



Valley News

The Newsletter of Avon Valley Runners

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What a strange month. I normally take a part in about five or six races a year and I've already completed four in the last few weeks. That said, there's been a dearth of material that you guys have submitted so maybe late summer leaves us all a bit jaded when it comes to the grey cells.

We have the reliably regular and ever wise words from Steve Williams - it's all about the very necessary process of rest and recovery. That's the bit that gets easier as you get older.

Many of us run just to keep fit and to improve our health and vigour; others seem to turn in winning performances and stay right up there with the best. I'll let you decide into which category the contributor of this month's member's profile fits.

Given the lack of material this month I've added an item about AVR records, there seems to be an unusual abundance of them recently and for once in my life I have a personal interest. Quite a few figure in Joby's Junior AVR news too.

I've also padded the *news* out with another of my literary contributions. This will be my third, and the closest I've come to writing a crime story. If you read it, please treat it with a little respect - as I've said often, it's not much but it's all I have.

Did you know?

"Rabbit " has a particular meaning in athletics. Rabbits act as pacemakers in specially organised events, usually with the idea of helping the event achieve some kind of record amongst the other competitors. They are usually fine athletes in their own right who compete at lesser but faster distances and give the real competitors something to chase. They tend to drop out of the race once their job is done. Rabbits used to be frowned upon, but are now recognised as an essential part of many athletics competitions to give the race some added interest. Chris Brasher and Chris Chataway famously helped Roger Bannister break the four minute mile back in 1953 by pacing him in turn around the track. The biggest problem with rabbits is that all the athletes know they are there and can choose to ignore them - but they need to beware.

One of the most famous upsets in the rabbit world was caused by American Tom Byers at the 1981 Bislett games in Oslo. Britain's Steve Ovett was competing and was fully expected to win the race. Byers carried out his task well but the other athletes chose to run their own race. Byers detected their indifference and having gained a huge lead, decided to go for it. Ovett, realising the danger set a blistering pace on the last lap to try to catch Byers. By then though, it was too late and Byers - fired up by the possibility of an unlikely victory - powered on to the finish line and just managed to hang on to win the race. His state at the end of the race said it all, needing to be held up by race officials. Before too long he was running a lap of honour.

A record breaking summer

This summer has been a great one for record breaking at AVR.

By far the most noteworthy performance came in the eventual recognition that our very own Fiona Price was confirmed as having broken a British record that has stood for over twenty years. Back in June Fiona took part in a South West Vets track event in Brecon, that saw her - amongst other achievements in the same race - run further in one hour than any woman of her age. Fiona ran an impressive 14,519 metres. I've often (humourously) described Fiona as boringly brilliant. She's caused a massive yawn yet again. Good on you Fiona.

At the Melksham 10k, Laura MacGregor ran 36:03 to take the lady's record from Ruth Barnes' by four seconds. Laura is also a member of a club in Maidenhead but chose to wear her AVR colours on the day. Well done Laura.

In the Avon Valley Mile, Jackie Rockcliffe took thirteen seconds of the previous lady's FV40 record in a time of 05:48. Jackie turned up late and had to run in the men's race, though only a few of them managed to stay in front of her on the day. You clearly gave them what for Jackie.

The same Avon Valley Mile saw Ken Marshall, no doubt aided by a massive tailwind on the return leg, finally knock his hero Frank Lamerton off his two year old MV60 perch, shaving thirteen seconds off for a time of 6 minutes dead (an appropriate description.) This result is still the subject of an enquiry given that traces of a performance enhancing drug called Nurofen were found in his shorts pocket. Ken claims the achievement was down to his new lightweight titanium Zimmer not previously available to Frank.

Other performances earlier in the year are also worthy of a mention.

In August Mike Towler equalled his record 5k at Heddington finishing in a time of 15:52.

At the same race Ruth Barnes created a new AVR ladies record finishing in a time of 17:33.

In July Phil Harding gave us a new MV60 5k record at Bitton with a time of 20:48.

February saw Fiona Price create an FV40 record with a time of 1:05:08 in the Wiltshire 10 mile race.





Member's Profile

Ruth can run a 10k in around 36 minutes – a time many male club runners could only dream of; she holds the Avon Valley records for the mile, 5k and until recently 10k distances, yet she thinks not many people would find her interesting and she seems completely unmoved by these impressive performances. She can't even remember her PBs. Come on Ruth, you're a bit of a star in the club. Keep shining.

Name: Ruth Barnes

Age: 35

Where do you live: Westwood

Where do you work: I work as a GP at Bradford on Avon Health centre.

What's your role in AVR: I've been a member of AVR since 2010 having moved from the Midlands where I ran with Kenilworth runners for several years.

What are your interests apart from running: After fitting in the children and work, spare time for other hobbies is rather limited. I do however enjoy a bit of gardening and a trip to the pub when I can. In the last year, I've done two obstacle course races (Tough mudder and Judgement day). These were great fun, at a time when my motivation to run was rather low.

Favourite food: I love going to the Thai Barn in Bradford for a banquet but if I'm home alone with no one to cook for then beans, egg and cheese on toast (all together!) followed by ice cream and chocolate sauce is always a good option.

Favourite book: The Davinci code. Dan Brown

Favourite book about sport: Never read one. I'm more of a doer than a thinker!

Personal Background: I live with my husband Chris and two children Hattie (5) and Martha (2). I met Chris in the first year of medical school and we got married in 2006. When we first met, Chris suggested that we went for a run (I know, he's so romantic!). I declined to tell him that I was a runner and to cut a long story short, Chris came home with a nose bleed and swore he would never run with me again, and he never has.

I've done many things over the years from working in outdoor pursuits to doing VAT returns for a yoghurt factory. Eventually realising that I should get a proper job, I went into medicine. After my junior doctor years I pursued a career in surgery but soon realised that this wasn't going to work with a young family. So I now find myself working as a GP in a very rewarding and interesting job.

Do you have a philosophy on life: I say take every opportunity that is given to you. It may not be offered to you again.

Tell us how you got into running: My Dad used to run and when I was about 10 I started going on short runs with him. I have run on and off every since. I've had periods of several years where I haven't run but have always come back to it eventually.

How often do you train: My training is hugely variable. On a good week I'll get out for 6 days but there may be the odd week where I don't get out at all. On average I'd say I manage 4 days a week.

Do you have a training regime: Up until about 6 weeks ago, I had no regime. It seems to have worked but my training has always been rather unstructured, fitting in sessions where I can. More recently Steve Williams has become involved and he is giving me a weekly plan, which I try to stick to as best as I can. The bare minimum is a long run and a speed session and then I try and fit a few other sessions in around them. We will have to see if it works!. Working with Steve has definitely improved my motivation and given me some focus.

Tips for someone starting out: I'd say the most important things is to enjoy your running. Its unlikely that you will stick with it if you're gaining no pleasure from it. Do what suits you and get from it what you choose. Its great to do speed work and tempo training but if you simply enjoy long Sunday runs then just do that. You're far more likely to still be running in 10 years time if you enjoy yourself.

PBs: This is embarrassing but I haven't a clue what my PBs are, other than those times run in the last 2 years which I found on the AVR website. I've never run a Marathon.

Mile	00:05:18	AVR Mile 2013	10k	00:36:07	Bromham 2013
55k	00:17:33	Heddington 2014	10M	01:02:45	Melksham 2012
5 Mile	Not sure		Half M	01:19:44	Bristol 2013

This Month's Training Tip

Rest and Recovery and Adaptation

Rest and recovery is a key part of any training programme. Without it you will overstress your body. This can result in injury and possible burn-out.

When you do an intense training run you are placing your body under stress. The first time you do such a run your body will find it hard or feel uncomfortable. But by repeating similar sessions your body learns to adapt and gradually you find it a lot easier to accomplish them. This process of adaptation will only work if you give your body time to recover from placing it under stress. So a fundamental rule is to alternate hard sessions with easy sessions or rest days to give your body a chance to recover.

Once your body has adapted to the demands you have placed upon it then you need to increase the stress you subject it to, in order to improve your performance further. This could include doing a slightly shorter run at a faster pace and once you are comfortable with this extending the run back to the original distance. Or if you are doing an interval session, increasing the number of reps or reducing the recovery between them or increasing their intensity. The key to this process of adaptation is knowing by how much to increase the intensity without overstressing the body. (Please feel free to ask me about this aspect as this article is not long enough to do the subject justice.) Needless to say, the rest and recovery days are key to the effectiveness of this increase in training intensity.

The increased stress that you put your body under is fundamental to improving your fitness. The benefit of a specific training session diminishes over time. If you continuously do the same session then after 6 weeks or so your fitness level will plateau. This isn't necessarily a bad thing if you wish to maintain a level of fitness but if you want to improve then you won't.

In a similar vein, if you want to improve your 10K race time don't continually race 10Ks. After several such races the (racing) adaptation process will be complete and your performance will begin to plateau. You need to subject the body, within race conditions, to increased/different levels of stress. For example, if I had a key 10K race in the offing I would do a 10 mile road race (4 weeks or so beforehand) at 10 to 15 seconds per mile slower than my target 10K pace. A couple of weeks beforehand I would do a 5K at 10 to 20 seconds per mile faster pace. This notion of one over-distance and one under-distance race as preparation for a key event benefited me and many of my contemporaries.

Finally, it is worth planning a couple of breaks within your running year to let your body have a rest. This will have both a physiological and a mental benefit as you step off what would otherwise be a year-long racing/training treadmill. The break should be for a couple of weeks or so and could include non-running exercises as part of it. All top athletes adhere to this concept – traditionally taking their breaks late winter/early spring (post- cross country season/heavy winter training) and late summer/early autumn (post- track/road season). Whilst this might not be suitable for your running calendar you could plan to take yours when you have no foreseeable races scheduled.

JAVR News

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RECORD BREAKERS

Since April 2012 the JAVR 2K at Southwick Country Park has been run by over 100 different runners of all ages. Below are the current records for each age category. The records are updated on the Junior Avon Valley Runners website when new records are set. Well done to all those who have set the targets so far.

Boys Records				Girls Records			
B15	Alex Tucker	8:35	Jan 2014	G15	Jo Grieve	14:24	Mar 2013
B14	John Howorth	6:28 *	Jun 2014	G14	Caitlin Wosika	7:00*	Jun 2014
B13	Max Davies	6:59	May 2014	G13	Jade Littlechild	7:20	Mar 2014
B12	Tom Brown	7:35	Apr 2013	G12	Sarah Wilson	7:29	Mar 2014
B11	Rory Howorth	6:31	Jun 2014	G11	Polly Allan	8:54	Sept 2013
B10	James Pickford	7:40	Jun 2014	G10	Abbie Brown	9:22	Jun 2014
B9	William Andrews	8:13	Apr 2014	G9	Freya Buglass	8:42	Apr 2014
B8	William Andrews	8:18	May 2013	G8	Freya Buglass	9:17	Aug 2013
B7	Joseph Andrews	8:52	May 2013	G7	Lottie Brown	9:20	May 2014
B6	Benjamin Hailes	9:39	Aug 2013	G6	Lottie Brown	9:48	Sept 2013
B5	Lucas Cunningham	11:27	Aug 2013	G5	Olivia Hailes	10:25	Dec 2013
B4	Will Smith	14:28	Dec 2013	G4	Lilly Davies	12:25	May 2013

JUNIOR CHAMPIONSHIP LEAGUE 2014

The JAVR 2km volunteer team took a very well deserved break at the end of August and so with holiday season and a multitude of conflicting events the August Championship League race was unfortunately cancelled. So since the last JAVR News update a further two races have been run with race 7 taking place at the end of July.

In the June league race Abbie Brown set a new PB and a new record in the G10 category with a time of 9.22. Yet another PB was set by Luke Slade in June and with a good run in July Luke retained top spot in the boys league accumulating a 15 point lead overall. The top 5 league places remain close with Robert Warner and Niall Thorne finishing in the first 10 in June's race with a further top 5 finish in July for Robert. A fantastic run saw Max Davies take first place in July's race just ducking under 7 minutes with a time of 6.59.

In the girls league JAVR retain three of the top 10 league places with Abbie and Lottie Brown in 4th and 5th place and Ellie Isaacs in 10th position. Abbie has level points with third place so with four races remaining the league remains as exciting as ever.

UPCOMING RACES

Sat, 27th Sept - JAVR 2K League, Southwick Country Park

Sat, 25th Oct - JAVR 2K League, Southwick Country Park

Sat, 29th Nov - JAVR 2K League, Southwick Country Park

Sat, 27th Dec (TBC) - JAVR 2K League, Southwick Country Park

More information @
www.junior.avonvalleyrunners.org.uk



RECENT RESULTS

FROME 5KM – 20th July

1	Max Davies	B13	Avon Valley Runners	18:27
7	Niall Thorne	B13	Avon Valley Runners	21:11
17	Robert Warner	B13	Avon Valley Runners	23:45
22	Ellie Brown	G13	Avon Valley Runners	24:27
23	Luke Slade	B12	Avon Valley Runners	24:29
25	Alex Tucker	B16	Avon Valley Runners	25:01
35	Abbie Brown	G11	Avon Valley Runners	26:13
44	Cherry Bruce	G14	Avon Valley Runners	27:52
57	Ellie Isaacs	G14	Avon Valley Runners	31:15



AVR AUTUMN MILE – 4th September

James Pickford	11	Avon Valley Runners	6:02
Kieran Beardmore	13	Avon Valley Runners	6:24
Luke Slade	12	Avon Valley Runners	7.19
Callum Slade	8	Avon Valley Runners	7.32

CHIPPENHAM MT 1 mile – 8th June

9	Luke Slade	B12	Avon Valley Runners	6:57
13	Lottie Brown	G7	Avon Valley Runners	7.19
14	Ellie Brown	G13	Avon Valley Runners	7.22
15	Abbie Brown	G10	Avon Valley Runners	7.23
20	Callum Slade	B8	Avon Valley Runners	7.33



The Birthday Party

Matthew Parry scanned the room looking for the girl carrying the tray of cocktails. If he was going to endure a party thrown by one of the wealthiest men in town he was certainly going to make the most of it when it came to indulging himself. With a deft movement, narrowly avoiding two well dressed and extremely overweight gentlemen; clearly business associates of his host; he stepped right up to the petite cocktail carrier and skilfully extracted a vodka-and-something from her tray.

Matthew felt a little out of place among these pretentious businessmen and had only been invited by his host Nigel Alderman because they were from the same running club.

Nigel had been an out-of-condition, slightly overweight middle-aged man when he joined the club about six years ago but he had improved markedly since that day. He was celebrating his fiftieth birthday; a joint celebration with his oldest son who had just turned twenty one. The mutual occasion - clearly designed to avoid the cost of throwing two expensive parties - was taking place on a bank holiday weekend. That was just like Nigel; ostentatious with one hand while skimping and penny-pinching with the other. Matthew wondered if that was why he was had been so successful in his business life.

Money was not the only sign of Nigel's success either. He had a wife who had managed to retain her beauty even into her late forties; a pigeon-pair of handsome children who seemed to excel at every sport and every academic venture they attacked; and a successful business which allowed him the freedom to enjoy his spoils.

Matthew sipped his cocktail and wondered why he had been invited to the party. It wasn't as if he was Nigel's only running partner. He could have chosen one of a dozen. It was true their abilities were comparable; either one occasionally having the upper hand over both long and short distances. Neither of them was super fast, but they usually finished in the top half of the local races they attended. Matthew had taken the super vet fifty title on a number of occasions; something which mercifully gave him the edge over his wealthy running colleague who was a little too slow to match most vet forties against whom he was accustomed to competing. Now however, Nigel was about to join him in that new category and would no doubt be trying his utmost to usurp him in that meagre part of his life too. *It's not much*, thought Matthew, *but it's all I have left to impress anyone.*

With the next encounter occurring the following day at the Bank Holiday five mile race, Matthew resigned himself to losing the crown he had gained in the previous two years. Nigel was running more strongly at the moment and there were no other super vet fifties likely to be taking part; at least none who would be challenging for that particular crown in that particular race.

Matthew subjected himself to the proceedings for as long as he could bear it. Listening to speeches given by Nigel's business associates and members of his family was tortuous to the extreme; dripping like unwanted syrup over his ears; too sweet and too sickly to be appreciated.

He began to wish he'd refused the invitation and probably would have done so if Nigel had not been so insistent and persuasive.

He diverted his attention momentarily and looked around the room. Nigel was clearly proud of all his achievements displaying a veritable gallery as evidence to all who came to his home. As well as a plethora of pictures showing his children's progress through their schools, universities and careers, there were many more photographs of Nigel himself in a variety of poses showing the successes he had enjoyed in his life. There was one of him wearing a smile almost as big as the giant sea bass he was carrying while on a fishing trip to some exotic location; another showing him holding the reins of a winning horse of which he probably owned one leg. There was a picture of a considerably younger Nigel at the centre of his five-a-side football team holding a large cup as well as one of him holding a trophy he had acquired at his very expensive golf club. Nigel had clearly achieved many things in his life and boy, did he have the evidence to prove it.

As Matthew scanned the room he realised there was something conspicuously absent from this ostentatious display of success; there were no photographs showing Nigel's athletic prowess. If Nigel had ever won anything, you could be sure it would have been on display for all his visitors to see. This was clearly the one area of his life which was lacking and Matthew wondered if this had irked him. If Nigel managed to win the super vet fifty category at tomorrow's race, Matthew knew there would soon be a photograph occupying pride of place somewhere in his lounge and he would find some excuse to invite everyone back for drinks and nibbles just so that he could show it off.

Once the speeches were over and everyone had been invited to indulge themselves until the early hours, Matthew made his way towards Nigel. His host grabbed his hand and shook it vigorously.

"Thanks for coming Matt. It's been great to see you. You'll be there tomorrow won't you, old boy?" He asked.

"You bet," said Matthew "giving you a run for your money mate! Anyway I have to be there. I'm on duty before the race, taking the late entries."

"Ah, I didn't realise that, well good for you Matthew, very community spirited." Nigel said "And that reminds me, I haven't completed my race entry yet. Would you mind doing that for me just in case I'm a bit late? Can't be sure what state I'm going to be in tomorrow morning." He added, laughing out loud and looking around at anyone who might be listening.

"No problem." Matthew assured him. "I haven't registered either, so I'll make sure we have consecutive numbers."

"...and don't worry about the entry fee," he felt obliged to add; "Treat it as a birthday present from me."

"Matt, you're too kind," Nigel shouted to the ceiling, "but I appreciate it. Thank you." He placed his arm on Matthew's shoulder and said under his breath, but loudly enough for Matthew to hear. "Celebrating my fiftieth birthday and still running strong. Not many of my friends and colleagues can say that Matt; except you of course. How old are you now?"

"Fifty two."

"Pretty good for an old man eh?" Said Nigel, winking.

Matthew smiled. He didn't know which one of the two of them Nigel was referring to.

"I'll see you tomorrow Nige. All the best and don't get too drunk. You'll suffer for it if you do." He sincerely hoped Nigel *would* get too drunk and impair his chances of stealing the Vet 50 crown.

The following day, Bank holiday Monday, Matthew arrived early along with the many other volunteers and started setting up the reception tables. He laid out the entry forms, the cash tin, the timing chips, the race numbers and the pins. He knew there would be a rush of late entries as the start time approached and he filled in his and Nigel's entries to get them out of the way. Momentarily the temptation crossed his mind to forget to enter Nigel. He would be profusely apologetic of course, but it would have been a mistake and there would be nothing he could do about it now. He dismissed the thought quickly. There was no way he would stoop so low for the sake of a veteran's trophy in a two-bit race in a two-bit village fare that in a few week's time no-one would even remember. In any case, Nigel could easily turn up early in time to register. He returned to his form filling.

Nigel Alderman, race number 425.

Matthew Parry, race number 426.

He grudgingly wrote *MV50* against Nigel's name and wished that the race had been a few weeks earlier. For the last two years he had thoroughly enjoyed and indulged in the feeling he had experienced only rarely in his life; that of walking up to collect a winner's trophy; a prize for which he had trained hard and which he felt he had deserved. That feeling was now about to be snatched away from him by a pretentious upstart who had already achieved so much in his life and saw a victory in this race as just one more photograph on his dining room wall.

As the morning progressed, the buzz of anticipation spread around the race camp. It was a glorious spring day; not too hot to be uncomfortable and cool enough, with a slight westerly breeze, to merit the term 'perfect conditions' for a five mile race.

The loud speaker was announcing various aspects of the day's events; naming people who would be involved throughout the day; thanking the volunteers who had given up their valuable time to make the day a success and holding interviews with dignitaries who had come to mark the special occasion. Many fund-raisers were joining the serious athletes to make the day a great one; and their charities were named out loud inviting further donations.

Matthew's responsibilities soon caused him to forget his angst. He felt overrun with the queue of late entrants who had chosen not to enter online; something he couldn't understand, knowing how much more comfortable it was to turn up to a race with a number already pinned to your vest and being able to spend the preceding time warming up and chatting to your friends from the running club. He had only done it today because he was taking the entries and knew he would have sufficient time to register and little time to warm up. He wanted to get out there and do some stretching but since a large percentage of the proceeds were going to a local charity he felt obliged to take everyone's money.

When the last entrant had taken his number and the desk was free, Matthew deposited the money and the entry sheets into safe hands. The names would be added to the online list giving

a complete catalogue bearing all the entrants names, gender, club affiliations and age categories.

"Hey Matt, I made it." A voice announced behind him.

Matthew looked around, easily recognising the voice. He forced a smile as he reached out to shake Nigel's hand. Nigel looked smugly confident in his skimpy shorts and running vest. He was tall and slim, having lost a good deal of weight since he had started running; and sickeningly good looking; something else which made Matthew wish he would step firmly onto an open drain cover and sprain his ankle.

"Well!" Nigel grinned "I was up and partying 'til two o'clock this morning, but I had a great sleep and I feel raring to go."

"Good stuff Nigel." Matthew said through grit teeth. "It's a good day for it. We've been very lucky with the weather."

"You all done then Matt? D'you fancy a little jog up the hill and back?"

Matthew didn't, at least not with Nigel.

"Sure." He said. "Give me a sec and I'll be right there."

After the inevitable speeches about the success of the day and the hard work of all the volunteers, the gun fired and the race was underway. Nigel had insisted on standing close to Matthew and had insisted on engaging in small talk while they waited. Matthew was convinced this was only to emphasise the effect of getting further and further away once the race had started. He imagined Nigel wanted him to suffer every aspect of his victory; to appreciate superior talent and fitness and to feel the pain of failure. Matthew wished he could have mustered up the energy to outrun his opponent but deep down he knew that was not going to happen.

At the end of the race Matthew crossed the line in thirty three minutes and forty three seconds; a very creditable performance and one that last year would have given him the super vet fifty title. Unfortunately this year it was not enough. Despite always being in his sights, Nigel had stayed in front of him throughout the entire race and had beaten him by nearly half a minute. Matthew had tried desperately to stay with him in the hope that he could have managed a sprint finish but the extra effort in the early part of the race had cost him. By the end of the race a ten second gap had grown to well over twenty seconds as Matthew's energy faded. He had become disheartened and that had made him slow down far more than he might have done otherwise.

The psychology of racing had always intrigued Matthew, making him wonder how physical fitness can be upstaged by the anticipation of an impending outcome. The possibility of success can draw up reserves that were hitherto impossible to find, while the thought of failure leaves the legs feeling heavy and the body drained. Matthew knew a long way back that he was in that 'failure' category. He had been unable to reach Nigel and that had slowed him down far more than if Nigel had not been ahead of him in the race.

Nigel added to the ignominy of Matthew's failure by waiting for him at the end of the race and offering his congratulations.

"Well done Matt, a great time for you and you pushed me all the way."

Patronising to the last thought Matthew.

"Well done Nigel, you deserved it. I just didn't have the energy to keep up with you."

"Well if it's any consolation," added Nigel, "I'm convinced I did a better time knowing you were right behind me."

It isn't, thought Matthew, I so wanted to beat you.

"You were superb mate. Well done." Matthew tried not to sound cynical. "You realise you've very likely got the Vet50."

"Really?" Nigel tried to sound surprised but it was not convincing. He knew full well the possibility of his achievement and inside was gloating at his success and by extension, at Matthew's failure.

"That's amazing;" he added, "my first ever athletics trophy."

Yes I know, thought Matthew, I've seen your lounge wall.

After congratulation his victor Matthew managed to make some excuse to get away so that he could find someone in whose company he felt comfortable and from whom he could seek commiseration.

Later that morning, once all the fun runners and fund raisers had returned; the loud speaker announced the impending presentation ceremony. Matthew knew it would have been impossible not to stay and witness the event, even though he had no desire to see Nigel stepping up to receive his prize. To leave would have seemed puerile to say the least. As members of the same running club everyone had to enjoy everyone else's success and he was usually very happy to do this. With Nigel it was impossible. Something about the guy made his flesh creep and this result only added insult to injury.

The race organiser ran through the various winning categories as the winners walked up in turn to receive their prizes and to shake the hand of the Mayor. Then it was time to present the winner of the male super vet fifty category. Matthew grit his teeth again and looked down at the floor as the loud speaker announced for everyone to hear.

"Retaining his Vet50 title for the third year running; Matthew Parry, in a very impressive time of thirty three minutes and forty three seconds. Well done Matt."

Everyone applauded and the members of his running club whistled and shouted their congratulations.

Matthew was dumbfounded. This couldn't be happening. Nigel had beaten him. Where was he? Why wasn't he questioning the result and protesting? He hesitated, waiting for someone to announce the inevitable correction; that it was all a mistake and that there was actually a different winner.

"Come on Matt, don't keep us here all day" one of his club-mates shouted.

As Matthew walked up to collect his prize, he looked confused and hesitant. He questioned one of the organisers who assured him it was a correct result.

Carrying his trophy with no real conviction, Matthew walked back to his place in the crowd. He looked all around for Nigel but couldn't see him anywhere. He walked over to the office where

the results had been posted and scanned the list looking for his name; then he looked for Nigel's name. He was definitely lower in the list than Nigel who had finished in a time of thirty three minutes and seven seconds. Then he spotted something that surprised and puzzled him. Someone had crossed out the 'MV50' next to Nigel's name and had replaced it with 'MV40'. *This is not right* he thought. *I was at his fiftieth birthday party yesterday. They've got this wrong. But where is Nigel and why isn't he objecting loudly like his usual obnoxious self?*

Nigel sat in his car a mile or so from his house, going over things in his mind. When he'd heard the result he knew he'd been cheated out of his prize but he dared not have protested in case he'd been confronted with the truth. Had Matthew got it wrong? Had he written down the entry incorrectly on the race sheet? Had someone made an assumption that he was still a vet forty and had kindly corrected Matthew's mistake? Or had someone known all along about the birthday party he and his son were conveniently celebrating together. The only reason he'd invited that loser was to make sure he'd be placed among the vet-fifties. *What difference would it have made?* He thought. *What's one day in fifty years; one day in over eighteen thousand? My first chance to get a prize in athletics and I missed out because someone knows my birthday is tomorrow.*