

2018 Summer Series Review

And so it ended, the 2018 Oxted Runners Summer Series, in much the same way as it had started – in the thin sunshine on an early Sunday morning with just a hint of freshness in the air in the air. At the beginning, it was March in the grounds of Woldingham School, and the freshness was one of the last blasts of winter; at the end, it was September in the grounds of Imberhorne School in East Grinstead, and the freshness was an early hint that winter would soon be here. No matter, it will all start again next March in Woldingham.

The runners are the same wherever they are, each with their own goals for the race. Some are definitely ‘in it to win it’ – but not many; some just want to get round in a reasonable time to prove (to whom? – to themselves, of course) that they can, or that they still can; some – most of us – would like to do better than last time – but of course we cannot always achieve that; some are running for and with others – like last year’s East Grinstead womens champion who paced her father round for a best time for him (and maybe a worst time for her!); everyone enjoys the buzz of running with others in another festival of running.

The final race in the Summer Series was the East Grinstead 10k This is the easiest course on our roster; generally, our runners normally record their season’s best times. The first half is on footpaths and the Worth Way – the course of a disused railway line. The Worth Way has an imperceptible downward slope on the outward leg: You do not notice the gradient; you just feel as if you are a really gifted runner who is having a particularly good day. Things are a bit different after the turn: it turns out that you are just an ordinary runner after all, and now this gentle climb seems to go on forever. After swinging off the Worth Way, the course takes you gently downwards along suburban roads, before you can show off to the motorists by running the last km up the busy A22 before turning to finish - out of their sight and exhausted - in the grounds of the school.

This race also doubles up as the Oxted Runners Club Championship. The Oxted Runners signed their season off in some style – Neil Danby won the event in 34:54 and would have won the best veteran’s prize as well, but for the ‘one person, one prize’ rule. Harry Lawson – at the other end of the age ranking – came in second on 35:14.

Completing the trio of OR superstars, Sean McCabery took the vets’ award, as well as placing sixth overall. Neil is therefore Oxted Runners Mens’ Champion for 2018, with Sean taking the age-graded award. There were only two entries by OR Women, with Kim Sullivan first back, ahead of Jane McTaggart. Kim is therefore Ladies Champion for 2018, with Jane taking the age-graded award.

<i>East Grinstead 10k 30 September 303 Finishers</i>	<i>Race Position</i>	<i>Chip Time</i>	<i>Age Grade %</i>	<i>Age Graded Time</i>
Women				
Kim Sullivan	156	53:47	70.4	43:05
Jane McTaggart	166	54:16	63.9	47:28
Men				
Neil Danby	1	34:54	88.3	30:15
Harry Lawson	2	35:14	75.8	35:14
Sean Mccabery	6	38:36	76.6	34:54
Chris Sharpe	18	42:13	67.2	39:45
James Raven	22	42:55	66.6	40:06
Robin Hickson	50	45:46	70.4	37:58
John Warren	72	47:24	62.3	42:52
John Holmes	78	47:52	73.2	36:29
Tony Sall	84	48:08	76.0	35:10
Simon Brooks	90	48:34	70.1	38:06
Pat Sullivan	160	54:00	60.7	43:59

The season's opener, the Woldingham 'Mad March Hare' 10k is another fast race (some say that it is not quite 10km...) It is a very pretty course on the traffic free paths and tracks in Woldingham School which we run regularly on our Tuesday night club runs in the summer. There are no good reasons for not entering, so about a dozen ORs assembled at the end of March to take on the challenge. Sean McCabery – who won the event in 2017 – was the fastest OR, back in 38:04 and in third place overall. Maggie Statham Berry was the first OR woman back in 48:17. Both Sean (77.6%) and Maggie (85.1%) ran excellent age-graded times (super-excellent in Maggie's case), but the 'one person one prize' rule means that the age graded awards go Kim Sullivan and Tony Saill.

Woldingham is a little local event, very friendly with fewer than 100 participants. Sevenoaks, our April race, is a bit different.

The Sevenoaks 10km would say that it is the most beautiful of our courses, as it takes place in Knole Park: Deer sightings are a distinct possibility, or would be in the absence of about 450 runners and associated marshals and helpers. This is definitely multi-terrain, with some grass, some track, and some tarmac paths. And there is that notorious hill – shortish and steepish on the first lap but, somehow, not short at all and definitely steep on the second lap. This is usually the slowest race on our calendar – some say it is longer than 10km...

This year's race took place on 8 April, when winter seemed to be making a comeback. Sean McCabery and Maggie Statham Berry carried on from where they had left off at Woldingham. Sean's 39:59 was enough to get him second place overall, and given the course and conditions was, in my view, a much better run than his faster Woldingham result; Maggie was again first OR woman back in 51:22. Unfortunately, injury would mean that the rest of Maggie's season would be drastically curtailed. Once again Tony and Kim picked up the age-graded awards on the 'one person, one prize' rule. Most runners' times were about three minutes slower than in 2017: the conditions made this a challenging race.

<i>Woldingham 10k 25 March 92 Finishers</i>	<i>Overall Position</i>	<i>Chip Time</i>	<i>Age Grade %</i>	<i>Age Graded Time</i>
Women				
Maggie Statham Berry	32	48:17	85.1	35:38
Sylvie Green	51	53:06	66.9	45:20
Kim Sullivan	53	53:29	69.9	43:24
Joanne Morfield	79	61:39	51.7	58:38
Men				
Sean McCabery	3	38:04	77.6	34:25
Jonathan Buxton	20	45:17	71.8	37:13
Tony Saill	31	48:10	75.9	35:11
Simon Brooks	35	49:01	68.8	38:50
David Green	39	49:39	62.6	42:40
Peter Gibbons	42	51:14	65.8	40:35
Pat Sullivan	60	54:20	59.8	44:40

<i>Sevenoaks 10k 8 April 391 Finishers</i>	<i>Overall Position</i>	<i>Chip Time</i>	<i>Age Grade %</i>	<i>Age Graded Time</i>
Women				
Maggie Statham-Berry	109	51:22	80.0	37:55
Kim Sullivan	218	58:12	64.2	47:14
Men				
Sean McCabery	2	39:59	73.9	36:09
Robin Hickson	57	46:46	68.9	38:48
Tony Saill	110	51:26	71.1	37:34
Pat Sullivan	217	58:10	55.9	47:49

The Sutton Runners 10k was a complete contrast – a warm day on a course with possible PB potential in Nonsuch Park, Cheam. This race usually has the best quality field out of all the races in the Summer Series, reflected in the winning time of 32:19. The course, nearly all on tarmac inside and just outside the park, has no significant hills, but lots of little ups and downs, and a few tight bends. Neil Danby finished in 10th place overall in 35:05, and carried off the prize in the M50 age category. Sean McCabery was next OR back, and won our mens age graded prize under the ‘one person, one prize’ rule. Kim was the only OR woman in the race, and so wins all the prizes. Maggie thought about competing, was changed and ready to go, but – certainly wisely, if to her great disappointment – decided to support others rather than run.

<i>Sutton 10k 20 May 448 Finishers</i>	<i>Overall Position</i>	<i>Chip Time</i>	<i>Age Grade %</i>	<i>Age Graded Time</i>
Women				
Kim Sullivan	295	54:34	68.5	44:17
Men				
Neil Danby	10	35:05	87.1	30:40
Sean McCabery	39	38:31	76.7	34:50
John Holmes	216	48:49	71.8	37:12
Simon Brooks	236	50:10	67.2	39:44
Pat Sullivan	294	54:35	59.5	44:52

Race 4 of the Summer Series was the Staplehurst 10k. This is the longest journey of the season, but worth the drive. But it seems

<i>Staplehurst 10k 10 June 379 finishers</i>	<i>Overall Position</i>	<i>Chip Time</i>	<i>Age Grade %</i>	<i>Age Graded Time</i>
Neil Danby	6	36:06	84.6	31:34
John Holmes	122	48:59	71.6	37:20
Simon Brooks	146	50:08	67.1	39:51

that not everyone agrees, as only three ORs made the trip. One car set off at 8:15 – the same time as we left for East Grinstead and Sutton – with Neil Danby, John Holmes, and me aboard. This is a lovely course. It is a tadpole. Start at the tip of the tail, run around the head, and then back up the tail to the finish. The lanes are quiet except for the padding of runners feet; the countryside is pretty; the course is flattish – not like a runway, but mostly gentle ups and downs; the weather was perfect – gentle summer sun though light intermittent clouds, warm not hot. Great village atmosphere at the start/finish.

It was no surprise to John or me that Neil was (again) the first OR back, in 36:06 and in sixth place overall. Much to his brief chagrin and our surprise he didn’t win the mens’ V50 prize, being beaten by an unfamiliar dark horse who came in fourth. Step up John Holmes - he won the mens’ V65 prize in 49:19. (The remaining OR had a ‘mixed’ day- see box.)

The Caterham 10k is not in Caterham, which is a good thing in view of Caterham’s hilliness. Instead, the race starts and finishes at Redhill Aerodrome. It has become a bit of a home race for the Oxted Runners. . The organisers are very generous with the vet category prizes, which means that the Club has done quite well. There are some advantages to having – ahem – a good number of ‘experienced runners’!

Sean Mccabery was the fastest Oxted Runner on the day, finishing in 17th place in 43:50, good for most of us, but slowish for him no doubt reflecting a last minute decision to race, which may well have been made deep into the Oxted Beer Festival on the previous night. Tony Saill won our best age-graded award. Kim Sullivan won all the prizes for women. Kim, Sean, Tony, and John Holmes carried off the official race prizes in their respective age categories. (Robin and I were runners up in our categories – obviously the winners must have lied about their ages!)

You get August off, if you take part in the Summer Series, but you have to turn out for the Sevenoaks Weald 10k right at the start of September. This is the most atmospheric race of the season. You start on the village green, turn left, go past a few houses, and you are in the country. 10k later you are back on the village green. There is, of course, the small matter of the finishing hill. On the way out – downhill - you think “this is a bit steep; too steep to run down properly”. But you put it to the back of your mind as you enjoy the tracks and lanes which follow it. At about 9 ¼ km, you remember that it was too steep to run down and is definitely too steep to run up

<i>Caterham 10k 22 July 151 Finishers</i>	<i>Overall Position</i>	<i>Chip Time</i>	<i>Age Grade %</i>	<i>Age Graded Time</i>
Women				
Kim Sullivan	75	56:44	65.9	46:02
Men				
Sean McCabery	17	43:50	67.4	39:38
Robin Hickson	27	46:52	68.7	38:53
Tony Saill	37	49:09	74.4	35:54
John Holmes	39	49:17	71.1	37:34
Simon Brooks	45	50:25	66.9	39:56
Pat Sullivan	76	56:45	57.3	46:39

<i>Sevenoaks Weald 1 September 364 Finishers</i>	<i>Overall Position</i>	<i>Chip Time</i>	<i>Age Grade %</i>	<i>Age Graded Time</i>
Women				
Maggie Statham-Berry	157	53:75	76.9	39:28
Kim Sullivan	201	56:34	66.9	45:19
Men				
Robin Hickson	96	49:10	65.5	40:47
Tony Saill	120	51:17	71.3	37:28
Simon Brooks	125	51:28	66.2	40:23
John Warren	127	51:30	57.4	46:34
Pat Sullivan	192	56:22	58.2	45:55

with any pace or style. But if you have run the course before and have saved just a little bit, you can make up some places and time on those who wished it was a 9 km race. At last you are at the top, turning right onto the green and finishing to the cheers of your many fans. You might even succumb to a village burger after the mandatory banana proves insufficient....

The awards for the Summer Series, as a whole, reward consistency (and a bit of luck in picking the right races). They are given for the best three performances over the seven race season. Only two women qualified – Kim Sullivan, who ran in six races, and Maggie Statham Berry, who missed most of the

season through injury, who ran three races. Maggie had the fastest aggregate time for her three races compared with Kim’s best three. Kim therefore wins the Age Graded award for the best three age graded runs, on the ‘one person, one prize’ rule

Seven men qualified by running three or more races. Neil Danby’s best three were the fastest. Neil would also have won the best age graded prize, but for the ‘one person, one prize’ rule which means that the best age-graded award goes to Sean McCabery.

East Grinstead and Woldingham were the fastest courses, and included by everyone’s ‘Best three’ if run. Sevenoaks was the slowest course, and was hardly ever included in the best three by runners who had other possibilities.

<i>Summer Series Overall Best Three to Count</i>	<i>Total Races</i>	<i>Best Three Races</i>	<i>Best Three Average Time</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Best Three (Age Graded) Races</i>	<i>Best Three (Age Graded) Ave %</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Women							
Maggie Statham Berry	3	W,7,SW	51:18	1		80.6	
Kim Sullivan	6	EG,W,S	53:56	2	EG,W,S	69.6	1
Men							
Neil Danby	3	EG, S, St	35:21	1	EG, S, St	86.7	
Sean McCabery	5	EG, W, S	38:33	2	EG, W, S	77.0	1
Robin Hickson	4	EG, 7, C	46:28	3	EG, 7, C	69.3	4
Tony Saill	5	EG, W, C	48:29	4	EG, W, C	75.4	2
John Holmes	4	EG, S, St	48:38	5	EG, W, St	72.2	3
Simon Brooks	6	EG, W, S	49:12	6	EG, W, S	68.7	5
Pat Sullivan	6	EG, W, S	54:18	7	EG, W, S	60.0	6

Key: EG – East Grinstead, W – Woldingham, 7 – Sevenoaks, S – Sutton, St – Staplehurst, C – Caterham, SW – Sevenoaks Weald

'One person, one prize' rule – The winner of the 'fastest category' may not also win the 'age graded category'.

Race reports have to highlight the winners – they are about races, after all. But everyone who runs has a good time, whether they come 1st or 101st. For me, and for most, it is all about having a good time with your friends – not only the other ORs but also new friends you make on the way. Whether it is sunny or chilly, whether you run well or disappoint yourself, you get a lift get at the finish from doing something you enjoy. I can't wait for next year.

Staplehurst – the truth

Just three of us in this race. Pick up Neil at 08:16. He comes jauntily up the track from his house, carrying the bubble wrapped atlas he likes to sit on to ward off sciatic twinges which car journeys otherwise give him. A couple of minutes later we are at the end of John's drive, and he is chucking his stuff in the back, and we are off. Just after 09:00, and we are at the village hall in Staplehurst that they used as race HQ last year. But it is all shut-up! I am confused. "Er, you should have turned left by that big sign that says 'To the Race'", they tell me in chorus. And a couple of minutes later we are at race HQ putting on our race numbers, and looking for the Portaloos.

At least, John and I are. Neil has got his number through the post and is already off on his warm up. Neil is a really good runner; his idea of a warm-up is to check out the first km of the route (ie one km out and one km back); Neil's warm up pace is faster than I can run; I would want a finishers' medal and a banana just for warming up with Neil; so no – John and I warm up with a gentle lap of the playing field as I explain to him that I am not on tip-top form and divert back around the Portaloos...

And so to the start. A quick glimpse of Neil up at the front – the last I see of him until the finish. I am about 50 back- not that I expect to finish 50th, but the nearer the front you are, the less far you have to run. John is about 60 or 70 places behind me, chatting to this woman he has just met. Obligatory safety briefing that no-one can hear. Parp! We are off!

Mercifully, it is slightly downhill. The bunch starts to stretch out; loads of people are passing me; my legs seem to have rusted up, and the engine is barely ticking over. At about 1 km John bounds up like Tigger in a green Oxted Runners shirt: "How's it going?", he chirps. "Not good. Don't wait for me." "This bit's downhill. Let yourself go!", he says, gleefully. I feel like murdering him for being so bouncy, but I don't have the energy

He didn't wait. I watched John's green back get further and further away over the next few kms until he was too far ahead to spot.

The lanes are quiet; the countryside is pretty; the weather is perfect – gentle summer sun though light intermittent clouds, warm not hot. Little by little magic works and by 5km I am feeling pretty good and run the second half a lot faster than the first. At about 9 km I hear Neil's voice encouraging me onwards (thanks, Neil!) and I manage a sprint of sorts to cross the line. Not my best time by any means, but better than I had expected an hour ago. Now it's water and fig rolls and chatting to the others. John thinks we need to warm down; I think I need another banana. We agree that we are not joining Neil's warm down.

Prizegiving shock! – Neil does not win his class in spite of finishing 6th overall! But John picks up the win in the super-super-super-super vets class. John buys Neil and me coffee in celebration. Then we're back in the car and home in time for lunch. Another Summer Series triumph!

