good hard push for a minute or two should open up a gaaah... tripped on a tree stump, twisted ankle, stumbled, knee nearly exploded, stumbled again, crashed through nettles and miraculously ended up back to the path. Splashed through stream but legs gone to jelly and was struggling to keep pace going, lost a couple of places on climb to field at end of lap but crucially stayed ahead of rival v40. Kept pushing as hard as I could around a tough lap 4 – with now customary ankle twist in same chuffing rabbit hole - in the hope he would tire first. Eventually on final climb out of woods I had to walk a bit and he went past, tried to hang on as best as I could and only 9 seconds lost at the finish.

General consensus over the free coffee in the scout hut afterwards seemed to be that everyone found it a lot harder than expected. Set a new PB for post race rehydration – 2 litres in 15 mins. Barely able to walk due to ankle twists, seemed to be a few others limping away too. Loved it!

Moved up 3 places to 14th in series and consolidated 3rd place v40, with 4th v40 now nearly 3 mins behind. Series 13th place now 42 seconds ahead, and 15th and 16th in series only 14 and 18 seconds behind.

Day 3 Saturday – Radcliffe Trail 5 mile

Was now regretting Wednesday's long pack run and Stoodley Pike Race on Tuesday. Dragged self out of bed, hobbled downstairs glanced at my result calculations spreadsheet and gave up on improving position... it was going to be a tough battle to hold off next two. In fact it was just going to be a battle to start. After an extended warm up I was starting to feel optimistic again. A fast start and I had the next three in the series just in front. Tracked them comfortably for about 3 miles and then started struggling badly, quickly losing sight of everyone in front along an overgrown canal path.

All I had to do now was keep going and not get overtaken... and then a Rochdale guy caught up and passed me. I knew he was one of the ones close behind in the series so despite pains in heel did my best to try and stay with him. Gap grew to about 30 secs and I knew I had to get it down or I'd lose a place. Managed to half it and cling on before a stroke of luck at the very end, as a nice downhill slope into the running track allowed me to gain some momentum. Only 4 seconds behind at the line, yes! Did a lap of track to celebrate... after 10 minutes laid out on ground!

Ended the series in 14th place of the 33 who survived all three races and 3rd v40 of 10 who finished series. 1st v40 won overall and I was only 4:42 behind 2nd, so definitely intend to be back next year – hopefully fitter and uninjured.

[10 races in 23 days to get my 40 | 40 challenge back on track... but that's another story!]