

GRAND PRIX 2008 – A summary

Congratulations to Kath Brierley - this year's 'Grand Prix Champion'. She becomes the fourth different winner in the past four years, showing how competitive and open the GP can be. And she had to score a (recent) record number of points to head the table.

The new GP format with an extra six races to choose from certainly encouraged participation – 20 Toddlies qualified this year (running a least 8 races, a minimum of 3 fell and 3 road must be included). This is double the number of qualifiers last year and the best for many seasons. It is encouraging to see that four new members, competing in the GP for the first time, made it into the top 20. And by my reckoning (which may be wrong as excessive drinking hampers the memory) seven runners will be receiving certificates for the first time – including Kath! All the more reason to get along to support them and all the others at our presentation do.

The total numbers of Toddlies who competed at least one GP race was 84 – an impressive turnout and again better than previous years. 70 of the 84 ran a fell race, whilst 48 ventured onto the roads. Whilst 20 managed to fulfil the GP criteria, 23 only ran one race and a further 9 only two. But over half of our active runners managed 4 races, halfway to the GP requirement. The average number of races run by a GP entrant was 5.39. Mel Blackhurst was 'Most Prolific Runner' with 17 races to her credit, followed by Kath Brierley and Claire Duffield on 15. So where were the Ultra men?

Moyra Parfitt, who was second in the GP, actually scored the highest average points per race and could well have won the GP if she had run at Oakworth. In fact everyone who was there scored their highest GP points at this race, (four runners gained over 100 points each) – a veritable Haul. Excluding the aberration of Oakworth, all but three runners who qualified, many of whom would regard themselves as better on the fells, scored their best GP points in short road races. It's not just how good you are, it's the extra couple of points scored in these sorts of races that can decide your position. All the more reason to do as many as you can.

Plenty of local races ensured good turnouts – Midgley, Blackstone Edge, Whittle Pike and Mytholmroyd on the fells – as did the weekend away at Coniston where 32 was the highest overall turnout, though this proved to be the hardest race for gaining points. By far the favourite road races were Helen Windsor and Ron Hill's followed by the trail races at Guiseley and Norland. Long road races were left to the specialists, attracting only two runners who did not qualify for the Road Championship (one of whom was Paul Brannigan, for reasons that become clear below). Overall, there were 158 Tod entries in the 12 road events and 295 for the 18 fell races.

Finally our 'Club Champion' had only four contenders this year. Needing to run one road and one fell race in short, medium and long categories it was targeted by Paul Brannigan as his only chance of winning something this year. Four of his qualifying points came in the last possible race in their categories; his season effectively starting at the end of August! It would have been a close result at the top had Nick Barber run a long road race. Did he realise? Was this ultimately a tactical victory by Paul; an old head triumphing over a younger's lack of awareness?

Hopefully this has been of some interest, but more importantly of encouragement to get lots more Toddlies competing in and qualifying for next year's GP. Good luck and go for it.

Dave O'Neill

(Full results for this year's club championships can be found at the back of this edition of the Torrier)