

Stephens isn't shakin' as he is knocking on the green floor

The Loughshannagh Horseshoe – Hill & Dale Race 8 by Bogusboy

Loughshannagh is undoubtedly the most challenging of the Hill & Dale courses, characterised by steep climbs and sharp rough descents on entirely unpredictable ground. Whichever way it tackled, it presents a very good test of mountain running ability. This year, the challenge saw a substantial field of 177 take on the 4-peak loop in an anti-clockwise direction, summiting Carn first and Ott last. This caused some consternation in the days leading up to the race as there was a school of thought that suggested it should be Ott first. Needless to say the RDs were decisive and Carn was the first destination of the night.

Far from a pleasant evening as conditions change quickly

Last year the conditions were benign and the participants were encouraged to carry water and sun cream rather than the more traditional full body cover. While conditions had been reasonable earlier in the day, the forecast for the evening was less than favourable. Sure enough as 7:30 approached, the sun disappeared, the clouds descended and the rain started, vindicating the decision that carrying full body kit was mandatory. The Prophet had arrived early, armed with three whale suppers that were devoured in minutes by the organising team at just after 5:30. It looked like a plague of locusts of Biblical proportion had descended on the car park! Then, it was down to business to get the marquee erected and the registration area established. With the vans wedged closely together it was agreed that the erection of the marquee was surplus to requirements. The saved time was devoted to haranguing and berating those looking to register. Richard Vassey, applauded last week for his style has started a trend as a few others arrived this week in their finest pinstripe suits, prompting the Prophet to observe that his would only get ruined by the mortar!



Andrew Tees was the winner of the Jamie Doran lookalike contest.

It is more efficient than ever

It was not long before the athletes rocked up to be processed using the new streamlined entry system. Despite the speed and accuracy of the process, many have complained that they no longer get lambasted by the entries management team in this new age of uber-efficiency. Many have called for a return to the 'old days' where pre-race insults and sledging were included in the entry fee! Needless to say, there was value for money this week as the race organisers hurled mild abuse at those who wanted it and those who did not! One of the advantages of the new software is that it does the work for you – that is provided one does not poke at the laptop and upset the sequencing. Rodgers, standing in for McCrickard was forced to chastise one of the RDs who in an attempt to be helpful may have

initiated mayhem and complete carnage. Of course Rodgers was more than delighted to remonstrate with one of his colleagues!

Stephens has a belter

With Lynch on a deserved holiday after a hectic schedule of racing culminating in Winning Donard, the Hill & Dale Series and Carrauntoohil in recent weeks and Bailey nowhere to be seen, despite his love of this race, the door was open to lay claim to a coveted race win and what a race to win! Such is the prestige that Paddy Mallon, a former winner, availed of the VIP parking for those fortunate enough to have scored a victory in this race. Mallon was surrounded by his adoring fans and the great man was more than willing to proffer advice on how to tame this beast – follow your compass and get your bearings right! Advice that indeed served him well on a miserable night when most found getting to the 4 summits an impossibility. So, after the kit check was complete and the race briefing delivered off they went, with O'Hare taking the now obligatory start line video. 43 and a bit minutes later, Mark Stephens was first to break the tape and record his maiden Hill & Dale victory. There was a great scrap for second place with the impressive Jared Martin leading Colm Murtagh over the last peak. However, old age and treachery overcame youthful exuberance as Murtagh reeled him in and strode purposefully to take runner up spot by the narrow margin of 6 seconds. It was a great night for the youth with Martin third, Oisín Brennan (just home from University) 4th and 16 year old Conor McGrath 10th.



From Left to Right: Jared Martin (3rd, Ballydrain Harriers), Mark Stephens (1st, Newcastle AC) and Colm Murtagh (3rd, Newcastle AC).

Dickson continues to be a class apart

In the ladies race it was business as usual with the dominant Dickson recording another emphatic win, coming home 18th overall, just under two minutes ahead of Aine McCann who in turn had almost a minute to spare over third placed Sarah Graham. Sarah had prepared well for the race with some warm weather training in Portugal augmented with an enforced hydration schedule.



First Lady Esther Dickson from Newry AC.

McKee was there, but where was Hen?

As predicted by last week's scribe, the return of Willie McKee was only a matter of time. And so it came to pass that he appeared on Thursday night. Admittedly, it was only in the role of spectator, but he is back training at a reasonable level and has used the bacon slicer to good effect since the last of the Easter eggs was consumed. He is looking lean again and one can detect a hunger for racing in his demeanour. Without doubt he will be a main challenger to Lynch et al in 2020. While some were racing and others was watching, others still were getting a sneaky recce of the Meels in. Alas, most drive past the Meels on their way to Loughshannagh and multiple sources revealed that Hen was out on a training run in preparation for resuming battle with Grant next week. Grant had a fine run at Loughshannagh (finishing 17th in 49:04) and was overheard telling Mary Margaret that he knew Hen wouldn't show because he knew the result of this now very personal and very ugly battle was a foregone conclusion. Moreover, he added that he was claiming this as a moral victory.

View from the funnel

Morgan had built a finish funnel to maximise value for money for spectators. With a bog 50 yards before the finish and a really sharp 90 degree turn right on the line, there was great amusement as many fell foul of the seemingly engineered hazard before their race was run. Perhaps the highlight of the evening was the arrival of Thomas Morrow. Morrow, who had been up since stupid o'clock to get a flight from Bristol to take part, strode purposefully down the final hill before disappearing into the aforementioned bog and disappeared out of sight completely. He emerged totally unscathed and regrettably there was no photographic evidence to shame him further. Last week we mentioned the rivalry between Morgan and Nugent – something it appears that the latter was totally oblivious to! Well, Morgan got his man this week crossing the line 2 seconds ahead of his nemesis. Nugent remarked, 'now I know we are rivals, I'll have to try a bit harder'. Ouuuchhh!

International cuisine at the end

One of the highlights of this race is the mandatory visit to the Horseshoe Bar for analysis and discretion of performance. As always, there is always a bit of food to replenish lost carbs and provide ballast for the stout. Thanks to Rita who provided a gourmet alternative to the traditional egg sandwiches. Connell Nugent will be raging when he hears what he missed! This week the distribution of souvenir mugs was predicated on the criteria 'who hasn't got one yet!' – as good a reason as any other, one suspects! A special word of thanks to the many volunteers who stand on mountain tops for a considerable length of time each and every week to ensure the safety and well-being of our competitors. Thanks to those who managed the entries and processed the results or acted as sweepers. We are indebted to you all.

Race 9 – Meelmore/Meelbeg

Thursday 13 June is the penultimate race of the series, the Meels, organised by the El Dude brothers, McCrickard & McMurray. We ask that people car share where possible as parking is limited at the Happy Valley. Please follow the directions of the parking marshals as they try to ensure the road is passable for other users not involved in the series. There is an expected downward turn in the

weather, so please come prepared for the worst. If the weather is good, don't forget the midge spray as it might just save you from a load of bites!





