

24 HOUR TRACK RACE REPORT

Tooting Bec 14/15th October 2006

'We've got the makings of a great race this year, but you never know what will happen on the day.' I'd said to my fellow organisers. With a record number of entries, a good dozen or so Europeans with impressive past performances, quite a few proven regulars and a number of first timers with a lot of potential, I knew this year could be special and so it proved.

With a batch of eager helpers we had everything set up in record time, and the only concerns with the weather were if it would be too hot; a nice problem to have in mid October. Right from the start of the race there was a real buzz on the track and it never subsided; I'm used to seeing things quieten down a bit as evening descends and muscles start to complain, but the running continued apace, and out physio continued to read her book!

I'm always surprised by the swiftness of the hours, meals came and went, the cones went out every 4 hours for a change of direction round the track for the runners and before I knew it the time had come to organise the finish. 24 hours had passed and some very impressive performances had been produced; John Pares kept up a constant six miles an hour to become our Winner with 143 miles, the energy in his stride never seeming to diminish. Our Scandinavian contingent produced great performances with a Women's National Record for Torill Fonn's 127 miles, and taking 6 of the top 10 places. Sandra Brown impressed yet again with 124miles giving us a new Women's Vet 50 record for our Tooting Bec races, and Ken Fancett proved again what a consistent

performer he is (winner in '04, third in '05 and 4th in '06 overall) taking 1st Vet 50. Out of the many first time 24 Hour competitors, John Pares was of course the most impressive, but a mention must be given to Stephen Pope with 120miles and Steven Battle's 119miles (with only a 100K under his belt previously), plus Chris Carver, never having raced any ultra, clocked up 113miles.

Our previous record for competitors covering over 100miles was 20 in 198 when ultra running was an extremely elite sport, it's opened up considerably over the last decade and 22 runners exceeding 100miles this year proves that there is no lack of quality.

I can't recall us having a better 24 hour race. The weather was perfect, the runners ever inspiring and the helpers cheerful. There were a few times during the race that I looked up to the heavens with a wry smile; I could just feel Ongkar Tony Smith beaming down on us all and telling me 'See, I told you it would be fine, no need to worry' and then laughing his immortal laugh.

I'm hugely grateful to the runners and helpers alike for making this a very enjoyable event to organise, and of course to Sri Chinmoy for inspiring it and me.

Here's to next year!

Shankara Smith