

## Canny Racers Dominate at Luke's

In 2019 the Broken Wing Commander dreamed up a new race route for the Hill & Dale Series. Make Meelmore Lodge with all its brilliant facilities the race HQ and look down the lane onto the open mountain and choose a couple of random summits with no obvious routes in between – “that might give me a chance of winning another race”.

In the inaugural running the club's legal adviser thought he'd spotted a way to win the race that was by taking a direct line to the finish rather than running along the Ulster Way... this cunning plan had two flaws: one, the route he chose was 'out of bounds' and two, the race winner and new record holder Seamy Lynch was already home and hosed.

With the COVID-enforced break in 2020 and 2021 this fascinating race route got the opportunity to be tested for only the second time in 2022 and the dream team Race Directors of Dumb and Dumber were intent on preventing this sort of nonsense emerging this year. An extra checkpoint at the end of the lane would put the legal eagle in his box.

Setting up an effective road block at the finish line in the newly stoned area below the Lodge, the Broken Wing Commander unhelpfully parked his pimped up van used for registration 200m away and out of sight – really, really helpful. Off he went and returned like Max Verstappen (angry) moving the cones to incur the wrath of official start and finish director, Frank Morgan, who had plans for them to be his finishing funnel.

Meanwhile Morgan had inserted his 'START' sign at the end of the start field... which led to the inevitable questions of 'where is the start Frank?' He just shook his head, many many times... Race registration was in full flow with the usual suspects and another name check for Connell Nugent who this week drifted from his shocking arrival a whole hour before race time to half an hour this week – still amazingly early for him but trending again towards his perennial 'just at race time' registration.

Dumb and Dumber stood on the sidelines and smiled – that's best practice senior management in action.

In perfect weather 190 runners toed the start line for the race to Slievenagloagh and onwards to Luke's Mountain before returning to Meelmore Lodge. A worrying number of runners are now turning up to pay on the night having 'forgotten' to register and pay on line – we would really really appreciate if racers would do it online before the cut-off each week – cash belongs in the 20th century and it helps us a lot when it stays there ☺.

The aforementioned Lynch's record is 35:43, which is some trampin. His club mate Tom Crudgington is attempting to become the first 17-year-old to win the series overall and with 2 firsts and a second is well on his way towards that. However, this week he had serious competition emerging in the form of Adam Kirk-Smith – how would the Commonwealth Games steeplechaser fare on this terrain? Esther Dickson's record is 42:41 and wasn't here tonight so would favourites Diane Wilson or Sarah Hanna win and get close?

So the intention was to start the runners as close to the end of the field as possible to allow them to spread out before the natural gap at the other end and get onto the lane without too much of a bottleneck. David Smyth has other ideas though and in a display akin to the best at Beecher's Brook he is pictured below in a 10/10 clearance for style points with the onlooking front runners glancing to the left with a big smile on their faces.



*David Smyth in full flight 50m into the race 42 minutes before returning in 13th place (photo by Kerry O'Flaherty)*

Kirk-Smith could certainly never be described as stupid and he demonstrated this again tonight with astute tactics – ‘stick to Crudgington like a limpet’. And that he did from start until close to the finish which was wise given he had no idea of the race route. Questions about how he'd fare over the rough descents were quickly answered – he loved them and had no problem following the young heir apparent. Showing his track speed on the finishing lane Kirk-Smith came home in 37:35 with Crudgington 10 seconds behind. In turn this strengthens Crudgington's bid for the title with now 2 firsts and 2 seconds.



*"Still friends, mountain racing friends..." (photo by Kerry O'Flaherty)*

The women's race was equally tight with Sarah Hanna and Diane Wilson returning to form in recent races. Hanna led early as expected but canny running was the order of the day and Wilson hoped she would slip by on one of the descents just as she had done recently in the Donard Race. So it proved with Wilson with the ability of a gazelle over the rough stuff moving into the lead when it mattered to win in 48:23 with Hanna only 18 seconds behind.



Winner Diane Wilson in the home straight with Luke's Mountain as a backdrop (phot by Paul Fegan)

Connaire McVeigh auditioned well for his Bobgoy apprenticeship literally falling in the bog many times.



1st Prize for muddiest runner home, Bogboy's apprentice – "I fell 15 times..." (photo by Jack O'Hare)



*A picture that captures why so many trek to the Mourne's for the Hill & Dale Series on a Thursday evening in the Spring*

Dumb and Dumber would like to express massive thanks to all the marshalls (and apologies to those, misdirected by Dumber and had to re-arrange out on the mountain tops), the registration, start and finish team, everyone at Meelmore lodge and all the staff at the Avoca Hotel Resort and Spa, who hosted the apres-course festivities.

Next up is race 7, Millstone, where Audey McVeigh and Pete Grant will oversee proceedings back on the original Buzzard Route.

*BOGBOY*