

STRATHEARN HARRIERS

The club for runners in the Crieff and Comrie area of Perthshire

President's Report 2023-24

Presented to the Annual General Meeting, 15 March 2023, by Jason Miles-Campbell

The presentation of this report to the club AGM marks the end of my 'stint' on the club committee, having completed the five years permitted under our constitution. That provision is no doubt intended to ensure a turnover of involvement in running the club, and fresh thinking into its future. I have very much enjoyed those five years – one as Media & Comms lead, and four as President – and hope I have played a positive part in supporting the club's continued development during that time, even with a pandemic thrown in. I have offered to continue to compile the club bulletin, and so look forward to keeping in touch with all the club's achievements. I wish the new committee well in continuing to develop the potential of the club.

This past year I'd characterise as building for the longer term. In 22-23, we were still in the throes of putting the pandemic years behind us. In 23-24, it was about cementing a solid foundation of performance, inclusion and ambition for the club. I take the opportunity here to thank my committee colleagues for their enthusiastic and wise input, and for participating in the running of the club in a generous and positive manner.

Reflecting on some of the key issues which I raised last year, the first was consideration of our membership platform, currently LoveAdmin. With thanks to our secretary, Jon Williams, for diligent comparison of alternatives, we decided to continue with LoveAdmin, whilst implementing some improvements to our processes to make life easier for our members and ourselves. The 2024 renewal process relatively smoothly. However, towards the end of this reporting year, LoveAdmin have announced a substantial rise in fees, beyond what a club of our size would reasonably pay. Whilst exploration of alternatives has continued, the decision to move platforms will be an early one for the new committee.

A second area was around the balance between support for performance alongside participation and inclusion. This past year has seen the Juniors continue to excel across all types of activity (track, road, trail and cross country). For the Seniors, we've seen renewed engagement and success in hill running in particular, whilst participation in road and endurance continues. Whilst there has been some Senior success in cross country, the club would benefit from greater numbers participating to ensure we register as a 'team' in addition to the individual successes in recent years.

The third area to address was promoting wider involvement in the club's organisation. This past year saw new members join the committee, with appreciation of the fresh thought they were able to bring. Whilst the club will always benefit from a level of continuity and experience, the club's future is best served by preparation for 'succession' too. Beyond the club committee, there has been welcome new involvement in the club's race committees too. However, I suggest that the club will have to continue to work to ensure future new involvement in the running of the club.

Governance

I am satisfied that the club has been run in keeping with its constitution. The Strathearn Harriers Committee has met 9 times this past year, with all meetings compliant with quorum. The character of the committee has been positive, with sufficient common ground in our vision for the direction of the club, but also having sufficient diversity of views for robust and creative discussion.

Club Activity

Training

Club training has been relatively 'steady state' across the previous year for both Juniors and Seniors, though noting success in adding a Tuesday night Senior training session particularly to engage Juniors' parents, but drawing further participants too. Attendance has been good overall, with a shallow general trend upwards.

Club Championship

The club should be proud of the diversity of running it encompasses. However, that's given a long-running challenge as to the configuration of the Senior Club Championship in order to recognise the variety of road, trail, hill and cross country running seen in the club. Whilst there is never going to be a perfect configuration, changes made this past year have built on review and feedback and seeks to increase engagement with the championship.

Club Races

Of note during the past year has been the positive re-establishment of the Simon Wake Comrie Hills Relay Race, and the Strathearn Marathon. It was disappointing not to have been possible to put on the marathon in 2023, through a gap in capacity for organisation and new operational issues that had to be addressed. Preparations for the 2024 race have seen a resurgence, and I give thanks to the substantial efforts of Andy Gallagher and the race committee for making that happen. The relaunch of the Simon Wake Comrie Hills Relay in 2023 was strongly successful, as a clearly vibrant and competitive event – and many thanks go to Phil Mestecky and the race committee for their substantial efforts in achieving that success.

Race Participation

The club, despite its relatively small 'catchment area', continues to enjoy notable success in many aspects of the Scottish running scene, and in both the Junior and Senior parts of the club. The fact that we can put out a substantial bulletin on a weekly basis is testament to the broad range of competition in which club members engage. And I can personally attest to the challenge of discovering all the club's activity each week! Whilst this isn't the place to pick out individual successes (and avoiding the risk of omission), I will give particular note to the Juniors' continued successes, including national representation and success, and with specific appreciation of Phil Mestecky's commitment and dedication to coaching the Junior section, and those others who support both Junior activity and the competitors themselves.

Media and Communications

As before, the club continues to email a weekly bulletin to members, covering general club matters, Seniors News and Juniors News sections. Analytics show that it is opened by a sufficient proportion of our membership to continue to provide that bulletin. In parallel, we use our members-only Facebook groups 'Strathearn Harriers Members' and 'Strathearn Harriers Juniors' Facebook group to communicate and interact with our membership. We also use a public Facebook page, 'Strathearn Harriers' which is currently

used somewhat sporadically to highlight club activity to the public. One issue that hasn't been sufficiently addressed this past year is renewing our website and coordination of other public-facing promotion of the club, and this is something the new committee may choose to give this further attention.

Social Activity

The club continues its strong camaraderie, and that's reflected in the social activity of the club, and has included both race-related social gatherings (such as the 5k finale to the Club Championship and the Juniors' Intraclub Cross Country event), another well attended and 'bouncing' ceilidh in January. Additionally, this year, activity has been planned and has kicked-off to mark the 40th anniversary of the club's founding with good early engagement with a fun 'Taskfaster' activity. Overall, recognition goes to our social secretary, Elizabeth Mestecky for leading on this important aspect of the club's offer.