



## **Race Reports**

### ***Report by Andrew Wadsworth:***

Leicestershire 10K at Prestwold Hall - 25<sup>th</sup> October 2020.

#### *Racing in the time of Coronavirus*

Looking back over this year, the last race (& parkrun) I did was on the 15<sup>th</sup> March, a 5 mile race organised by Centurion running club in East Birmingham. It was a last minute decision to enter; originally I had been scheduled to enter the 20 mile race at Ashby de la Zouch also on the 15<sup>th</sup>, which though was cancelled due to virus concerns. At the time I could not imagine it would be seven months before I could once again don my Sparkhill vest, pin a number to the front, and enjoy the excitement of an event, we are indeed in unusual and challenging times, athletics events being cancelled one of the more minor consequences of everything.

Initially I could not believe this would take place, I had never visited Prestwold Hall before (for those who don't know it) it is about three miles outside Loughborough. However careful monitoring of the website and social media suggested they were going to proceed, with of course Covid modifications so entrance money was paid (the minimum three days in advance, entries on the day not allowed, being one of the modifications).

Parts of the Prestwold Hall estate had clearly been used as an airfield as well as for motor sports, the runway evident during parts of the race, as were racing signs and tyre walls. This provided an essentially flat 10k with long straights, however little protection from the wind when trying to make headway in particular directions. Whilst the final 200 metres was on gravel in front of the hall, (exactly not what was needed for a final sprint), the rest of the race was on generally good surfaces.

So what made the event different in terms of Covid-19 precautions? Simple changes were made, event staff/marshals had PPE, plenty of places to hand sanitise, no official bag drops, at the end medals, water & snacks were picked up from separate tables progressively further away from the finish line, and runners were encouraged to leave the site soon after finishing. For me the major change was at the start. On entry runners had to estimate their finish times, and based upon this were allocated to a particular wave.

Wave 1 – Red Bibs – Sub 40 mins

Wave 2 – Blue Bibs – Sub 46 mins

Wave 3 – Black Bibs – Sub 52 mins

Wave 4 – Yellow Bibs – Sub 60 mins

Wave 5 – Purple Bibs – Sub 66 mins

Wave 6 – Green Bibs – Sub 90 min

Having got my blue bib pinned to the front of my Sparkhill rest, blue runners were then called forward in one minute predicted segments, the red runners having already been directed to the start line. Having not raced for some time I opted, perhaps optimistically for a sub 44 min finish, and joined two side by side lines of runners (2 metres apart) following a line of equidistant spaced disks until rounding a corner and being told to start running, the timing mat being about 10 metres in front of me. This had the desired effect of spacing people out, and whilst obviously some overtaking took place I always felt I was running in plenty of space, and that people were very accurate at predicting their times. This did have the effect that although my chip time finish was 42 minutes 27 seconds, my gun time was 46 minutes 41 seconds. Considering though that the first person back completed the course in 31 minutes 11 seconds I do not believe my race winning chances were affected!

One slight unfortunate mishap, as I crossed the starting line I started my watch as last done seven months previously, however I had clearly been messing around with the settings, as I only had a single display showing the distance covered (in miles) time not displayed at all! With the route marked out with kilometre signs this was useless information. Craig's wise words of encouragement during the 12 minutes track time trail came to mind, to run based on how you feel rather than the watch indicated time. As ever the advice proved beneficial as I was quicker than the optimistic time I predicted for myself at the start. I did wonder though at times about the advice for running into a head wind, but sadly could not remember that.

Full results are on runbritain, just under 600 participants.

### ***Report by Andrew Wadsworth:***

Winter Warmer and Festive 5

Two races reports for the price of one and jumbled up together but I hope it makes sense and is interesting to read. Good reasons for doing it this way, both advertised as 5 mile, multi-terrain and local, my finishing positions very similar 26<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> and run on consecutive Sundays, although one was the last Sunday of 2019 and the other the first one of 2020, perhaps that is where the similarities end though. 107 runners out for the Winter Warmer, slightly more at 164 who tackled Fladbury.

The Winter Warmer well organised by West Bromwich Harriers around the hardcore trails and grassy paths of the Sandwell Valley, some hills, albeit artificial, but bridges not designed for commercial traffic over the M5 have steep inclines, mud, some significant puddles to avoid or splash through, as well as some fast and firm sections following the parkrun route for those who know it. I soon became aware that my forward direction on the muddy grass paths due to traction issues was poor, and despite my best efforts, cost me time & positions to other runners, however once the surface improved so did my forward motion, good learning for the following week. A challenging and enjoyable course, nice medal at the end, tea and cake served from a club gazebo to replace the energy and calories used.

Took the opportunity to quiz a friend at the end of the race regarding what I could expect at Fladbury and was told a firmer running surface, and a flat course, despite a significant part of the route based upon the grass path alongside the Avon. So decision made, same footwear, although truth be told I have limited choice for these multi-terrain races. Also with some research managed to get an idea of what the challenges of the course would be, allowing some tactical planning.

Fladbury for those who do not know is a Worcestershire village close to the Avon about halfway between Evesham and Pershore, a very rural setting in contrast to the urban heartland of the Sandwell Valley. The run is organised by the Friends of Fladbury, a village community group, who made us city dwellers very welcome, one gentleman on seeing my Sparkhill vest shook my hand and welcomed me as a fellow Brummie, although he had escaped years ago! Race HQ was based in the offices of a large nursery on the edge of the village and provided all the facilities needed, the large room being of a size that the pre race briefing could be held indoors, out of the wind. We were warned that they had received far more rain than normal, and this was evident within 400m of the start when a large pool covered the whole road.

My tactics worked out fairly well, shorter strides, reduced pace on the challenging uneven and muddy in parts river bank section, which was most of the first half of the race, then with the energy saved, step up the pace when the surface improved, and try to chase down those ahead. Once again a well signed route, plenty of supporting and encouraging marshalls, chip timing with ankle bracelets, (the Winter Warmer used traditional timing methods). No medal on crossing the line but a goody bag consisting of cherry tomatoes on the vine, and very tasty they were as well, I assume locally grown. One final community aspect though was then revealed as we walked back into the nursery offices, hots drinks and a wonderful variety of home made cakes served to all runners, the local bakers had clearly been very busy, and were once more very welcoming and hospitable. I realised at the end I was not the sole Sparkhill runner there, when I spotted another red and black vest, and was very pleased when I realised Margaret had won a category prize; great running Margaret.

One final disparity between the two events, was my time, six minutes slower at Fladbury, although it was pointed out to me (& GPS confirmed) the Fladbury course was nearer six miles than five so perhaps one of my initial similarities was stretching the truth a little.

Would recommend both races as an enjoyable way to both end the old year and start the new.

**Report by Clare Bovill:**

## **6 Star Marathon Challenge**

**"more people have stood on the summit of Everest than have done the six marathon majors"!**



I moved from Scotland to the Solihull 27 years with a baby, Jonathan. To try and lose my post-baby weight I decided that it was time to get fit. Running seemed like a great option as it burned a lot of calories and I didn't need to spend a lot of money on expensive gym membership or equipment. All I needed was some decent shoes and a good bra!

I joined a local running club in Birmingham - Sparkhill Harriers - and started running with the old men. As I progressed, I found that I was suited to distance running rather than sprinting - I'm only 5' tall. I entered a number of half-marathons, and then decided that before my 30th birthday I would like to run a marathon. The London Marathon was, and still is, a focus for distance running in the UK and over the next few years I ran it 6 times, gaining a PB of 3:28.

On a visit to take my sons to buy their running shoes, the owner of Sutton Runner and fellow Sparkhill Harrier, Dave Jones, asked me if I was still running marathons and I said that although I was still running I didn't feel that I needed to do any more. "Before you hang up your shoes" he said "enter New York"! I had just come through a traumatic period in my personal life, during which time my running had given me great comfort, so I thought 'ok, let's give it a go'! NYC Marathon is the largest marathon in the world with over 50,000 competitors and it is a wonderful event. Carried along by the crowds I ran a fast time of 3:49. This time gave me a qualifying time for the prestigious Boston Marathon - you can only run it if you qualify - making it a very special race for marathon runners.

Back in 2013 The World Marathon Majors 6 Star Award was launched with sponsorship from Abbott. The challenge was for amateur runners to compete in the 'Majors' along side the professionals and gain an impressive large medal along the way. Having now done 3 of the six, I felt that this was a challenge that I could pursue. I ran Boston in 2015, Chicago in 2018, Tokyo in March 2019 and I have just finished with Berlin on September 29th 2019. The road to Tokyo was particularly hard as I picked up an achilles injury which took several months of physiotherapy to rectify. I was only able to do a fraction of the running training that I would normally do, but in its place I substituted a new skill - swimming! I had learned to swim at school but could only do breast stroke. One of the Solihull School PE staff, Dan Super, taught me how to swim front crawl properly and I now continue to swim 3 times a week..

The 6 Star Medal has been achieved by 6,428 people worldwide, though that number will have increased at the recent New York City Marathon. There are only 207 women in UK to have gained it.

***Report by Rob Mills:***

**Chester Marathon, 6<sup>th</sup> October 2019**

Without the benefits of a 41-strong team of windshield pacesetters and the laser guiding support vehicle, Michael and I ran 26.2 miles on Sunday 6 October. Not for us a specially prepared and ergonomically banked four-lap track, our run was around a one-lap undulating course starting and finishing in the lovely city of Chester.

This is a great race and strongly recommended for anyone looking for an Autumn marathon next year. It is regularly voted “best marathon” by readers of Runners World and it is easy to see why; superb organisation, good support, attractive rural course, and a packed goody bag including a technical tee-shirt! Following the bad weather, the start and finish of the route had to be amended as Chester Racecourse was waterlogged and although torrential rain was forecast for the morning, we were extremely lucky as it held off until the afternoon so the running conditions were really good.

Michael’s performances continue to improve and he sliced an impressive 8 minutes off his previous best time (which I believe is proportionally more than Mr Kipchoge managed in Vienna... just saying). I was happy with my run as it was the first time in over five years I’ve been able to complete the required training without getting injured. Bring on the cross-country season!

3,131 runners set off and among the 3,077 finishers were:

317 <sup>th</sup>	Michael Wade	3:14:51
702 <sup>nd</sup>	Robert Mills	3:35:32

So the only question is: has Craig taken my running as far as it will go – do I need to invest in a pair of Nike Vaporfly Next?

**Report by Andrew Wadsworth:**

**Pattingham Bells, 6<sup>th</sup> October 2019**

The bells toll for one last occasion.

The Pattingham Bells race, so named as initially setup to raise money for timber work needed in the belfry of the local parish church, but has since been used to raise money for a significant number of local charities. It is run on beautiful Crown estate land, however the estate is up for sale at an eye watering 32.5 million pounds should anyone have some spare cash. The organisers sadly announced a few months ago this would be the final running on its thirtieth anniversary.



What makes (made) this unique was not only the beautiful location in which it is set, starting and finishing on the village hall playing field, with a single lap route covering fields, woodland, hills, farm tracks, passing lakes and going through farm yards but also the unique mementos at the end. No medals and T shirts here, a cup of tea or coffee freshly made by the volunteers, a piece of 'harvest cake' which for the non bakers such as myself means a tasty piece of fruit cake, and to top it all a horse brass or about 4cm in diameter. The

design changes every year, yes those wonderful shiny pieces of metal you can attach to your shire horse when you are ploughing or perhaps hang on a leather as a retro style piece of wall art.

As for the race itself, recent heavy rain had left parts of the course soft with some significant puddles for the unaware, however a lovely day meant that I could take in the splendour of the course for one last time in good visibility. At the start line plenty of 'local vests were in evidence especially from the black country and Shropshire, Pattingham itself being on the Staffordshire/Shropshire border. Supportive friendly marshalls were out in abundance to direct the runners, all adding to the 'local' vibe of the event, in contrast to the larger corporate events, you really had the feeling that the village welcome this annual influx of colourful vests.

Personally having been injured for much of the summer my performance was nothing to write home about, generally lacking in both speed and stamina, however the enjoyment of being able to participate for one final time easily offset that.

In terms of results I clocked a chip time of 51:59 for the 10k distance, 31st in category and 120th overall, a distant 23 minutes behind the first finisher from Tipton Harriers.

Full details can be found here.

[https://my1.raceresult.com/139344/results?lang=en#10\\_797EDF](https://my1.raceresult.com/139344/results?lang=en#10_797EDF)

I have only done this race three times, I still wonder how it took me so long to discover it, however I did meet one chap clearly far more organised than myself who was the proud owner of 27 different horse brasses!

2020 I will have to find a favourite new local races as the Bells no longer will chime to welcome home the runners in Pattingham.

***Report by Simon Hodges***  
**Worcester Midweek Series 2019**

Paul Webster talked me into this little set of 4 races with 3 to count for final positions / prizes, also with his wife Sarah from BvH, they consisted of :-

15/05/2019 ~ Hagley, a 2 lap route multi terrain through wooded areas, through farmers fields, bridal paths and small sections of roads, a long stretch up hill on a sandy foot path....and very sunny and humid evening.

Paul 40:48 / Overall 28th, M40 6th  
Simon 41:23 / Overall 33rd, M45 4th

12/06/2019 ~ Redditch, a 2 lap multi terrain through wooded areas and fields, oh and remember the rains we had for 2 weeks before, and certainly that evening, talk about MUD,MUD & more MUD, absolutely soaked, had a chat with Noah finishing his Arc, and that's before the race started (that was more of a cross country course than the Gloucester XC in the league races !!! ).

Paul 49:46 / Overall 25th, M40 6th  
Simon 51:37 / Overall 47th, M45 8th

10/07/19 ~ Droitwich, a single lap on undulating country roads mostly traffic free, but the occasional car trying to squeeze through. A rather warm night and a very pleasant race

Paul 40:33 / Overall 33rd, M40 9th  
Simon 41:56 / Overall 47th, M45 10th

14:08:19 ~ Clent, I've run over Clent a few times now, but I've never raced over it before. A very undulated 2 lap course. Steady up hill to start, then down, down and down a bit more through a wooded area.....what's goes down, must go up...so we did, big time, now let's do that all over again for the second lap omg !!! A warm humid night that saw myself and Paul do a sprint finish, and Paul did the honourable thing, and let me beat him on the last race.

Simon 40:45 / Overall 49th, M45 12th  
Paul 40:49 / Overall 51st, M40 8th

Final Results...

Paul finished 5th in his age group M40

Simon finished 7th in his age group M45

Sarah finished 2nd in her age group W40, winning 2 bottles of wine

Overview, a great little series of midweek races, well organised and extremely well marshalled especially in Redditch in the rain....thanks to all the marshalls.

### ***Reports by Rob Mills***

#### **Sparkhill Harriers represented at Manchester, Solihull and London**

The close of the cross-country season provides an ideal springboard for our runners to get out and take on a few longer distance road races while the legs still have that mud and wind-battling stamina in them...

Most of us will have been aware that Michael Wade and Simon Hodges have been training hard for the **Manchester Marathon**, which was run on Sunday 7 April 2019. Both ran well and completed the distance:

Michael Wade: position 2,436 - chip time 3.29.45

Simon Hodges: position 2,807 - chip time 3.34.58

13,380 runners completed the race.

Having spoken to both of them since, it seems like they enjoyed the experience and I don't recall either saying "Never again"!

While Michael and Simon were slogging it round the streets of Manchester, some of their fellow Harriers were running the **Solihull Half Marathon** (lightweights!) here on our doorstep. Apart from the obvious advantages of being so close to home with a very civilised 10.30am start (and where else can you park within 30 metres of the registration and start line?) this is a very pleasant rural, virtually traffic-free course, albeit somewhat more undulating than expected.

There was a healthy Sparkhill turnout and some impressive individual performances, with Vicki in particular having a great run to finish fifth overall woman and first in her age category.

28	Paul Webster	1.33.06 (6th MV40)
42	Vicki Bone	1.36.01 (1st FV35 and 5th woman overall)
50	Dave Pearson	1.36.49 (3rd MV55)
56	Rob Mills	1.38.26 (2nd MV60)
67	Andy Manning	1.40.09 (9th MV45)
148	Simon Shepherd	1.51.03 (19th MV45)



159	Kevin Morris	1.51.56 (11th MV50)
260	Jenny Price	2.02.22 (15th FV35)
320	Manisha Pearce	2.10.26 (14th FV45)
343	Stephen Shearman	2.13.39 (34th MV45)

434 runners completed the race.

And so to the big one: this year's **London Marathon**. We had two Sparkhill Harriers running this year; Emma and Rebecca. They both did well, completing the course and finishing as follows:

**Emma Donnelly**

overall position: 19277  
time: 4.17.11  
Cat place: 2933 (FSen)

**Rebecca Marks**

overall position: 23745  
time: 4.34.02  
Cat place: 1104 (FV45)

***Report by Andrew Wadsworth:***

**Run Balmoral 2019 - 27<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup> April**

I've run a ten mile race on Deeside the last couple of years and found few places to compare in terms of the majestic surroundings, so when told about the Run Balmoral races, I just had to investigate. The weekend is based on the Balmoral estate, with most races starting and finishing outside the famous castle. Eight races are scheduled, three of those for juniors. Four events are grouped together as a special Deeside challenge and with the travelling involved it seemed logical to try to meet this challenge.

Saturday started with the three junior races which were well supported, which meant by the time of the first of the four events a numerous and encouraging crowd was present. Event one was a 5K, a single lap, all on tarmac roads within the estate. Familiar territory for myself, parkrun distance and a good surface, however in my mind I was aware that event two started only ninety minutes later. 779 runners lined up at the start, and whilst the first finisher shot around in 14:44, I was content to take it much more steadily completing in 23:15, although could not resist the temptation to race with each kilometre being faster than the previous! A little time to relax, return to the car, change to the top with new race number already attached and back once more for a second warm up of the day. Event two was a 10km, voted I understand by readers of Runners World as the most scenic road race

in the country – it did not disappoint. This included a steep hill during the first 5k for over a kilometre through the pine forests, and whilst the running surface was initially tarmac again, once the hill commenced rough forest roads took over. At the crest of the hill a group of pipers welcomed the weary runners to the downhill forest section, and finally back to the estate roads and the finish. 48:40 was my time, some way behind the first of 1777 runners in 31:37 (this was his only race though). Chip timing was used throughout for the four events to ensure accurate events times were taken forward towards the overall challenge.



Just time for a quick picture in front of the famous Balmoral castle, before returning to my accommodation to recharge the batteries for the 'tougher' second day.

Day 2 the rain had past, the sun shone and the estate looked even more stunning. Event 3 the duathlon started out at 09:30 and comprised a 6km run, follow by a 16km cycle and then finally another 5km run. Sufficient time for a five minute pedal on my hired mountain bike, before depositing it into the transition zone and onto the race start. Cycling other than one session down the gym had not been trained for, however the uphill nature of the first part of the course, through the pine forest and eventually emerging onto the open heather moorland, all

on stony and bumpy 4x4 roads did not place me at too great a disadvantage, downhill and ensuring I stayed on the bike at sharp gravelly corners showed up my limitations and I was regularly overtaken. Another quick transition after which the first 1km of running did not come easy, persuading my legs to go forwards rather than round, but eventually rhythm returned & I was able to gain a few places before the finish. Total time for the event was 2hrs 2mins, only 197 finishers on this event, with the breakdown of stages interestingly showing my 'best' phases were two rapid transitions and the final run.

After returning my hire bike I had just over an hour to eat & prepare myself for the final event, the 15 miles trail run. This showed off the beautiful scenic variations of the estate, initial miles on tarmac alongside the River Dee, 4x4 tracks then through the undulating pine woodland, until a technical uphill route for about a kilometre avoiding recently cut pine branches until emerging again on the stony road to cover once more the previously cycled moorland section. Running rather than previously cycling in this section meant I got chance to mentally distract myself for a while gazing at the snow clad peaks surrounding me in this exposed tree free area. Having been here a little earlier meant knowledge of where the

downhill section started was in my mind and therefore to the finish, however one last sting in the tail awaited, the final kilometre deviated back onto the uphill 'wee trail' previously run twice in the duathlon. Mentally that was tough, however I was determined not to walk at any stage so plodded on despite the tiredness and eventually crossed the line in 2:16:30 in the top half of the field of 965.

Full stats are available of the website <https://runbalmoral.com/content/> including the Deeside challenge where I finished 43 of the 90 who completed all four events, with a total time of just over five and a half hours. In total 41 miles or 66km were covered over the two days, and I managed to collect a good number of race shirts and medals as reminders.

Yes it was a tough challenge, however the opportunity to run in such beautiful surroundings and a accompanying memories will remain with me for a considerable time. If you are fortunate enough to get the opportunity to run there, take it – you won't regret it.



***Report by Andrew Wadsworth:***  
**Centurion Grand Prix series**

Of all the local races until this winter I had never tried the Centurion Grand Prix series, six races, one every month from November until April, run on the first Sunday of the month. All races over the same course, a five mile circuit around the paths and tracks surrounding Babbs Mill lake in North Solihull, and expertly organised by Centurion running club.

The five miles consist of two large laps, preceded by an initial smaller one with a small section of a few metres on each laps on grass, with the rest on either tarmac or gravel. EA class it as a multi-terrain event in their results classification, however my view for what it is worth is that the course is fairly flat, plenty of straight sections, and very well marshalled and managed by the Centurion club, who publish the results so incredibly quickly after the event. Numbers in the first five races ranged between 102 up to 131, although dropped to 64 for the final event, perhaps due to a date clash with the nearby Solihull half marathon.

The Grand Prix idea is that a minimum of four races from the six need to be completed to qualify for the series so I set my target at achieving that, and I found out that after the first one when conditions were not in my favour, strong winds never suiting me, knowledge of the course, when to try to up the speed helped to improve my times.

Bar the April event when I was joined by Andy Law, I was the only Sparkhill runner, although plenty of local clubs were represented, and I think every event was won by the men from Tipton Harriers, occasionally even providing the top three.

I personally finished with the following four times & race positions.

34:36 -- 15<sup>th</sup> Dec race; 33:06 -- 18<sup>th</sup> Jan race; 33:25 -- 18<sup>th</sup> Mar race; 33:21 -- 11<sup>th</sup> Apr race.

Andy Law's result was 35:58-- 19<sup>th</sup> Apr race.

Formal full results can be found here.

<http://centurionrc.org.uk/grand-prix-results>

I was fortunate to qualify for two veterans prizes in different races, Andy Law also won one.



Prizes are awarded for the first three male & females in each races, plus the first three in differing veterans ages categories each month.

I could certainly recommend this series, a consistent competitive monthly test over the winter months, minimal cost (pay on the day) and the advantage of being local, try it next winter you won't regret it, and everyone completing four events is awarded a commemorative glass.

### ***Report by Andrew Wadsworth:***

#### **Ashby 20**

Ashby 20, a race I have always wanted to try, but never been organised enough to enter prior to it filling. Why this race, well the small matter of the coveted Ashby 20 hoodie (picture below), often seen around running circles but difficult to acquire, and of course the challenge of a long race, without it has to be said the challenges that come with the final 10km of a marathon.

This year's event was run on the 24<sup>th</sup> March, organised as usual by local club Ivanhoe Runners, entries for which opened (and closed) on the 22<sup>nd</sup> October, so in theory plenty of time for preparation for the big day.



Ashby de la Zouch is a small market town which appeared to have been taken over on this particular Sunday morning by runners, (just over 1200 who ran this year) all converging on the Bath Grounds, an open green area in the centre where the cricket club is based. The local brass band was entertaining the gathering masses playing some well-known

traditional tunes, food stalls, and of course a marquee selling trainers and other essentials for runners. Prior to the start runners were asked to move to particular pens based upon their estimated finish time, in order that they could then be escorted a couple of hundred metres to the start line in a plan (which worked) designed to minimise the early race congestion which often occurs.

The course itself then went approximately a mile to where it joined the main nine mile loop at Packington village, completed twice of course, before a return leg of a mile back to Ashby and the finish line. My impressions on the first lap were of great scenery, plenty of helpful smiling marshalls, one side of most roads being formally closed throughout the event, and of course a number of undulations, and a sharp breeze in parts, which thankfully was most noticeable on a pronounced downhill section.

My pre-race strategy was to try to maintain a steady pace of around 7.75 minute miles and then to increase this for the last three miles, however whilst this worked well for the first fifteen miles, my cadence gradually dropped and for the last couple of miles, a large part of which were uphill, I was being regularly overtaken which was somewhat dispiriting (clearly not enough miles in my legs) and a good lesson for future years assuming I return. I crossed the line in 2 hours 40 minutes, 5-10 minutes slower than target, and moved across to the cricket pavilion where the free massage was most welcome.

I saw Emma prior to the race, although not spoken with her afterwards, and I understand Michael Wade also ran however did not get to see him, however there were plenty of familiar faces from the Midlands running scene. I would certainly return, despite it being tough to enter, at £30 it was reasonably priced, was relatively local, was very well organised, plenty of encouragement in the villages, and the sun was shining, but I guess this aspect could not be guaranteed for 2020!

Results : - <https://www.chiptiming.co.uk/events/aldi-ashby-20-2019/>

**Report by Vicki Bone:**

**Coventry Half Marathon**

Six of us Sparkhill Harriers took part in a very sunny Coventry half marathon on Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> March. The early 8.30am start actually worked in our favour as it did start to get warm as the day went on. The event seemed well-organised despite Pauline's number not having arrived on time and being able to use the indoor toilet facilities in the Hub rather than the portaloos was a bonus.



The route was very scenic and up and down for the first six miles. We ran along country lanes as well as the city streets, and there was a great amount of supporters cheering us on. The second half had a lot more down hills as we made our way back to Coventry city centre and it was nice to see the Cathedral appear on the skyline as the finish came into view. There was a digital good bag participants could download afterwards as the organisers wanted to make it more environmentally friendly but we still got a lovely t-shirt and medal at the end. Unfortunately Graham wasn't well enough to take part, but he very kindly drove me and Pauline there and back and looked after bags for us too.

It was a great local event, helped by the great weather conditions and one I would happily recommend.

327	Vicki Bone	1.34.34
421	Dave Pearson	1.37.00
574	Andy Law	1.41.06
909	Kevin Morris	1.48.13
1393	Pauline Hygate	1.55.43
1396	Simon Sheppard	1.56.02



***Report by Clare Bovill:***

**Tokyo Marathon**

When I embarked on my marathon career I never anticipated travelling quite as far as Japan. However, now that the Tokyo Marathon is included in the Abbott World Marathon Majors it seemed like an opportunity too good to miss.

My brother Peter and I flew together and stayed in a hotel almost on the start line. For him, it was the last race in the Six Star programme, so he collected an enormous medal at the end in addition to his Tokyo Marathon one. The course was not the most exciting of city-scapes, but the crowds were quite staggering in size and volume despite it being a cold and wet day. Two of my children, Jonathan and Livvy had also made the journey to support us, and I managed to see them on 5 occasions.

Prior to the race I had been suffering with Achilles Tendonitis so my training had been very limited - less than 200 miles in the previous 5 months, compared to an average of 200 miles/month in a normal training programme. I had substituted a lot of cross-training including spin cycling and learning to swim front crawl, in order to keep my fitness up.

Hoping for a sub-5 hour race, I was thrilled with my 4:19 despite a loo stop and a 2 minute stretch stop on physio advice. I also managed to beat my brother!!

<https://www.marathon.tokyo/result/index.php>

