

Masters Feature

SUE JAMES

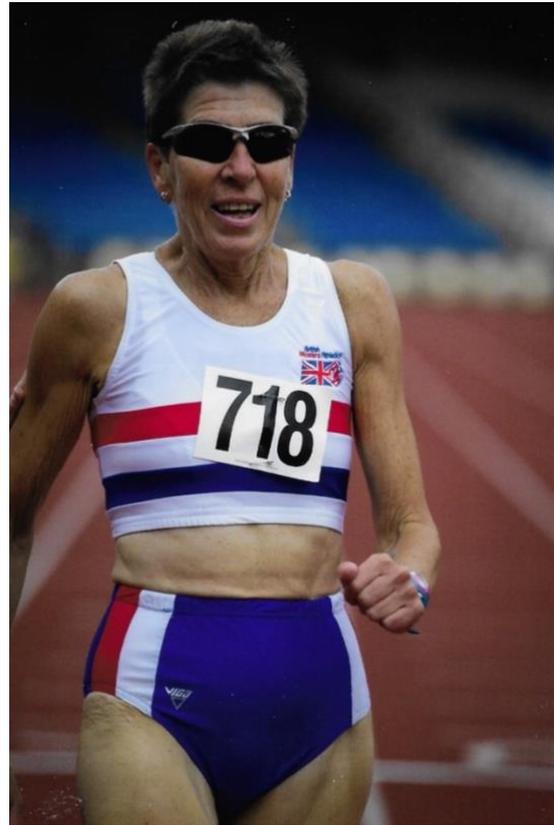
Sue is perfectly happy to confess that she was never a natural runner. In fact, she was not a runner at all until she decided that something needed to be done to avoid the fate of her peers, who were rapidly becoming 'fat and forty' (in her words).

Running only started after Sue had raised two fine sons and was looking to gain some fitness by joining a women's only gym in her native Blackpool, where she met England international Sue Samme in the sauna (as you do). Sue Samme ran 16:23 for 5k, is an England Masters XC international and remains Sue's inspiration to this day.

First steps, supported by her new buddy, comprised jog/walk sessions between the many lamp posts that support the world famous Blackpool illuminations on the Prom. Sue's first race was the 1988 Blackpool 10k that took well over 90 minutes. Ten years later she was to run the same course in rather less than half her debut time!

Sue joined North Fylde AC and enjoyed modest success in the local area, although she remembers one brutally honest comment from the Lancashire team manager: "I would love to select you, Sue, but you are just not fast enough"!

This was to change in January 1990, when Sue met her partner and now TAC coach Alan Newman – in Tunisia. Sue and Alan were on a running and fitness holiday with marathon legend Ron Hill (who became a life-long friend). Within a year Alan and Sue had set up home together in Blackpool and Sue's 10k time was hovering around 40 minutes.



Moving to Kent in 1993, when Alan took up a Police Sergeant post at Maidstone, proved to be the turning point as Sue's times tumbled in the colours of Paddock Wood AC, with 14 PBs set at distances between 100m and 5000m in a single year (1996). That year was to end with the highlight of her athletics career so far, when she ran for the gold medal England W45 team in the Home Countries Veterans International XC at Irving, Scotland – finishing 5th overall on her international debut.

Since then Sue has enjoyed competing in European and World Masters Championships and always supports the British Masters Championships at track, road and XC events. She has competed for England in the British and Irish Masters International XC as a W45, W55 and W65 and hopes to continue to meet her many friends and rivals in age-group competition for a very long time to come.

Sue has joined TAC as she hopes that the change of environment and more competitive club outlook will keep the flame burning as her speed is naturally starting to wane as the years begin take their toll. She will be found at the back of the pack in training but at the front of volunteers to complete a team.



That Lancashire selector was made to eat his words when Sue ran for Kent in the CAU National Inter-Counties XC Championships at Bute Park, Cardiff on 10/03/1998. Sue takes up the story: "I was so excited to receive my first senior county vest aged 47. Shortly after the start I slipped, spun round and fell over. I jumped to my feet, ran a few yards the wrong way like a fool, before sheepishly resuming at the back of the pack!"

(Note: Sue worked her way back through the field to finish 108th, 4th scorer for Kent).

Did you ever run before starting as a veteran?

I was not at all sporty at school. I married at 20, my first son was already on the way so I became a mum, working from home as a tailor. My only experience of school athletics was in the Blackpool Town Sports sprint hurdles. No-one wanted to run it, so I decided to have a go. I seem to have retained that "have a go" mentality to this day.

What influenced you to take up running?

Watching the London Marathon on TV in the 1980s. I thought it looked wonderful and vowed I would compete one day. I did two London's, with a best of 3:29:07 in 1993.

What were your best races then?

I am not a great keeper of records but here are a few that stand out in the memory and the reasons why (thanks to Alan for all the research).

Inter-Counties Veterans Match, Portsmouth: 06/05/1996

"Neither of us can recall the exact details but I ran for Kent and won the W45 800m. I was then asked to jog the Mile for a point and won that in a PB (5:50). Alan was away for a run round the lakes near Mountbatten Stadium and missed both races!"

Benidorm Half Marathon: 23/11/1997 – 5th, 1:28:27

"I won £100 and set my PB on a hilly course in hot conditions. This was to be my only decent cash prize but, better than that, I was only 7 minutes behind Alan! We had great fun spending the booty in the local sports shop. Everything seemed so cheap back then!"

British Masters 10k Championships, Eastleigh: 15/03/1998

"Memorable for so many reasons. Alan collapsed at home and dislocated his shoulder and my father died in Blackpool two days before the race. My head was in a whirl. Somehow we made it to Eastleigh. I ran under 19 minutes for the first 5k lap and Alan missed me. Despite inevitably slowing, I hung on for W45 silver in a PB (38:26). The following week was all about Alan's recovery and my father's funeral, so I never really got to celebrate."

European Masters Championships, Cesenatico, Italy: 13-19/09/1998

"This was probably my best championships for setting times but the standard was so high I only just made finals in the 800m (2:36.97/2:34.14) and 1500m (5:20.86/5:10.81). Then I ran a 70.3 split for silver with the GB W45 4x400m team. It was a great trip. "

World Masters XC Championships, Linz, Austria: 17/03/2006 – 8k, 36:34 – 4th W55
“It was freezing cold but a glorious, sunny day. The course was compacted snow and we were the first race. I had what coach Newman described as a “rush of blood” and led the first lap of four. Unfortunately, I lost a place a lap and missed an individual world medal by 15 seconds. (Note: Alan ran the same course five hours later in a slower time).”

British Masters XC Championships, Mansfield: 24/03/2007 – 6k, 27:03 – 1st W55
“I won my only national BMAF XC title by five seconds from my good friend Ros Tabor. This was only six months after a full hysterectomy. I had not wanted the operation but preferred it to having the cancer. I worked through from fourth to take the lead with 400m to run. I think it was the relief that I was healthy again that helped. Alan lost his voice! I peaked that day.” Ros went on to win many national and international titles!

European Masters Championships, Ljubljana, Croatia: 23/07/2008-03/08/2008
“I made the finals in the 800m and 1500m again as a W55 but the event that stood out was the 4x400m relay. This was a mixed age-group race with the GB W50 teams also running. I went to take the baton for leg three but, due to a case of mistaken identity, I was unceremoniously dragged away by an official. I knew I was right so gave him my best Lancastrian rugby hand off, grabbed the baton and flew round on sheer adrenalin. My split never appeared as we were disqualified from a certain silver medal!”



Finally, what are your PBs?

200m – 32.9;
400m – 69.0;
800m – 2:33:11;
1500m – 5:10:81;
Mile – 5:50.00;
3000m – 11:12;
5000m – 19:10;
10,000m – 41:00;
10k – 38:26;
10 miles – 65:31;
Half Marathon – 1:28:27;
Marathon – 3:29:07.

Sue James