

BRIGHTON PHOENIX

PHOENIX PHLYER ANNUAL REVIEW 2020/21



2020/21 has of course been a difficult year for us all, with the health worries associated with the COVID-19 pandemic compounded by the frustrating absence of most of the usual competitive events and training sessions that we rely on to keep us fit and happy. Our club members have shown great ingenuity in organising “virtual” events, both internal Phoenix competitions and those involving competition with athletes from other clubs, and our Coaches have provided a constant stream of online advice whenever they have been unable to coach athletes in person. At senior level we have continued to recruit a steady stream of new members and managed to maintain an impressive level of competition, friendship and support, despite the unavoidable over-dependence on “virtual” solo performances, whatsapp and strava.



Unfortunately with the entire period affected by track closures and other COVID-19 restrictions, and virtual racing opportunities generally being outdoors alone and unsupervised, our junior members have been hit particularly badly. Here is a snapshot of some of the year's highlights, with apologies to all of our other hardworking volunteers and athletes who fail to get a mention but are every bit as important to the success and unity of the club. Hopefully our website coverage will have gone some way to put those omissions right over the past year – or if it hasn't please keep sending us your news and help us to do better in the coming year.

March 2020

Four of our youngsters represented Sussex in the English Schools Cross Country Championships, with Leo Brewer finishing 17th in a field of over 300 in the Senior Boys event and leading his team to an excellent 4th place in the Intercounties competition. Finn McNally produced a fine Half Marathon run to finish 8th at Bath in 1:06:35. Liz Halliday and Erica Martin responded enterprisingly to lockdown by transforming their Turbo Training sessions into a virtual event with cyclists joining from the comfort (before the session that is) of their own homes.



April 2020

Over fifty of our members took part in the National Virtual Road Relay Championships with thirteen of them achieving personal best times over the 5k distance, and there was a win in the Women's V50 age category for our quartet – Samantha Leader, Liz Halliday, Taff Atkinson and Tracy Mitchell.

May 2020

Our virtual Phoenix 10k challenge yielded an amazing 14 pbs, notably from Rachel Gorman (37:23) and V45 Tony Rickwood (37:21).

June 2020

We marked the scheduled day for the sadly-cancelled South Downs Way Relay with our own virtual version of the event, making use of nearby sections of the route and an imaginative out-and-back system, so solo runners could be both competitive totally self-sufficient, and competitive, apart that is from one or two of our quicker runners whose lack of navigational skills turned them into relative slow coaches. Ian Leitch clocked 15:52 in challenging conditions in the British Masters Virtual 5K Relays, finishing as 17th V40.

July 2020

Our flagship 10K event was sadly limited to a virtual event, with much reduced participation from members of other clubs, though we had a good turnout of almost around fifty of our members, with Reuben Hoyte recording the fastest time of 31:13 and Simon Heath just one second slower, and Reuben's mum - Arena 80 V50 athlete Caroline Hoyte - the fastest female in 37:47. Our triathletes had a tough month with three virtual events – Aquathlon, Aquabike and Sprint Tri - following in quick succession as part of our club Multisport Championship



August 2020

Virtual racing continued with a Phoenix v Lewes AC 1-mile challenge, open to all age groups and offering a rare taste of competition for our younger members, including Under 11s Louie Pegley and Samson Blandy. Careful social distancing procedures from organisers Nice Work gave our seniors a chance of some real racing in the Rye10, and Rachel Gorman and Bobby Searle made the most of it by smashing the female record on this challenging course, with Rachel coming home in 1:05:27 and Bobby just seven seconds behind her. There was a smattering of track racing this month, with several of our athletes taking full advantage, and new pbs at 800m for Archie Davis 1:48.51, Ben Connolly - only just moved up to the Under 17 age group - 2:04.19, and George Mills 1:47.10. Charlie Da'Vall Grice returned to Monaco and couldn't quite match his incredible 2019 record-breaking 1500m time but still produced a world-class run of 3:34.63.

September 2020

Following on from Spencer Thomas's 800m win last year we had another spectacular set of results, and another champion, to celebrate at the British Athletics Championships, with George Mills producing a devastating finish in a slow tactical race to win in 3:51.39, thus adding the outdoor 1500m title to the indoor one he claimed back in February. Toby Harries also grabbed a place on the podium, taking the bronze medal in the 400m in 47.00 after clocking 46.67 in his heat. Fabulous runs too from three more of our athletes who made it through to the Finals, Archie Davis 5th in the 1500m (3:52.6), Beth Kidger 11th in the 1500m (4:22.11, heat 4:19.27), and young Almi Nerurkar who produced a 16:21.64 pb to finish 11th in the 5000m.



George Mills continued his outstanding form with a 3:36.72 1500m pb in Zagreb whilst Toby Harries set a new 100m 10.43 pb. Another Worthing Track Night produced a flurry of good performances from our younger athletes including 1500m wins for Under-15 Sofia Akilade (5:13.71), Under-13 Raphael Reed (4:54.48) and U20 Atticus Mohapi-Dobouny(4:06.67).

Our Club Multisport Championship concluded with Virtual Sprint and Standard Distance Triathlons, and two of our V50s - Malcolm Hughes and Samantha Leader - beat some much younger (and some much older!) rivals to claim the titles. Simon Heath ran a 5K pb of 15:05 at the Goodwood GP. And our superstar triathlete Sam Wade won the Hever Castle Tri over a very demanding course in the remarkable time of 1:54.24.

October 2020

Finn McNally travelled north to the aptly-named fast 5K and helped himself to a 14:10 pb. The Sussex Track & Field Championships produced another batch of junior pbs and that rare experience this year of wins on the track for Raphael Reed and Jahnvi Choksi.

A great run from Bobby Searle in the iconic (and of course hilly) Beachy Head Marathon, whose time of 3:29:35 was quicker than all her male Phoenix clubmates and earned her 3rd place in the Women's race.



November 2020

The Beckley 10k, run over a shorter version of the scenic and challenging Rye 10-mile course, gave V50 Paul Wishart the chance to reproduce his excellent form from the earlier race, which he duly did, 39:25 to finish 2nd overall in 39:25. Wins for Jim Lathbury and Samantha Leader, and on Handicap for Andrew Brooks, in our traditional – albeit Virtual this year - Blackcap Handicap Race.

Despite COVID-19 restrictions making it impossible to stage our usual annual Awards Night, we announced and celebrated our list of worthy winners, including the usual wide age range of our athletes from the likes of up-and-coming Under-11s Louie Pegley and Katherine Haslip at one end to the battle-scarred Eogan McKenna, - still energetic enough to carry off our Shield for Commitment and Enthusiasm -, at the other. And some very special volunteer winners too including veteran Coach Phil Savage and our timeless Membership Coordinator Nerine Standen.



December 2020

The Ardingly PB5K provided a rare opportunity for some high-quality competitive races, with Robbie Fitzgibbon (14:29), Finn McNally (14:34) and Archie Davis (14:39pb) all finishing in the top 10, Beth Kidger (16:24) in 2nd place a hair's breadth behind the winner in the Women's race and no less than 21 Phoenix athletes achieving pbs. Over fifty of our members took part in a virtual Blackcap Challenge over the Blackcap course, along with Haywards Heath Harriers and two other local clubs, in memory of much-respected Haywards Heath runner Chris Smith – with

Simon Heath so keen to pay his respects that he headed straight over after running a 15:05 5K at Ardingly to follow up with 29:37 over this tough 5-mile course. V45 Gareth White joined the Sub-3 Marathon club with 2:58:10 at Goodwood, and Jim Lathbury beat a 500-strong socially-distanced field by a country mile in the Plumpton 10, clocking a mega-impressive 1:09:13.

February 2021

And a high note to end on, with two spectacular runs from Charlie Da'Vall Grice in the U.S., setting a new indoor 800m pb of 1:45.62 and following this up with a new British 1000m record of 2:17.20.

