

World “Masterclass” - Two Golds for England !!!

report from Neil Goldsmith

On a warm sunny day over an 8K uphill only course rising 857 metres (2700 ft), England produced two world champions: Maureen Laney in the W50 category and Bernard Grant in the M55. Although these world championships don't get the coverage of the Olympics, winning a Gold is no less of an achievement. At the sharp end these are the world's elite. Maureen won by a clear minute over the Australian Louise Fairfax, who had spent the previous week altitude training in Sestriere.

The world Masters were held in Sauze D'Oulx a ski resort in Italy, popular with British skiers and not far from the French border. It is a compact resort with hotels and bars in a relatively small area. This added to the enjoyment as we were always bumping into other Brits. The Irish and Scots were well represented and there was a small but perfectly formed Welsh contingent.

In addition to the gold medal, England packed well in the O55 with Tony Hesketh in fourth and Dave Spedding fifth. Craig Roberts was fourth in the O40, Alex Mennary fourth in the O70, Dave Neill sixth in the O45 and Sue Becconsall fourth in the O45 ladies. Indeed, if team medals were on offer for races we would have done well in the team events as well.

I have been to the last three World Masters' events and I can honestly say that they are a great event. They are open to anyone of the appropriate age and they attract a large entry - around 800 this year for all categories. The biggest field was in the men's O40 with 136 runners. Support on the course is excellent and the atmosphere is really friendly. Naturally, with something to celebrate we had a great time at the medal ceremony ! Maureen standing on the podium waving the English flag and struggling to retain her balance was a sight to savour ! How she got home with a huge bottle of champagne which was nearly as big as her, I have yet to find out !

It was a good day for the Brits overall as Scotland's Susan Ridley won Bronze in the O35 and Wales won a bronze through John Collins in the men's O65. Results are on the web site www.wmrt2004.org.

The course was good and obviously suited our fell runners even though it was an “uphill only” (it did have a short bit of down hill) and the trials race was a pretty close fit to the profile – well done the trials course designers.

Next year the World Masters is in Keswick on an up and down course. Let's improve on this year's great performance and let's have a big turn out.

There was much comment this year about England vests and trials races. The races are open and therefore the concept of selection does not really apply. However, all of us who went think it is a great idea to have the English runners wearing England vests, they are easy to recognise and wearers get cheered. Club vests are more difficult to spot. Next year I think it would be great to get every English runner in an England vest – what do you vets out there think ?

The FRA committee would like the membership to express its opinions on how we should organise any possible trial races and what we should do about vests. There is now a forum on the FRA web site and you can express your views there.

One point to note, we had two runners disqualified. Although I cannot be sure of the reasons, I believe that it is for running without a vest. I understand that IAAF rules require a vest to be worn and for many continental races vests must be worn. It is likely that we will have to apply this rule in Keswick.