

# The 25<sup>th</sup> Green Belt Relay

## Who's running...

### So let's start introducing the teams.

First of all, here's the list of all clubs, and the number of teams. The intros are then ordered in reverse order of the number of Green Belt Relay appearances.

26.2 RRC (x 3)  
BeaRCat (x 2)  
Beckenham RRC (x 2)  
Boston Consulting Group (x 2)  
British Airways  
Burgess Hill Runners (x 3)  
Clapham Chasers (x 3)  
Clapham Pioneers (x 2)  
Clapham Runners (x 1)  
Dulwich Runners (x 2)  
Ealing Eagles (x 3)  
Elmbridge RRC  
Hampton Wick Wanderers  
Havering 90 Joggers  
Hillingdon AC  
London Front Runners (x 4)  
Maidenhead AC (x 2)  
Queen's Park Harriers  
Ranelagh Harriers (x 3)  
Serpentine (x 3)  
SHAEF Shifters  
Stragglers (x 2)  
Sutton Striders (x 2)  
Team Bushy  
Thames Hare & Hounds (x 2)  
Waverley Harriers  
Wimbledon Windmilers

### Sutton Striders.



Sutton Striders are a new team this year, and are bravely entering two teams on their very first attempt.

This is not quite as mad as it may sound because their team captain is none other than Bryn Reynolds, who has competed in eight GBRs for two teams (mainly Clapham Chasers but also Stock Exchange), run 17

legs (he did 3 in 2012), won ten of those, and broken stage records in most of them. So he probably knows what he's doing.

The club was founded in January 2020, just about the worst imaginable time to start a new club, but despite the pandemic has thrived and grown, and we're looking forward to seeing them.

So welcome to Sutton Striders, and welcome back Bryn!

### Wimbledon Windmilers

They've entered a team for the very first time the day before Alex sent in our t-shirt order, so their last minute timing is impeccable. And they're a big, friendly, well-established local club, so are most welcome.



They're led by captain Phil Reeves, who's been making up for lost time by being extremely thorough and positive. He'll be the only team captain who's really never done this before, so let's make the start of their GBR adventures a special one.

### Maidenhead AC

Maidenhead were brand new to the event last year, entering one team. They finished in an impressive 11th place overall, and 6th in the mixed event. Along the way



Frances Sille picked up a stage win in stage 8 (which is incorrectly missing from our stage winner list - will fix that), Ellen Easten was lead vet in stage 7 and Tom Easten picked up wins in the vets category for our two most brutal stages, 4 and 16.

This year they're entering two teams and I think were the first team to enter,

so I guess they must have enjoyed it. Team captain is Nick Sille, keeping his job from last year.

So welcome back Maidenhead!

### Boston Consulting Group



When BCG first contacted me for last year's race I put quite a lot of energy into making sure they understood the challenges of the race - this race is a big ask if you're not an experienced running club (and as a former consultant myself I perhaps have a jaundiced view of competitors). I needn't have worried - they turned out to be a superbly well organised, cheerful and competitive addition to the GBR and

perhaps one to watch in challenging for prizes this year.

They turned up with two teams last year. One of them finished in a very strong 7th place, picking up the 2nd place mixed team prize and mixing it with our most experienced and competitive clubs, while the other was 32nd.

Team captain Simon Shenton led by example with a 4th and a 2nd place in stages 5 and 12, and this year is joined by Natalja Dezinova, Junyi Chen and Anneka Nelson in their leadership team.

Welcome back BCG.

### **Hillingdon AC**

Hillingdon joined in the GBR fun in 2019 and proved to be a reliable and well organised



addition to the race, without really troubling the trophy engravers too much. They came back in 2022 with a dramatic rise up the leaderboard to 14th place overall, helped by a stage win from Hannah Wells in stage 10 and perhaps the most dramatic (and certainly most beautifully

photographed) stage win we've ever had from James Laing in stage 16.

They return this year with two teams again, led by the excellent Andy Wood as team captain and John Dobbs sharing the load.

Welcome back Hillingdon AC.

### **Waverley Harriers**

Waverley Harriers joined the GBR for the first time in 2018 and followed up in 2019, and we're delighted to get them back after a rest last year.

They started with a strong 22nd place overall and followed this up with 27th in the big



2019 field, and had plenty of great individual performances, notably Christopher Peck's stage win on the tough hills of stage 17 in a desperately tight sprint finish down the hill into Merstham, and his big smile on his warm-down wearing his winner's t-shirt.

Team captain is John McKenna who's run in 6 stages, despite his club only appearing in 2 races; in 2019 he ran four, including the brutal hills of 4 and 16 as well as 8 and 20, so I'm guessing he'll be quite focused on getting his runners lined up so he doesn't have to do that again.

Welcome back Waverley Harriers



### SHAEF Shifters

SHAEF Shifters first entered the race in 2018 and have been in every race since, and proved to be both well organised and really competitive. Last year they finished 15th place overall



with Rhys Powell winning stage 11 and Naomi Johns the lead supervet in stage 21. This followed 10th place overall in 2019, and 7th overall in 2018 with a stage win from Will Rawling.

Team captain is Ian Fullen, who has run in every GBR since 2016 for four different teams (Team Bushy, SMTC, Shaef Shifters, Bushy Shifters) and

picked up a stage win on his first ever stage, finishing in some style at Letty Green with a sort of outstretched arm Superman kind of thing, and a very big smile. Welcome back SHAEF Shifters.

### BeaRCat Running Club

BeaRCat have run in only three GBRs yet have 108 stage finishes to their trickily-spelt



name, having run with two teams in the last two events and aiming to do the same this year. This enthusiasm is matched by consistent reliability and gutsy running in the mould of outgoing captain Alun Thomas.

Last year they finished 26th and 29th, with Jess Smith the leading vet on stage 17 and Richard Willoughby the leading supervet on stage 19.

Their new captain is Jon Lear, a six-stage veteran of their

previous races, with stages 12, 14 and 15 suggesting he likes to get them out of the way early on Sunday.

Looking forward to seeing you back BeaRCat

### Clapham Pioneers

Clapham Pioneers have only been in the GBR since 2018 yet have made a huge splash (and



with their bright orange kit, you can't really miss them). On their first attempt they finished 6th overall in quite a closely bunched finish. They returned in 2019 with two teams - a men's team who finished 6th overall and a women's team who took home the trophy for 2nd place in the women's event. So last year they were back with three teams and even stronger - their men's team was 4th

overall and just a couple of minutes off a trophy, with stage wins from Matt Raeside and

Michael White in stages 7 and 14. Their women's team was 3rd in their category, and their mixed team 43rd.

So very much a team to watch in this year's race. They return with 2 teams this year, captained by Andrew Thompson, who won the supervet category in stage 20 last year and was second supervet in 21 the year before.

Welcome back Pioneers.

### Queen's Park Harriers

Queen's Park will be celebrating their fifth year of Green Belt Relays this year, having entered their first team back in 2017, and so far hauled seven teams and 152 people around the race.



Over this time they've notched up four stage wins and some very competitive overall finishes - Joanna Braine won stage 10 in 2017, helping QPH to finish second mixed team and 9th overall in their debut GBR. Johnny Suttle is a two-time winner of the brutal stage 16, and in 2018 also won stage 18 to make it a weekend double and a team 10th place overall. Matt Kitching's win in the opening stage of the 2019 race left Queen's Park at the top of the

overall leaderboard for a brief while - they finished that one in a tightly bunched group in 11th place, while 2022 saw them with a solid 30th overall.

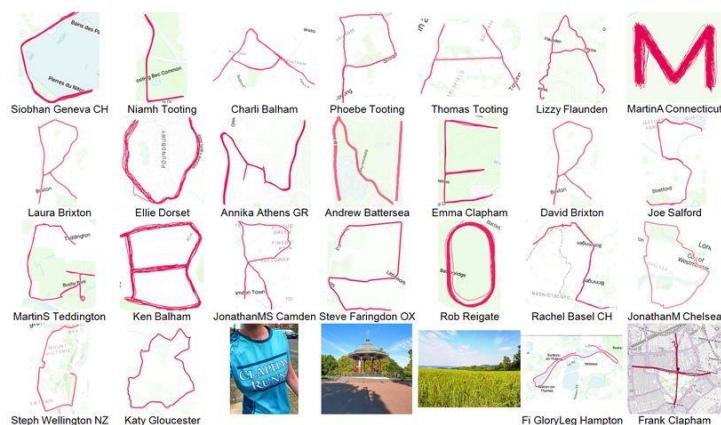
They're back this year with one team under the captainship of Tim Lewin, who in his four GBRs has run stage 16 twice and also stage 5 and 2, so seems to enjoy the tough ones.

Welcome back Queen's Park Harriers

### Clapham Runners

I felt I had to include this picture, the result of Clapham Runners' 2020 lockdown GBR and a real highlight of a tough year.

This will be Clapham Runners' 6th GBR, having entered a team in the last five races since 2016. They've racked up a series of good steady finishes each year, but mainly



they're just a great bunch of people, and Martin Arms' heroic efforts to compete despite living in Connecticut are the stuff of legend.

I'll miss their outgoing captain Frank Elston, who provided peerlessly clear and useful race feedback - he's made the race better and safer. This year's captain will be Ken Willis, who has run six different stages in

his appearances to date and got steadily quicker - I suspect he was second supervet last



time in stage 3, but they were a bit coy about giving their ages (we all get to that point in life...).

Clapham Runners, looking forward to seeing you.

### **Team Bushy**

Team Bushy have entered a team each year since 2016, running in 2017 under the name Team Kirsty to support their team captain Kirsty Bangham. If I remember rightly, Kirsty and Dan actually got engaged during that race, so that worked.



During this five year run they've been well-organised and steady team finishers with some striking individual runs. They got a stage win on their first appearance from Ian Fullen (see team intro 6). Rob Phillips and Justine Albert picked up first vet places in 2017, and Justine picked up two supervet wins in last year's race too. Team captain this year is once again Zoe Faiz, running in her fourth GBR. She

finished stage 22 last year with a memorable guard of honour while carrying her son, which was the highlight of stage 22 for me. He got a t-shirt too. We're expecting to see him lining up for Team Bushy in about 2039.

Great to have you back Team Bushy.

### **Thames Hare & Hounds**

Thames are a club with a rich history and the current holders of the Green Belt, having won the last two events with blisteringly quick mixed teams – in just those two events they won 26 of the 44 stages overall, and eight women's stage wins too. They broke 14 stage or category records just last year.



But they're actually relative newcomers to the Green Belt Relay - this is a relatively recent run of form. They ran one event in 2005 where they were 8th overall, then vanished, although they provided some useful ringers to other teams in the missing years – their runner David Symons has run 20 GBR stages, won seven of them for four different clubs and won the Green Belt winner and King Of The Mountains in 2006.

The whole club finally returned in 2016 with one team who took

home the mixed team prize and 4th overall. In 2017 they were back in force and came within 5 minutes of winning the event outright and took home the mixed prize and the Kings Of The Mountains too (very unusually – it's almost always won by the overall winners). Captain Matt left that one with a look of fierce disappointment and determination, in his impeccably polite way.

2018 saw them retain 2nd place and the mixed prize, then it all came together in 2019 with a dominant win and very quick time, which they repeated in 2022. In those two events their B team also came 8th and 10th.

It would take a while to go through the individual achievements there, but you get the picture. It's worth calling out the women in those teams - Katy Hedgethorn, Rebekah Edgar and Natalie Seymour - only one other club has won the Green Belt with a mixed team.

Anyone beating Thames in 2023 is very likely to win.

The team is led by Matt Jones. Matt has run ten GBR stages – he won on both days in 2005 and again in 2019, along with a win in 2017 and 2018, and he held the stage 1 course record from 2005 until it was beaten by his own teammate Richard Ollington last year.

So well done again to Thames Hare & Hounds, and welcome back.

### **Ealing Eagles**

The Eagles have entered every GBR since 2015 and usually in force - over 300 of them have now competed. They only had one team last time but they're back with three this



year - they're one of those teams whose endless enthusiasm and reliability keep the event going. They were 27th in last year's race and a look through their history makes me wonder if they're actually deliberately targeting that number for some sort of gambling sting. Along the way they've picked up stage wins - Bernard Sexton won stage 13 in 2018, while in 2019 Ealing's women picked up two stage wins

from Jenny Bushell and Melissah Gibson (and the best-ever stage winner photo of Melissah flying down Box Hill, as well as the stage record), and did it again last year with stage wins for Rebecca Jackson and Sarah Bailey in stages 5 and 18. Claire Morris also holds the vets stage record for the old stage 14 route (and as such will do forever). So despite my silly comments about their consistent placing, they may well be a team to watch out for.

They're led this year by a trio of captains - Angela Duff, Caroline Rush and Alan Krisciunas. Angela has run in every GBR since 2016, Caroline is a veteran from 2018 and 19, and Alan ran some of 2019 and had a top ten finish in a tough stage in 2022, so another to keep an eye on.

### **Burgess Hill Runners**

Burgess Hill have run in the last seven GBRs with some big turnouts which means they've finished 380 stages (and that's not counting the fact that they tended to double up). Last year they were 39th, 41st and 42nd. They won the Toilet Seat in 2014 and again in 2018.

They're good at bringing up the rear of the event without slowing it down, and as race director I like knowing they're there as they're organised and reliable.

They're by no means always back markers either - there are clubs in the GBR who have never had a top-10 stage finish, but Burgess Hill have had quite a few. It's also a club dominated by veterans (only 29 of those 380 finishes were seniors), and their commitment to supporting all their runners is brilliant.





Team captain is once again Jay Wadey, veteran of six GBRs each on a different stage, so has now run more than half the route. Whenever I see him out on the course smiling I just know everything's going OK. Burgess Hill also provide us with Kevin Walker, who's driven our first aiders around the course with calm, lovable professionalism. Welcome back Burgess Hill.

### **Hampton Wick Wanderers**

HWW first entered the GBR in 2012 and have run in every event since, so are entering their ninth event this year. That's a mighty achievement for any club but it's especially so for HWW, who are more a bunch of neighbours and friends rather than a big running club. Everybody needs good neighbours...

They're reliably competitive too, with consistently quick overall times and a handful of top ten stage finishes - supervet Steve Wateridge especially keeps putting in highly respectable



times and is one to watch in that category, but a bunch of others have put in dozens of great runs, and some of them look like they're not far off doing every stage.

They shared the Wissahickon Trophy in 2014 for most supportive club when one of their runners (who was also a doctor) stopped to help a runner who had collapsed on the long hot towpath on stage 8. I was in my first year as director and in the middle of Epping Forest without a mobile signal, which is just about worst case, but I needn't have worried because

the understated superheroes of HWW just saw what needed doing and did it. Thank you once again.

Team captain this year is Simon Cornish, taking over from Kieran O'Flynn. Simon has done three GBRs, the last one in 2017, so knows what he's doing. Very much looking forward to seeing them again.

Welcome back Hampton Wick Wanderers

### **Havering 90 Joggers**

We're starting to get into double figures here in GBR appearances. Havering 90 have completed 10 green belts since first turning up in 2010 and are coming back for another one. That's a real achievement, not least because Havering is just about as far away from the race start as it's really possible to get and still be in the home counties. I make a few allowances for them including generally meeting up in Liverpool Street to hand over t-shirts and numbers (and perhaps enjoy a spot of lunch), but it's still a massive trek.



Havering tend to be at the joggers' end of the field rather than challenging for stage wins although it's not that simple - Bayo Mabo was lead supervet in stage 3 and Christina



Clementson lead supervet in stage 4, and they had lots of sparky runs challenging for other category prizes.

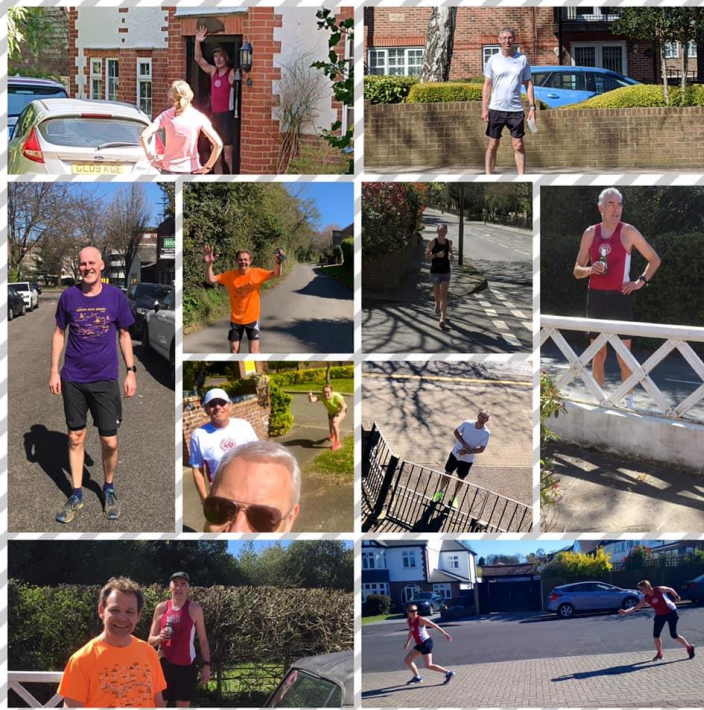
Brian Fry took over from long-standing captain Denis Mole for last year's race and resumes his role this year. Brian has run the

last three GBRs and put in some big performances last year in stages 5 and 16 (which together add up to a whole marathon). Looking forward to seeing them again. Welcome back Havering 90 Joggers.

### Beckenham RRC

Beckenham have been running the GBR since the Tony Blair era, and since 2007 have hauled a whopping 16 teams around the green belt.

They were first placed mixed team and 6th overall in 2010, second in the women's event in 2016 and second veterans in 2017. Last year they were 17th overall.



Over the years they've racked up 8 stage wins, 5 of them just in 2009, and half of all their stage wins ever happened all in the same day - would love to know what they had for breakfast that morning. Marc Clayton picked up a double stage win that weekend having very narrowly failed to do the double the previous year. Melanie Burdett's win on stage 20 in 2010 remains their sole women's stage win although they've had plenty of category wins too.

They were also one of our clubs who kept the GBR alive during the COVID pandemic with a brilliant socially-distanced event.

Team captain once again is Paul Fletcher. He's run 14 GBR stages since 2010, so in another four or five races might even complete the entire course. All our long-standing clubs have one or two GBR fanatics who keep them going through thick and thin, and Beckenham's is Paul.

Welcome back Beckenham.

### Elmbridge RRC

It's 2006. Few people have yet heard of Barack Obama or Lionel Messi. A small weekly 5k race then called the Bushy Park Time Trial is starting to think about starting up a second park run, while its founder Paul Sinton-Hewitt runs his first GBR stages (for Ranelagh). The

GBR meanwhile is trying out a brand new course, stretched from 20 stages to 22 and a load of new changeovers. Smartphones are still a year away from being invented, so navigating round the GBR course is still a case of following a sketchy diagram and hoping you spot the arrows and sawdust before some malevolent dog walker changes them. And Elmbridge RRC enter their first team into the Green Belt Relay.

Since then they have entered 19 teams and finished 414 individual stages to date - only seven clubs have run more than that. It's a big achievement and testimony to some astonishing consistency and organisation. They've won plenty of things along the way - they were 9th overall and won the mixed prize in 2006 on their debut, following this up



with two successive 6th places. They've mostly been well inside the top 20 ever since, and last year's 22nd place suggests they're heading back to that kind of form.

Individually they've picked up just one men's stage win, Tim Doran in stage 1 in 2007, but their women have picked up nine - six by Nikki Nicholson, who has run seven GBRs since 2008, and

the other three by super supervet Jane Davies. Last year's race saw Mike Hart first supervet in stage 4 and Dorothy Wilkinson was first supervet in both stage 5 and 17.

Elmbridge also ran an entire Green Belt Relay in 2021, running in pairs, dealing with some very heavy conditions, and sending in useful feedback about revised routes (they were the first to try out the current stage 14) as well as pictures of smiling runners and cake.

Team captain is once again Rich Nicholson, who has run 26 GBR stages since 2006 - not including his 2021 ones. There are 24 entire clubs in our history who haven't run as many as Rich has just by himself. This would be easily enough to have covered the whole course but he seems to keep wanting to do the tough ones - he's done stage 4 four times and stage 16 six times. As a previous intro noted - every club needs its GBR fanatic...

Welcome back Elmbridge.

### **Clapham Chasers**

We have a small handful of superclubs who come back year after year with fleets of minibuses and what seems like hundreds of eager runners, and Clapham Chasers are one of those. They've done every race since 2006 (like Elmbridge in yesterday's post), and in that time completed just shy of 900 stages - only four clubs can beat that.

They're also serial award winners, record breakers and stage victors. They picked up the Mixed prize on their second appearance in 2007, (and 4th overall), were then third overall the next time (and 12th, and 22nd), and the following year they won the grand slam of the Green Belt outright and the women's race too. After that they were reliable top ten finishers most years and came back last year with a win in the women's race again, and 9th overall.

An amazing 50 Clapham Chasers have won women's stages, and two of those, Moana Burt and Justina Heslop, were outright stage winners too in 2008 (am happy to say I was thumped by Justina in that one and she absolutely bossed it right from the start). 33 men have won stages too, giving them a total that only two clubs can beat. Just in last year's race the women won ten stages on their way to the win, and they hold quite a few stage and category records.





Joe Spraggins returns as team captain. Joe has run the last four GBRs and won two stages and had three 2nd places too. Captaining a team is the GBR's toughest job; finding the time to also run is hard; winning them too is

superhuman.  
Welcome back Clapham Chasers.

### **British Airways AC**

British Airways are one of our most prolific prize winners, having won the Corporate Prize essentially in perpetuity. I retired the prize because the trophy got full so we just gave it to them to keep.



They're a one-team club but have still run in every single GBR since 2004, and have put in a run of extraordinary consistency either inside the top 20 or just outside it. Their high point was the 2014 race where they came 6th overall and narrowly outside the trophies (I mean, as well as the corporate one), and they had another top ten finish

back in 2007.

The founder of this success was the late Brian Bennett, who ran eight GBRs between 2005 and 2012 despite already being a V65 when he started and still getting top 20 stage finishes well into his seventies. It's backed up by quite a few runners who have run dozens of stages over the years. They have won three men's stages during that time – by Dave Dixon and Mark Taylor – while Frankie Hogge took two stage wins just last year as well as the stage 3 women's record. BA hold quite a few category stage records – Dave Dixon's 2019 V50 record for stage 5 looks hard to beat, as does Duncan Wright's in stage 10 (and Dave holds the old course record for 10 too), and the same goes for Maria Jovani's stage 15 V45 record set last year. Then of course there's Roderick Hoffman, who was awarded a Stage Winner's t-shirt for running the old stage 22 during the cancelled 2021 race, and as such was the last GBR runner ever to finish at the Hawker Centre.

In other words, if you line up against a BA runner, however old they may look, don't be too surprised if they vanish off into the distance ahead of you...

Team captain is Chris Kelly, who has run a ludicrous 30 GBR stages - only four runners have run more - and including stage 4 eight times. He's also been a source of sage advice to me since our event relaunch in 2014 as well as an extremely effective team captain and I'd like to thank him for that.

Welcome back British Airways, the world's favourite GBR corporate club

### **London Front Runners**

I'm slightly surprised to see that Front Runners only started GBR-ing in 2004, as the idea of a GBR without them just seems all wrong. They caught up quickly with a combination of both large-scale enthusiasm as well as consistent achievement - they've completed well over a thousand stages (only three clubs have run more, and took longer to do so), and they've won some sort of club prize in almost every race they've entered. In both 2018 and



2019 they turned up with five teams, making up nearly 10% of the whole field. A sustained spell of quick races saw them win the Green Belt outright in 2008 (their B team came 7th in that one too). They've not won it since but they've been second four times and third another four

times. They won the mixed prize in 2012, 2014, they've been second in that twice, and they were second in the women's race in 2017. They have made the top 5 every single year since 2007, and usually have two teams in the top 10 - in both 2014 and 2015 they had two teams in the top 5. It's a ridiculous record.

Individually they've had plenty of stage wins (42 in total), with Shaun Whelan an eight-time stage winner and James Gillanders six, although fewer than I was expecting - when you look at their results, their consistent success comes from across-the-board teamwork much more than individual dominance. The exception is their winning 2008 team when they won 11 of the 22 stages, with four runners getting double wins (Callum Martin, Chris Beecham, Harry Wilson and that Shaun Whelan again). But generally they're masters at getting good, keen and extremely well organised teams together.

They're also good at enjoying the weekend. Alex and I stayed with them in the Brentwood Holiday Inn on what was effectively our first date in the 2014 race (it's a long story...) and their team dinner looked like absolutely loads of riotous fun.

Returning team captain is Julian Williams, who's run 20 stages since 2008 and epitomises the consistent competitiveness of his team, with a string of top-10 finishes. He was 8th and top supervet in stage 11 last year, returning the next morning for stage 12 with a 13th place. Having seen their dinners, I can see why stage 12 is a tough sell...

Welcome back to the London Front Runners.

### **Ranelagh Harriers**

In their last four years they've been 5th, 4th, 3rd and 2nd overall - what about this year? It could be a real belter.

Ranelagh were the Brazil of the early Green Belt Relay, and former London marathon winner Hugh Jones was their Pelé. They didn't show up to all of them, but when they did they were unbeatable. Hugh won the first nine stages he ran. I raced him on his last win in



2006 and it was such a great experience it's probably why I'm still doing this race director thing now.

Only two teams have finished more GBR stages than Ranelagh Harriers – 1,164 – and only



one can beat them in terms of prizes. They won the first one, then won everything in a golden period from 2000 to 2004 - two Green Belts in succession in 2000 and 2002 (there wasn't a 2001 race due to the foot & mouth outbreak), plus the 2000 ladies' event and the veterans' race too, the vets' race in 2003 and 2nd overall in 2004, and the Toilet Seat in those last two as well. There was

then a renaissance in 2008-9 where they won the ladies, vets and mixed trophies. Since 2016 they've been picking up second-place prizes and getting steadily quicker until winning the men's race and second overall last year, only 27 minutes off the lead.

Ranelagh's three most prolific GBR runners are women – Sonia Rowland (20), Sue Ashley (24) and Marie Synott-Wells (26). They're all stage winners too - Marie has picked up seven stage wins too, so far, and holds supervet records in stage 5, as well as the old route of 14 and 15.

Team captain this year is Suzy Whatmough, resuming her role from last year. This is her third GBR, and last year she was second in two mountain stages – 4 and 18 – as well as organising Ranelagh's best race in years.

Looking forward to seeing them - welcome back Ranelagh Harriers

## 26.2 RRC

Only four clubs contested the first GBR in 1995 – Stragglers, plus our closest local rivals Ranelagh and 26.2, plus Dulwich Park. John Major was still Prime Minister, Blackburn Rovers were league champions (it still makes me smile, and always will). Many of us didn't have any kind of mobile phone back then – imagine trying to organise a GBR team when you can't even call people - how on earth did that work?

Over the years 26.2 have got 37 teams out and finished 790 stages, and only missed one event, in 1998. Like Stragglers and many other GBR clubs they're about training newcomers and socialising as much as racing and like those clubs they're also quite capable of springing surprises – they won the mixed event in 2005 and have plenty of top 10 overall finishes in their record. They've also won the Toilet Seat twice, which is harder than it sounds: their genuine delight last year when we handed over their mementos was a real highlight of that night.

They've had 5 stage wins – two for Janet Sharp in 1995, one for Dave Wilson in 1996, one for Jan Heather in 1997, and one for Aimee Billington in 2010. Dave Wilson also has another claim to fame though – not only has he run 40 GBR stages (he's missed just two

GBRs in our whole history, and only one runner has done more stages), he's also run every single stage at least once and most of them twice. And he's still going too.



Richard "Captain" Kirk is the returning captain. He's run every GBR since 2014, which might not be much by 26.2 standards but it would be in any normal club. At Stragglers we got into a habit of booing when we said the words "26.2" in any context (I did it instinctively in a business meeting once, which took some

explaining), but decided that's not very friendly so we took to cheering each time instead.

So welcome back 26.2 (HOORAY!).

### Dulwich Runners

We're now into our top 3 – GBR teams who have been in pretty much every race: the completists who just won't miss a race, no matter what. Team captain Ange Norris leads by example in this respect - in 2017, Ange was running in a masters race in Birmingham and



somehow still made it to run stage 9 of the GBR that day: how is that even possible?

There's a core of GBR fanatics who keep this race going, and she's one of them.

Dulwich Runners have run in every GBR since 1996, having missed only the pilot race. They usually turn up with two teams – it's been one for the last few but they're back to two this year. So in 23 events they've had 39 teams and 819 stage finishes. On their debut they came a close second, and finished in the top 10 almost every year since, or near as dammit, and their punchy

6th place last year seems like a strong return to form even if it didn't quite qualify for the 2nd Mixed prize. Over that time they've won the women's race in 1999 and 2014, and the mixed prize in 2000.

Individually they've won 18 men's stages, and a whopping 54 women's stages, including 16 just in the past seven races. They had an especially good haul last year, when Katie Smith and Clare Norris won stages 6 and 12, Clare was also lead vet/supervet in stage 1, Katie also lead vet in 21, Lucy Pickering lead supervet in stage 8, and Ange Norris lead supervet in stage 10 and stage 19, while Mike Williams was first supervet on stage 16.

Captain Ange has run 20 GBR stages, won four of them and picked up category wins in many of the others, and holds a bunch of stage bests, and she's one of those people who always smiles when she's running. But even Ange is eclipsed in the barminess stakes by some of her clubmates, notably Martin Morley (38 stages and third on our overall individual leaderboard), who has run every single GBR stage at least once between 1996 and 2019, and was a consistent top-ten finisher for most of that time. Wow.

Welcome back Dulwich Runners.



## Serpentine

Here are some mind-blowing stats for you: one in five of every GBR stage ever run was won by a Serpentine runner, and a quarter of all women's stage winners. One in eight of all GBR stage runners ever was a Serpie. Wow.

Serpentine have run every GBR since 1996 and for much of that time have dominated the event. They've had 89 teams and 1,880 stage finishes in that time. They've won the women's race fourteen times and the Green Belt nine times, and they've come second a further five times. No other club (yet) comes anywhere close in either volume or achievement.



This story started in 1996 when they showed up with three teams, came 4th overall and won the inaugural women's race. They were pretty good for a few years

without winning much until 2003 when they won the women's event, then again in 2004, and in 2005 won that and their first Green Belt too. Since then they've been either first or second every year until 2022 (usually first) and won the women's event almost every time they've contested it. They were the first team to win with a mixed team (in 2014) and their men's team also came third that year.

There are far too many individuals to call out, but will pick out a few: Hugh Torry has so far won 15 stages, Andrew Reeves 13 and Sarah Pemberton 9 – only twelve clubs have won more stages than they've each won just by themselves. Andrew is also the most prolific Serpie, having done 28 stages, including 13 wins and 10 second places. Hugh has only once been outside the top 2 in his 24 races.

Last year they finished third and picked up the men's second prize, and also the women's second prize and a stage win for Sophie Flanagan in stage 9. They also picked up lots of category wins – Hugh Torry in stage 5 and 18, Nicola Barberis Negra (stage 11), Karsten Buecker (stage 14), Rhiannon Needham (3), and Victoria Brown (11 and 13).

This is all possible through endless enthusiasm and great organisation and leadership. Ian Hodge, the Sir Alex Ferguson of the Green Belt Relay, led them for a long while with an understated, unflappable excellence. When we paused the event in 2013 his unflinching support was essential – they even ran their own version of the event that year around the Capital Ring to keep up the momentum. Over the years they've taken on an oversized part of the burden of marshalling duties too; when I assign a dangerous road crossing to Serpentine I always know it's going to get done without any fuss.

The returning captain this year is Hans Ho, a veteran of three GBRs and one of our most responsive, reliable and enthusiastic captains.

Welcome back to the mighty red machine of Serpentine Running Club.

## The Stragglers.

Only one team has run every GBR, and that's the club that founded it: The Stragglers. A few of them were having a drink one club night in the early 90s reflecting on the fact that with the construction of the QE2 Bridge it must now be possible to run around the whole of the outside of London. So they just did it - dug out some maps, stapled some orange arrows, and set up this improbable race of ours that's been going more or less ever since. It turned out you can't actually run across the QE2 bridge, but that didn't put anyone off.

Having come second in the first event we won it in 1996 and also won the inaugural vets' race. We won a Toilet Seat in 2005 and second in the 2010 race (yay!), then picked up second vets and second women in 2018 before winning the Walking Stick in 2019, then runner up last year. Two other Green Belt-winning teams, the Sunday Night Shandies (2003) and BPTT (2006) also had a bit of a Stragglers influence, being organised by Jim Desmond, the Bernie Ecclestone of the GBR.

During all this we've won 63 stages and run a massive 1,434 stages - only Serpentine have



run more stages and only Serpies, Ranelagh and Chasers have won more. The most prolific ever GBR runner is Straggler Tim Wood, who has run 43 GBR stages, including being the only person to run in every single race from the start in 1995 to 2017.

You will have seen some of our best runners because a lot of them are now part of the organising team. Former race directors Sean Davis and Lynda Pile are both serial stage winners. Course marker Alan

Pemberton has run 32 stages and won 2. Timekeepers Roy Reeder and Sue Waters have won multiple stages. Evan Bond, who designs our graphics and t-shirts, was a men's stage winner in a thrilling final stage in 2005 which Olympic legend Sonia O'Sullivan won overall. Returning as Stragglers captain is the irrepressible Simon Webb. He's run 18 stages since 2009 and is returning this year as Stragglers team captain, and he never seems to let being fully blind and partially deaf bother him (Straggler Simon Brazil tends to guide him, and has run 28 stages including the very first event). My favourite ever Stragglers event was a running pub crawl where it was so dark (and drunken) that Simon Webb had to tell us which way to go.

So a big thanks to the Stragglers who set up this race and who keep it all working, and we look forward to welcoming all you other clubs for what we think will be a very special 25th running.

C'mon Stragglers!