

Flyers Eye View of the Southern 50 - 2009

After last years event our team were seriously contemplating the 50 mile event (well, some of us were!) but as it happened two of our original team had to pull out (Paul and Stephen) and so Martin and I had to try and find two other mugs – sorry, team mates – to join us, so we thought 50k would be more attractive.

Well, we managed to persuade two of our Networks, Justin and Phill, to join us (the poor fools) and the job of training them into the ways of the Phoenix Flyers began. We organised three practice hikes and for realism always made sure that it was pouring down with rain and very muddy when we did them! This didn't seem to put them off too much and so it was that we turned up on the Friday night for our final team meeting in the pub conveniently located next door to the start. It was at this point that Martin and I mentioned the “no stopping and no sitting down” rules that we adhere to on race day (must have slipped our minds earlier) oh and there will probably be quite a bit of ‘light jogging’ as well, oh and don't eat the sausage rolls! As we had new team mates we set ourselves some new targets, which were to finish as a team, in daylight, and in time to see the England rugby match.

When we got woken in what seemed like the middle of the night for breakfast Phill looked none too happy, and Justin was very quiet. After kit check I spotted the two teams starting just before us (we were last 50k team out) who we thought would be our main rivals; our old adversaries the undertakers, and the lads from Torbay. Now the Torbay boys looked like they meant business with their go faster footwear, lean mean rucksacks, shorts (actually are they allowed shorts? I'm sure somewhere in the rules it says long trousers!!), and a determined look on their faces. I then looked into the classroom where my team was preparing to see a mass of plasters, Vaseline and Ralgex being applied – and that was before the start!

Then we were off into the frosty morning, and the route setters had given us a nice gentle start – up Watlington hill! Well that warmed us all up and we soon settled into our rhythm. The ground was mainly still frozen and very icy in patches, we saw a cyclist fall off his bike at one point on the ice, but he was up and away before we got to him. Then we started passing teams, always a good feeling, and Martin and Phill started to give them names – like team mullet, team lost, the oldies, team waddle etc). But as we passed more and more they ran out of ideas.

We had a few issues at checkpoints this time, when at one we couldn't actually get in the door because people were blocking it and not wanting to move, and at another where there didn't seem to be anyone around to take our tickets – was this a conspiracy ??

At about the third checkpoint (or maybe the fourth, I'm getting old and the memory isn't what it was) there was the first board showing times and we saw that the Torbay boys were already 30 minutes up on us! I told our team they had obviously gone off too fast, it was still a very long way and we would reel them back in – hopefully! A little after that we came across our other main rivals, the undertakers, and one of them had a bad cramp problem. We were sorry to see that and wished them well, but for us it was good news. When we got to the checkpoint where our GSL was helping we saw that the Torbay team was now 40 minutes ahead – still a long way to go I kept saying!

We were now into the second half of the race and the pace was starting to tell a bit with our two new boys and we started to bring out the little treats to lift the spirits – the secret recipe bread pudding and Lesley's special shortbread went down very well with some energy drink and pain killers!

This may have contributed to the team hallucination that we had at checkpoint 17 where we thought we saw Santa and some elves, and someone said I sat on his knee, but that surely didn't happen, did it? Justin was struggling a bit with his knee so we stopped the downhill jogging to help ease that a bit. We did like the Valentine themed checkpoint, and the heart shaped biscuits were very tasty – thanks.

We were now in to the final 10k and Martin broke out his secret weapon, some super strong energy drink they use down his rowing club in what looked like test tubes – and was bright blue, we all took some down and within 5 minutes we were living up to our name and flying! By now the frost and ice had melted where the sun got to and there were two down and ups across very sticky muddy fields that really slowed us down. At checkpoint 19 we were told that the other 50k team were only 10 minutes in front, if that was the case they must have slowed a lot and that gave us fresh hope, so we were off and Justin forgot about his knee. But Phill was struggling with blisters on his heels and then Martin had his old enemy – cramp – strike quite badly, followed by a stitch. Still we pushed on and reached the final checkpoint desperate to see how close we were – 40 minutes we were told, the previous checkpoint had been wrong, or winding us up!

There was a sense of deflation but Justin picked us up again by setting the challenge of finishing in under 8 hours. So we were off again on the final push into Watlington, through familiar streets and then round the back of the college to the finish, Justin and I won the dash to the line, with Martin and then Phill hobbling in at the back. The usual feelings of relief to finish, and to stop – with the pain and suffering starting to kick in. When Phill took his boots off one of his socks was covered in blood from a burst blister, and when I took mine off I got cramp !

We knew we hadn't won but thought we had got second and that would be great – we had also finished as a team, in daylight, and we had time for a shower before going down the pub to watch the rugby! We celebrated finishing with our explorer team, who had been there to cheer us in at the finish, and bought them dinner as they had done a fantastic time of five and a half hours for the 30k. We then all hobbled back to the college for a cup of tea and an early night.

As it turned out we did come second, with a time of 7hrs and 59 minutes, with Torbay winning in 7hs 22 (great performance lads) and the Undertakers third. A huge “Well Done” to Justin and Phill for coming in and doing so well on their first time. We didn't let them stop or sit down once, they were clearly suffering but didn't moan and got on with it – respect guys, you are ‘Flyers’ now!

A big well done to our Explorer team who put in a brilliant performance and won their event for the first time – by one minute! It was great to see the teams of big hunky lads going up for the lower places, and then our team of 3 girls and a young lad just up from scouts go up to collect the winners trophy! They deserved their victory as they prepared hard and were single mindedly determined to do well – with a clear strategy of how they were going to do that. So well done to Gemma, Gemma, Kelly and Giacomo – great effort.

Now guys, about next year – who fancies 50 miles?!

Team 54 – Phoenix Flyers

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