

54th London to Brighton Walk 1st Sep 1979

A meagre field of 37 lined up on Westminster Bridge and worse still there were but two teams competing for the team race, Coventry and Enfield. Wot no Surrey? Sadly no, the unpalatable fact was that we were represented by just three members Steve Wynn, Jim Clements and Graham Peddie in our own race. Spectators shuffled their feet in embarrassment. A bedside alarm clock set for 6.00 a.m. would have been more appropriate to start this race than the booming resonance of Big Ben.

Why the lack of interest? The organisation was efficient. True we had turned away some late entries but potential competitors had had more than ample time to enter; two of our Brighton stalwarts Peter Selby and Nolan Simmons were sidelined by injury; the proximity of the National 100 kms may have deterred a few; perhaps too many Club members are treating the race now as a day out by the sea. One can think of many other possible contributory reasons but it is to the future we must look to try and ensure there is no repeat. Denis Vale has written along these lines and his letter is reproduced at the end of this report. Please digest!

The race itself for the individual placings was no less interesting however. Bob Dobson and later at 6.01 Ian Richards G.B. Internationals at 50 kms, added spice to the race in their first Brightens. Non participating experts questioned this pairs ability to cope with the extra 22 miles.

This too may have crossed the mind of the wily 46 year old Welshman from Sheffield John Eddershaw for he quickly showed his hand and made an immediate break. Nobody was prepared to take up the gauntlet seriously and so by halfway on a bright warm morning Eddershaw had established a clear lead of about 5 minutes over his rivals. Many still felt at this stage that Dobson had been holding back and would move through strongly in the latter part of the race. Others reckoned that the perpetual motion man from Brighton Dave Boxall would be more likely to capitalise on any slip by the leader particularly as the scent of his home town was growing stronger by the minute. No one however gave Ian Richards much chance; absolutely drenched in his own perspiration he looked ready to call it a day at Pease Pottage but as so often happens in distance races walkers can summon up hidden reserves of strength and Richards did exactly this powering past Boxall in pursuit of Eddershaw. John was not looking at all relaxed, his head swaying from side to side. Nevertheless he battled on grimly in his own inimitable style, but Richards was not to be denied and he overhauled Eddershaw at Preston Park to come home with barely a minute to spare.

To have made the pace for 50 miles and go under by so narrow a margin must have been a bitter pill for John Eddershaw to swallow, but he took it with a grin like the exemplary sportsman he is.

Our congratulations to Ian Richards; his late start could have cost him dearly but at the end of the day it was his superior strength that carried him through, a fact he emphasised the following day at Hove Park by clocking 47.11 in an open 10 kms.

What of our intrepid trio? Steve Wynn unfortunately could not reproduce his Hastings form and was very disappointed with his showing despite winning the Dithy Cup for being the 1st Club man home. Graham got the better of Jim to reverse their Hastings placings but there was under a minute in it.

The Coventry team of Richards, Halstead and Chaplin easily won the team race from Enfield for whom Peter Worth again excelled and though we filed out of the Concorde Bar empty handed after our President had distributed the awards, we must at least thank Steve, Graham and Jim for saving the Club from complete ignominy.

One cannot conclude without mentioning Bill Astill and Hughie Neilson. Bills generous contributions throughout the year helped enormously to off-set the cost of the prizes and we are very grateful to him for that. As for Hughie his entry for the race was turned down by the Club but did he show any resentment and spend the day elsewhere. No he re-channelled his efforts into attending John Eddershaw. It's people like Hughie Neilson who make this sport of ours a cut above all others.

Results:

