

Masters Feature

ALAN NEWMAN



Alan is one of our latest recruits to the TAC Masters team having transferred from Paddock Wood AC in September 2017, along with his partner Sue James. As well as being a keen M60 (soon to be M65) competitor, Alan is a qualified Coach and will be supporting the developing Masters section. We asked him to tell us about his earlier running achievements...

I would describe myself as an athletics enthusiast and an average club runner when Britain ruled the world in endurance events. My peak was at a time when going under 3 hours for a marathon or sub-60 minutes for 10 miles was considered the bare minimum to get any respect from your club mates!

As a child, I would run or cycle at great speed everywhere. I had morning and evening paper rounds and delivered groceries on a bike a long time before Ocado. I loved all sports and would play football for hours every night. I competed in junior moto-cross and ran to get fitter as I dreamt of being world champion one day. My ambition has always exceeded my ability!

Try as I might at school, I largely failed at sport until I discovered cross country running. I trained on my own at lunchtimes (preferring a packed lunch I could eat when I wanted) and eventually finished third in the King Alfred's Grammar School XC, leading to a run in the Berkshire Schools XC Championships. From then on I was hooked.

'Serious' running started when I joined Thames Valley Police Cadets in 1972. I broke my ankle playing football for them and after months of jogging to get fit, I was asked to run in a South East Police XC League race – scoring for the team (unlike my soccer efforts). My police career, reaching the dizzy heights of Sergeant, enabled me to represent British Police 44 times on the track, road and XC at home and abroad. I was quite successful for a while and won the British Police XC at Leeds in 1990, after ten years of top ten places.



Unlike some of my police colleagues, I always embraced club athletics and often raced two or even three times a week. Various postings meant a few club changes, so I can say I have been a loyal member of Reading, Newbury, Overton Harriers, Oxford City, North Fylde, Blackpool and Fylde, Wesham Road Runners, Maidstone Harriers, Medway AC/Medway & Maidstone, Paddock Wood and now Tonbridge. Basically, I have always run for and/or coached at whichever local club suited my needs best at the time.

I think my experience of competing in European Police Championships has given me an appetite for representing GB and that probably explains my determination to compete in World and European Masters events when I can. Having never made a GB international, despite training with the best and being coached by one of the greatest ever athletes (Bruce Tulloh) the next best thing is to don GB Masters kit and put yourself on the line against the best in your age group – another example of ambition exceeding ability?

I am more a doggedly determined than naturally gifted runner. I tend to stick at things until I achieve a reasonable standard. For example, it took 18 years for me to win my only Police National XC title. My British Police selections spanned 20 years. It took me 10 years to achieve a black belt in Taiho Jutsu. Although my running form is now in decline, I still have some ambitions and hope to return to the Steeplechase as an M65 in 2018.



The

World Masters Championships in Malaga in September are looking attractive ... ?

Read on for a Q&A session with Alan ...

How did you get into coaching?

I have always wanted to learn how to run better and was keen to pass on any acquired knowledge. When I moved to Newbury in 1974 they were quite ambitious but had no track and few coaches. I volunteered for a course and have been coaching now for more than 40 years. My best athlete became Commonwealth 10,000m champion and ran 2:12 marathon (Jon Solly) and I have helped several older runners win British Masters titles.

Who has influenced you most in coaching?

Bruce Tulloh helped me enormously. He was quietly spoken but gave you confidence. I was impressed with Wilf Paish's technical knowledge and enthusiasm when I met him on a coaching course. However, every coach who gives their time in all weathers, purely to help others improve, has earned my respect.

What were your best races?

That's hard. Perhaps I have not had my best race yet! Here is a possible top six:

1. Combe Gibbet to Overton 16 mile XC, Newbury – 23/03/1980

I was in top form, led from the gun and was a minute clear at halfway. I only won by six seconds, though, from marathon runner Dave Fudge, as I was tiring towards the finish. Strong wind against most of the way. My time was 1:31:11. This was a flat out effort to prepare for the European Police XC Championships 10 days later.

2. European Police XC Championships, Steyr, Austria – 02/04/1980

I was 20th (35:39; 10,800m) on a very muddy course and 5th scorer for British Police (team bronze). I could not have run any harder. I just loved the travel and ceremonies.

3. AAA National Indoor 2000m Steeplechase, Cosford – 24/01/1981

Memorable for several reasons. This was a rarely run event indoors (no water jump). I was slowest on paper of 12, finished 10th (6:03.9). One faller, one beaten. Loved the atmosphere in my one and only AAA final. After the race I sat on a bench beside Seb Coe, who was nursing some spike wounds. An autograph hunter then asked for MY autograph! I pointed him in the direction of Seb, once I had given him my signature!

4. Oxfordshire Cross Country Championships, Wantage – 02/01/1982

Waterlogged course after heavy snowfall in the week, followed by a sudden thaw. A few top boys gave it a miss, so I knew I was in with a chance. Led by 50m on the first lap and won by 400m/77sec in 45:40 for 7.5 miles. One of only two senior County titles I won but much more satisfying than my Berkshire 3000m Steeplechase title years earlier.

5. British Police XC Championships, Roundhay Park, Leeds – 04/04/1990

I had been a "contender" for more than 10 years but never medalled. Plenty of near misses but finally it all came good. Sprinted up "Hill 60" to win by 14 seconds (34:03) after working through the field. Took the lead with two miles to run feeling great.

6. Ron Hill Tour of Thameside, Manchester – 22/07/1990 to 28/07/1990

Not a single race but six tough, hilly races in seven days covering a double marathon. Thought that 5 hours might be possible and ran 4:59:57! Seemed to get stronger as the week progressed. Ran my PB for half marathon (1:14:32) in the fourth race. The spirit among the competitors was amazing. Finished 33rd overall from some good athletes.

Finally, what are your PBs? They are something that happened a long time ago!

200m – 25.9; 400m – 58.6; 400mH – 70.6; 800m – 2:04.2; 1500m – 4:08; Mile – 4:28.38; 3000m – 8:49.3; 5000m – 15:42; 10,000m – 32:55; 1500m S/C – 4:49; 2000m S/C – 6:03.9(i)/6:09.3; 3000m S/C – 9:31.2; 5 miles – 26:52; 10k – 33:25; 10 miles – 54:07; Half – 1:14:32; Marathon – 2:39:23. XC – Finished 2nd overall in Wessex XC League, Chiltern XC League and Today's Runner League (now Kent Fitness League).

