

On Election Day McKee declares his intention to stand as the primary candidate for victory in the Hill & Dale constituency and there may be no need for a recount

Hill and Dale Race 4 by Bogusboy

Hill and Dale Race 4, 'Binnian to the Top', is the shortest and arguably the most unique event in the 11 race series. Despite being less than 2 miles from start to finish (1.63 to be precise if my Garmin reading from 2015 is to be considered reliable and accurate), it is an unforgiving and extremely challenging event, a fact that the 204 competitors who completed the course will attest to. Conditions were perfect as race directors King and McVeigh began the task of getting their troops into place. This unlikely pairing is a match made in heaven – while King manages the 'ground staff', McVeigh takes control of affairs 'in the air' and to date this has worked admirably. Coincidentally, the race would once again take place on an election day – followers of Hill and Dale will recall how 'Bailey was first past the post on polling day' on General Election Day in 2015.

It's a bit ad hoc

That is not to say that the evening was without challenges. Mark King noted, *'upon arrival at the "Mark's Family" yard, I quickly realised there is more to organising a Hill & Dale race than meets the eye. For example having a table, chairs, electricity, pen & paper are pre-requisites. In fact, I would go so far as to state this kit is "Mandatory" and not just "Recommended" and any future Race Directors who do not carry this kit will be disqualified from the rest of the series. However, not to be beaten in this*

regard the ever resourceful Tony Steele & Phil Hodge quickly came to my rescue as they were able to make a table & chairs from "Oul bits of wud" some string and a half roll of masking tape they found in Willy Marks' shed.' As ever, were thankful to the Marks family for the use of their facilities which keeps cars off the road and makes the event so much easier to organise and manage.

What a body!

With these initial issues resolved, the competitors began to arrive. Among the first were Dale and Laura Smyth From Larne AC. Laura was overheard making comments like, 'what a body', 'it's in magnificent condition', 'I wish yours was as well looked after Dale' and 'what I wouldn't give to have one with a body like that'. One of the entries team was getting a little embarrassed and flustered as he thought she was talking about him. However, it quickly transpired that the object of her affection and admiration was Tony Steele's camper van. Dale breathed a sigh of relief and feigned similar appreciation of said vehicle. The NAC member relaxed his pose and resumed the now obligatory task of randomly insulting the entrants - it is almost reaching the stage that people are offended if they are not insulted prior to running!

We've got your number!

With the new barcoding system now understood by most, including the entries management team, registration is becoming increasingly streamlined – or so one might think. Regrettably, however, there are always one or two who try the patience

of the ever-helpful and taciturn registrars! Incredulous as it may seem, this week's culprit was none other than one of the race directors – The Prophet. When challenged by McNeilly, who it would appear is loath to have the sequence of his replacement 1000 numbers interrupted, about the whereabouts of his number, The Prophet had his excuse well-rehearsed, 'Sure you know how it is Deon! I gave Monica my number for safe keeping and didn't she put into one of her Dune handbags. And as we all know, I have bought her so many of them that she couldn't find the one she had put it in. So I had to come on without it!' McNeilly considered this long and hard, before issuing a new number, albeit under duress. All ended well as the Prophet returned the number in the pub and McNeilly was able to sleep, secure in the knowledge that all replacement numbers are where they ought to be!

Mary is unable to declare at Binnian

This was not the only challenge facing the entries team. Being Election Day it was hard to operate without the ubiquitous Mary Knight, who instead of being chief tallywoman at the "Mourne Upper" was chief electoral officer for "Mourne Lower". Frank Morgan was less than happy at not getting his mandatory 'cup of tay' and his mood was worsened when he realised that he had missed out on the freshly baked flapjacks proffered by the McCann family – it was agreed that his false teeth could not withstand the crunch of the baked craisins! Additionally, the bus from 'Blaney arrived at the usual time – 'chic late'! Francie Nugent ran to the entries desk to declare his intention to run (apparently that doubles up as a warm up!). Much to the amusement of the registrars he had no numbers to be scanned. His money was taken – you only get one chance to take Yo-yos, dollars, rupees or whatever currency is fashionable on the day in 'Blaney of these boys! – and he was sent back

to the car to get his own number and that of his brother Connell, who was warming up by removing the fluff of his socks from between his toes! Back he came with two numbers – alas one did not have a bar code as it was Connell’s number from 2015 – car valeting is evidently not a priority for these boys! He was sent back to the car and by now Connell had the shoes on and was engaged in his pre-race meditation! On approaching the registration for the third time, Francie managed to successfully register both Nugent athletes. However, they story does not end here as a fourth visit was necessary as he needed some pins: a worthy winner of the ‘silly boy’ award this week! Connell, of course found this all highly entertaining as did the entries team who usually observe Francie to be ‘laid back to the point of being horizontal!!!’ Perhaps Francie had the last laugh as he was obviously going to the line with his blood rushing through his veins as evidenced by his finish in 31st place. Connell fared less well, finishing 197th despite the obvious benefits that accrue from his meditations!!

Any chance we could find out who won?

Aside from the banter, there was the small matter of the race! William McKee once again proved to be too strong for his main rivals and with three wins out of four; he is firm favourite to win the overall title. Three more wins, over courses that will suit his talents,



William McKee on his way to another win

seem more than likely. He produced a great time on the night, improving his 2015

time by 1 minute 19 seconds – no mean achievement. Zak Hanna continues to impress and had a storming climb to finish second for the second week in a row. Barry McConville produced his best performance of the year to date to complete the podium, just ahead of the evergreen and fiercely competitive Neil Carty. One of the performances of the night came from the ‘Galloping Landlord’, Jack O’Hare, who finished 5th, easily his best ever performance in a Hill & Dale race. If his actions after the Les Jones in 2015 are an accurate barometer, Binnian 2016 will be mentioned again and again in the days, weeks, months and years that follow! A little further there were great performances from Deon McNeilly, The Spartan, young Scott McKeag, Paul Burns and Matthew Hewitt to round out the top 10. With Michael Cultra in 11th overall, East Down certainly packed well and rumours abound that hill reps are high on their training agenda in the foreseeable future!



Colm Murtagh with Paul Burns in the background

Wasson in command

Gillian Wasson of Ballymena runners was the comfortable winner of the ladies race in 22nd overall. She was joined on the podium by Shileen O’Kane (37th overall) and Sinead Murtagh (39th overall). Still recovering from her fine performance in London, Murtagh was unaware that the path to the top was neither smooth nor covered in tarmac! Despite this she turned in a stellar performance. All of the other category

winner are highlighted in red in the results. However, we would like to congratulate Ian McCullough of BARF for pipping the ever youthful John Adgey of Mourne Runners in the MV70 category – this one could go right to the wire! Not to be outdone, Mourne Runners did secure 1st place in in the sprightlier MV65 category, with Harry Teggarty overcoming the equally youthful Ed Smith.

They are not playing by the rules at NTSR!

This week, in a new feature, we focus on the not so well known athletes and clubs who rarely make the headlines but who contribute much to the richness of the series. Not The Sunday Run is a



Scott McKeag

collection of like-minded individuals whose origins lie in on and off trail mountain biking, usually heading off from Rostrevor on Saturday mornings (hence the name NTSR). They rapidly embraced the adventure racing and mountain running cultures. Their 'Fat Controller' (now known as the more politically correct Clinically Obese Controller) is Henry McLaughlin from Rostrevor. For the past two years the Fat Controller has taken his eye off the ball in the transfer market and NTSR have lost both Barry McConville and David Hicks to the bright lights of Newcastle AC – no big name signings have been made to fill their places! Despite the loss of their podium men, morale remains high within the NTSR Hill and Dale runners; everyone has their place and there is a place for everyone. In 2016 the pecking order has been upset within the highly competitive

MV55 category with Horace De Courcy-Wheeler having the temerity to beat Hugh Suffern in both race three (which to make matters even worse was Hugh's Birthday) and race four. The inside track seems to be that Horace's negotiations with the Fat Controller for a discounted NTSR tee shirt have not been going well and that he may seek to follow Barry and David into the world of heavily subsidised running kit at Newcastle AC. He was observed having a lengthy discussion with one of the NAC stalwarts in O'Hare's after the race and the discussion ended with a lot of smiling and firm handshakes! Arbitration is urgently required to restore the original pecking order within NTSR; the only hope is that Leslie Mullholland (having fallen off his mountain bike) will soon be fit again and that he will beat them both. Neither Suffern nor McLaughlin were available for comment. De Courcy-Wheeler volunteered to give a full interview, but the scribe thought it best not to upset the equilibrium among this fine body of men!

The Big Fella's Fella is 50

With the race over, it was time to adjourn to O'Hare's for the post-race post-mortems, 'if onlys' 'what might have beens'. The landlord was doling out food like a man who had just made the top 5! Suffern was 'huffing' at one end of the bar whilst De Courcy-



Eamon McCrickard celebrates his 50th Birthday

Wheeler was 'puffing and blowing' at the other about how he had made it onto page 2 of the results! The night had a little bit of extra spice as Eamon McCrickard, one of the most respected men in Western Europe turned 50. Cake was procured and presentations were made – boys who had not been at the race turned out in force offer their good wishes. It was like all his Christmas' had come at once when he was presented with a framed picture of himself and his hero McNeilly, by McNeilly, of them striding to victory in the Christmas Cracker. McCrickard was leading them out and McNeilly recalled that was the point when he was reining McCrickard in, 'ease her up Eamon, we are home and hosed.' Needless to say McCrickard failed to comply with his colleague's request and kept her going full tilt right to the end – such is the measure of the man. In typical McCrickard fashion, he was among the last to leave, when he was confident that everyone who had joined his celebration had a lift home!

Thanks

Our thanks to everyone who helped at the bottom and the top of the mountain to make sure this was a successful evening. Particular thanks to the mountain rescue team who looked after the one injured athlete, ensuring that she received the treatment needed. Next week, the action moves back towards Rostrevor with Race 6, Rocky – a cheeky little four peaker (4.25 miles with 1600 feet of climbing) organised by the Steele brothers. Seamus Lynch (30:41) and Shalene McMurray (38:55) were first home in 2015. Entries will be taken at Leitrim Lodge from 6:15pm – remember to bring your number to avoid the 'name and shame policy' being directed towards you. Again, we remind you of the need to bring full body cover as this race has 4 open top peaks to negotiate – runners who fail to comply with kit regulations

before or during the race will automatically be disqualified. As the races become more technical, cut-off points will be used at the race directors discretion for health and safety purposes – this will be most pertinent at Race 6, the Loughshannagh Horseshoe; more details in next week's report. The online entry system is open as usual between races for the benefit of athletes yet to register for the series – no fingers being pointed at Wonderwall!