

## **Abingdon AC Endurance Competition Group report for 2022.**

*Bernard Wilkins, lead coach*

The Endurance Competition Group (ECG) involves athletes from 12 years of age upwards. During 2022, we took on several young athletes, some that had graduated from the Transition Group and others that had joined the club directly from outside. This year however we have also seen an influx of senior athletes. It is worth noting that our work programme is not suitable for anyone with no recent training background, and our usual rule of thumb is that newcomers should be able to run 5 km continuously – a modest requirement. As in previous years, quite a few soon found that it simply wasn't for them, especially among the younger age groups, and there is no shame in that. Nevertheless midweek group sessions now often involve at least 25 athletes covering all age groups up to and including over-60. Sessions are usually under the direction of the lead coach but we also have 3 embedded coaches. Other senior experienced athletes sometimes lead smaller subgroups: for senior men the weekly sustained "comfortably hard" 10-miler is still popular and attracts athletes from other parts of the club and we have recently been able to introduce a similar session for senior women, led by one of our embedded coaches.

The year began with the southern championships where 2 athletes achieved top-12 placings in their age group. Then it was on to the county race, as a result of which 11 of our athletes represented Oxfordshire in the UK intercounty event in March. All of them fully deserved their selection but I have to mention specifically the outstanding performance from Evey Powell, who won the Under-15 girls event at Prestwold Hall. On to the track and group members made good use of various open meetings as well as championships, with pbs coming throughout a long season. Perhaps the best performance came from Olivia Martin when finishing 3<sup>rd</sup> in the English Schools over 3000m, hacking over 10 seconds from her pb in the process. I have to say however that even at a home fixture support for the Midland League was disappointing, especially from the senior age group. This is a club-wide problem and not confined to the endurance events, and after our inexorable rise to Division 1 a few years ago we are back to Division 3 for 2023.

Autumn means road relays at Sutton Park, where we fielded teams in all 3 of the mens YA age groups. All of our Under-13 boys team were having their first taste of competition at this level and will have benefitted enormously from the experience. Our senior womens quartet was the strongest we have put out thus far and they were rewarded with an excellent 25<sup>th</sup> place of the 67 teams that finished. It would be remiss of me to leave road racing without mentioning marathons. This year we had several debutants, the fastest being Cordy Parker for the women (2h 55 in Manchester) and Harrison Read for the men (2 h 31 in London).

Seemingly in no time at all it was back to cross country when the distance running year kicks off once again. This time the racing programme seemed even more hectic than usual with both Oxon and Chiltern league events. On top of those it was good see that most traditional of championships, the BB&O, back on the fixture list, although few clubs chose to partake of the demanding course at Henley Showground. We were one of the few, and for the first time a senior mens team drawn from across the club came away with what must be one of the biggest trophies in British athletics. Performances up to and including BB&O were used by the county selector to choose her squad for the southern Intercounties, the final event of 2022 and one of the toughest on the domestic calendar pre-Yuletide. A total of 16 of our athletes donned the county vest, with illness ruling out a few more. This year our leading athletes were Olivia Martin (3<sup>th</sup> Under 20 women), Evey Powell (8<sup>th</sup> Under 17 women and Cordy Parker (15<sup>th</sup> senior women).

A massive amount of work has gone in by our endurance competition group athletes over the year, and as a relatively small club Abingdon continues to punch above its weight at regional and national level. In addition to the invaluable input I have had from the other club coaches, both within the group and more widely, I must also acknowledge the support we get from our administration team, especially the work of John Styles, Emmanuelle Convers-Reignier (a role now taken over by Cheryl ???) and Becks Compton. I must also thank Ellen Herlaar who has set up and managed our WotsUp group, a universe I resolutely refuse to inhabit. We couldn't have managed without any of them.