

## 1993 VIC 24 HOUR TRACK CHAMPIONSHIP, HAROLD STEVENS TRACK, COBURG, 27-28 FEB

The roll on effects from the cancellation of the Westfield Sydney to Melbourne event in October 1991 was quick to bite and entries for the 1993 Victorian 24 Hour Championship were few. In an effort to swell the numbers, additional 6 Hour and 12 Hour race categories were added, along with a Coburg Harriers 24 Hour Relay. While the added events blended in well with the established 24 Hour event, they did not have the desired effect of attracting more runners and the fields were sparse - 7 entries in the 6 Hour, 3 in the 12 Hour and only 8 in the 24 Hour.

NZ ultra specialist Neville Mercer blitzed the field but he didn't do it easily. Although the weather conditions were fine and mild for the first 20 hours of the race, it turned suddenly nasty early on the Sunday morning. A strong cold wind sprung up and the rain started to bucket down. Neville didn't change into warmer gear early enough, and in his skimpy singlet, he got hypothermia and was dragged off the track absolutely frozen, looking positively blue. He was wrapped in blankets, head and all and given hot coffee. Anthony Ashley-Brown, the masseur, filled a plastic drink bottle with hot water for him to hold to try and thaw his icy hands. As time went by, his body started to warm up and he was keen to get out on the track again. The fact that he had only a few km to go to achieve a PB was great motivation. He struggled out there again and went on to achieve a 9km PB with 229.755km. An amazing effort. He had little opposition from any other runner. Peter Gray finished in second place around 50km behind him.

Race Director Dot Browne saw out this final event and then announced her retirement. The event could easily have folded at this stage if Coburg athlete and administrator Gordon Burrowes had not stepped up to the mark and offered to take over.

### 24 Hour Run

1.	Mercer, Neville	M		229.755 km
2.	Gray, Peter	M	1964	176.746 km
3.	Young, Cliff	M	1922	171.650 km
4.	Grayling, Michael	M	1956	163.759 km
5.	Matchett, Ken	M	1922	148.584 km
6.	Janosi, Elvira	F	1955	141.126 km
7.	Pollard, Godfrey	M		132.109 km
8.	Clements, Harry	M		68.400 km

### 12 Hour Run

1.	Lombardi, Rudy	M		104.563 km
2.	Taylor, Jacquelin	F		84.191 km

### 6 Hour Run

1.	Alexander, Keith	M	VIC	72.752 km
2.	Joannou, Bill	M	NSW	70.644 km
3.	Kerr, Sandy	M	VIC	66.338 km
4.	Campbell, Roy	M	VIC	65.730 km
5.	Woods, Peter	M	VIC	62.049 km
6.	Harper, John	M	VIC	61.002 km
7.	Brooke, Norm	M	VIC	43.019 km

### 24 Hour Relay

Coburg Harriers 302.055 km

## Race Report by Dot Browne (Race Director)

In an effort to swell the numbers for my traditional 24 Hour Race, and to make it a special event for its 10<sup>th</sup> year, I added an extra 6 Hour and 12 Hour to this race, as well as agreeing to incorporate a Coburg Harriers 24 Hour Relay as well. The added events blended in well with the established 24 Hour but did not have the desired effect of attracting more runners. I was dismayed with 7 entries in the 6 Hour, 3 in the 12 Hour and only 8 in the 24 Hour. Not really worth the effort or expense.

This 24 Hour race started back in 1984 with 9 runners as a result of Geoff Molloy asking me to put on a race in which he could test himself over a longer period of running before he put in an entry for the Westfield Melbourne to Sydney. In that respect, it was successful, because 3 months later, he went on to win the big one plus gained \$20,000 for his efforts. The 24 Hour event became very popular, and each year saw the numbers growing, partly because it was a qualifier for the Westfield (200km was required), and partly because it was such a challenging event. This trend

continued until the halcyon year of 1989 when there were over 70 entries and I even had to knock Bryan Smith back when he put in a late entry!

But when Westfield pulled their sponsorship on the Sydney to Melbourne race in 1992, it was the start of the rot for my 24 Hour as well. Very sad. And now my efforts to give it an injection of life for the 10th year have not succeeded. I guess it's the end of an era really.

However, those stalwarts who did enter this final one, were a very interesting group. Cliff Young, one of my regular entrants for the last 9 years, was going for the over 70 world age record, which was 174km. He put in a blinder in conditions which were not ideal, and missed it by only 3km to record 171.650km. Cliff is always a popular competitor because he not only is a top performer, but he gives tremendous support and encouragement to every other competitor in the event. He's also a real character.

Neville Mercer, top ultra-runner, came all the way from New Zealand with his wife and blitzed the field. But he didn't do it easily. Although the weather conditions were fine and mild for the first 20 hours of the race, it turned suddenly nasty early on the Sunday morning. A strong cold wind sprung up and the rain started to bucket down. Neville didn't change into warmer gear early enough, and in his skimpy singlet, got hypothermia and was dragged off the track absolutely frozen, looking positively blue. We wrapped him in blankets, head and all and gave him hot coffee. Anthony Ashley-Brown, the masseur, filled a plastic drink bottle with hot water for him to hold to try and thaw his icy hands. As time went by, his body started to warm up and he was keen to get out on the track again. The fact that he had only a few km to go to achieve a p.b. was great motivation. He struggled out there again and went on to achieve a 9km pb. with 229.755km. An amazing effort. He had little opposition from any other runner. Peter Gray finished in second place around 50km behind him.

Another competitor who had travelled an enormous distance to compete was Elvira Janosi, a delightful 36 year old Yugoslavian athlete, who had a string of fine marathon (2hrs.40mm) and ultra performances in Europe and Japan to her credit. She arrived with her husband, Tibor and we were happy to accommodate them. Elvira ran brilliantly for the first 12 hours, and was in third position overall at that stage. But a combination of factors slowed her down in the second half. With her fair skin, she developed sun-stroke from the strong ultra-violet rays during Saturday afternoon, her newly-purchased socks rubbed her feet into blisters and she was generally disappointed in her performance after midnight. She had run around 100km in the first half but only 41km in the second. However she achieved 141.126km, a very good effort. Her Yugoslavian sponsor would be pleased to see that she had won the women's event and taken home the trophy.

The 12 Hour race, also starting at noon on the Saturday was a 2 horse race. Jacqueline Taylor achieved a 3km p.b. to run 84.191km and Rudy Lombardi won the event with 104.563km, both very good efforts.

The 6 Hour race proved to be more interesting. Keith Alexander, a novice ultra-runner, surprised himself and everybody else by going out fast and keeping up the pace to lead from the start and win the event with 72.752km, with Bill Joannou from Sydney hot on his heels all the way. Bill finished only 2km behind him. Sandy Kerr ran brilliantly and evenly to win the women's event with 66.338km. Congratulations Sandy! In typical fashion, she also stayed around when her event was completed to lap-score for the rest of the 24 hours for Cliffy. Incidentally, Cliffy talked his 26 year old nephew, Peter Woods into having a go at the 6 hour for the first time. Peter showed heaps of talent by covering 62.049km and seemed quite comfortable all the way. Norm Brooke, recovering from a heart attack, but persistent to the end, walked aggressively for the 6 hours and covered just over a marathon.

It was a pleasure to have the 12 Coburg Athletic Club runners tackling the 24 hour relay between them and running in half hour shifts. It was a bit of a trial run for a special challenge event they are planning for the Coburg Athletic Club Centenary in a couple of years' time. They organised themselves up the far end of the track from the equipment shed, and encouraged all other competitors as they came around the bend. It became quite a competition amongst themselves to see if anyone could crack 20 laps in the half hour stint. I don't think any of them made it Nineteen laps was the max. After 12 hours, they had covered 382 laps, or 152.8km, and at the final whistle, their distance was 755 laps or 302.055km, a rather amazing effort.

At the end of each event, the presentations were held and the trophies distributed. At the final 24 Hour ceremony, Neville Mercer, on receiving his Perpetual Trophy, his Winners Trophy, his 24 Hour coffee mug, his 24 Hour Medal, his cloth badge and his Certificate, was obviously absolutely thrilled to have fixed up the Aussies. He'd had recently (on Dec 28<sup>th</sup>) come fourth in an Australasian 100km Challenge and been beaten by Don Wallace, Aussie who came in first, and then the Aussies won the team's prize. So Nev was highly delighted to take his revenge.

Thank you once again to my fantastic support team which has come out in force for each of the 10 years of this event. The Croydon Vets, particularly Annie Callaghan, Sandy Kerr, Bill Baxter and Les Clarke, the Society of Clinical Masseurs lead by Anthony Ashley-Brown who gave massage therapy for 28 hours non-stop, my race doctor, Dr.Spiro

Moraitis, who kept a check on each runner throughout the races, my long suffering husband, Colin, who updated the leader board every hour and computerised the hourly lap-counts and results, Harold Stevens, Coburg Ground Manager who constructed the lap-scorers' tent , Pauline Nippard who manned the canteen, and Geoff Hook, AURA President who was my right-hand man. I can't thank you all enough.

I'm really sorry to see this race go down, but it has turned into a financial disaster for me as race director in recent years because of poor entries, and I'm basically not prepared to go down the drain financially, plus do all the work, year after year. So that's it folks. Thanks for the memory.