

Lakeland Classics – Top 20 Men All Time Ranking

Having read the recent articles by Bill Smith and Graham Breeze on the subject of the Lakeland Long 'A' races, and analysed the results of the 6 races included in the Lakeland Classics Trophy during the last three years, these two questions particularly intrigued me :

Past & Current Generations :

How do the performances of the current top fell runners compare with those fell runners who set most of the race records in the late 70's / early 80's.

Lakeland Records :

Why have most of the records for these 6 races not been broken during the last 20 – 25 years ; only a new record has been set in recent times at Three Shires.

Trying to answer these questions led me on a voyage of discovery through 30 years or more of fell running history and the results of 174 races. This article refers solely to Men's results, but the intention is to complete a similar analysis for Ladies.

'Statistical Bit' – Standard Race Times

The history of these Lakeland races has been illustrated by lists of winners and times achieved each year. But is it feasible to summarise and derive a single statistic for each runner's performance, no matter when they competed at these classic races ?

For the last 3 years the Lakeland Classics Trophy has ranked runners by race times rather than race position, allocating points from 100 to zero based on the winner's time being 100 time points. Several other race series and even Championships calculate rankings based on times, albeit that there are slightly modified methods of transforming race times into time points or percentages.

By establishing a common reference time – a Standard Time - for each race, it is feasible to assess all race times within the history of these races. Thus Time Points are calculated from relating the race times to the Standard Time for each race, rather than that year's winning time.

The setting of Standard Times is somewhat arbitrary, but so that it also acts as an achievable Target time for the top runners, Standard Times have been set at approx. 10% slower than the current records. This means that the measurement or yardstick for assessing performance ranges from 100 equivalent to the Standard Time up to close to 110 points if the Record time was equaled. Times slower than the Standard gain points from 100 downwards to zero.

The Standard Times (ST) set are for Duddon Valley 3.00, Ennerdale 3.40, Wasdale 3.50, Borrowdale 2.50, Three Shires 1.55, and for Langdale 2.05. Thus, these ST's are some 10 minutes slower than the current records for both Three Shires and Langdale, some 15 minutes for Duddon Valley & Borrowdale, 20 minutes for Ennerdale, and 25 minutes slower than the record for Wasdale.

Top Fell Runners PB's

From the Top 50 or so Best times (those better than Standard Times) for each race it is possible to extract the top runners' Personal Best times, highlight those times close to the current record, and the sequence of records since the races started.

	Name	Club	D-V	E-D	W-D	B-D	3-S	L-D
1	Billy Bland	Keswick	2.43.10	3.21.04	3.25.21	2.34.38	1.53.45	1.55.17
2	Gavin Bland	Borrowdale	2.44.21	3.23.45	3.53.56	2.39.47	1.45.08	1.56.13
3	Andy Styan	Holmfirth	2.51.38	3.23.44	3.30.51			1.55.03
4	Simon Booth	Borrowdale	2.49.05	3.21.24	3.44.50	2.35.18	1.51.10	
5	Kenny Stuart	Keswick	2.46.10	3.20.57		2.45.25		2.03.12
6	Bob Whitfield	Bingley	2.49.58	3.25.21	3.40.25	2.43.27	1.49.07	1.58.59
7	Mike Short	Horwich		3.27.51	3.39.48	2.44.52		1.56.08
8	Mark Rigby	Ambleside	2.51.49	3.28.10	3.37.08	2.40.07	1.51.55	1.58.27
9	Jonny Bland	Borrowdale	2.52.48	3.25.39	3.46.56	2.41.26	1.47.58	1.59.43
10	Ian Holmes	Bingley	2.52.10	3.30.53		2.42.22	1.47.02	1.57.37
11	Colin Donnelly	Eryri	2.47.55	3.31.16	3.41.33		1.50.07	
12	Shaun Livesey	Rosendale	2.46.25	3.32.03	3.54.09			2.00.52
13	Mike Fanning	Keswick	2.48.00	3.37.22	3.39.56	2.44.12		
14	Jack Maitland	P&B	2.57.15	3.24.10	3.54.10			2.00.31
15	Joss Naylor	Kendal	2.57.00	3.27.27	3.40.14	2.55.38		2.08.20
16	Mark Roberts	Borrowdale	2.58.00	3.26.19			1.52.15	2.01.24
17	Hugh Symonds	Kendal	2.52.52	3.34.45	3.43.02			
18	Rob Jebb	Bingley	2.57.57	3.26.58	3.46.48	2.51.03		2.02.42
19	Andy Trigg	Glossopdale	2.55.38	3.32.12	3.50.32	2.49.48	1.52.33	
20	Ian Ferguson	Bingley		3.35.17	3.49.13	2.49.27	1.50.12	1.58.18
	Record Time		2.43.10	3.20.57	3.25.21	2.34.38	1.45.08	1.55.03
	Standard Time		3.00.00	3.40.00	3.50.00	2.50.00	1.55.00	2.05.00

No recorded time in this table means either the runner has never run that race, or that he has a PB time slower than the Standard Time.

Billy Bland holds 3 of the 6 records – Duddon Valley 1981, Wasdale 1982, and Borrowdale 1981, all when he was a member of Keswick. Andy Styan holds the Langdale record from 1977, Kenny Stuart the Ennerdale record from 1985, and Gavin Bland the Three Shires record achieved in 1997.

Two of the current Lakeland specialists have achieved times close to these long standing records. Gavin Bland holds the Three Shires record set at the British Home Championship event in 1997, and has run within some 70 seconds of two other records at Duddon Valley (1992 Championship event) and Langdale in 1997. Simon Booth has achieved times within 40 seconds of two records, at Ennerdale in 2000 and Borrowdale in 1999 both being Championship events.

Top 20 All Time Ranking

The following table shows a ranking of these runners using the same selection as the current Lakeland Classics Trophy; the total points being derived from the best two points scores of the Super Long races – Duddon Valley, Ennerdale and Wasdale, plus the next best points score from any of the other 4 races – points from 3 races in total.

Rank	Name	Club	D-V	E-D	W-D	B-D	3-S	L-D	TOTAL
1	Billy Bland	Keswick	109	109	111	109	101	108	329
2	Gavin Bland	Borrowdale	109	107	98	106	109	107	325
3	Andy Styan	Holmfirth	105	107	108			108	324
4	Simon Booth	Borrowdale	106	108	102	109	103		323
5	Kenny Stuart	Keswick	108	109		103		101	319
6	Bob Whitfield	Bingley	106	107	104	104	105	105	317
7	Mike Short	Horwich		106	104	103		107	317
8	Mark Rigby	Ambleside	105	105	106	106	103	105	317
9	Jonny Bland	Borrowdale	104	107	101	105	106	104	317
10	Ian Holmes	Bingley	104	104		104	107	106	315
11	Colin Donnelly	Eryri	107	104	104		104		315
12	Shaun Livesey	Rosendale	108	104	98			103	314
13	Mike Fanning	Keswick	107	101	104	103			314
14	Jack Maitland	P&B	102	107	98			104	312
15	Joss Naylor	Kendal	102	106	104	97		97	312
16	Mark Roberts	Borrowdale	101	106			102	103	310
17	Hugh Symonds	Kendal	104	102	103				309
18	Rob Jebb	Bingley	101	106	101	99		102	309
19	Andy Trigg	Glossopdale	102	104	100	100	102		308
20	Ian Ferguson	Bingley		102	100	100	104	105	308
	Record Time		109	109	111	109	109	108	329
	Standard Time		100	100	100	100	100	100	300

This Top 20 list includes both past and present British & English Champions from the last 30 years since 1975. No surprise that Billy Bland, British Champion in 1980 tops this list with a maximum points score from his three race records, and confirming his superiority and numerous wins at these long Lakeland races.

Within 2% and a few points of Billy Bland's maximum score are in 2nd place Gavin Bland, 1999 British Champion, 3rd Andy Styan, 1979 British Champion, and 4th Simon Booth, 2002 British Champion. The addition of Kenny Stuart in 5th place, British Champion 1983, '84 & '85, completes a select list of Champions from the last four decades, who between them hold all of these six race records.

The next five ranked, all closely within 1% of Kenny Stuart's points total, are Bob Whitfield 1987 English Champion, Mike Short British Champion 1975, '78, multiple British & English Champion Ian Holmes in 10th place, just behind noted

Lakeland specialists Mark Rigby and Jonny Bland.

Some may be surprised to see Ian Holmes in 10th position, but these Super long Lakeland races are not really Ian's speciality. Suffice to say that he has twice won two of the other Long races, Borrowdale and Langdale, and has the 3rd best ever time at Three Shires.

By chance the Top 10 ranking includes two groups of runners, five who achieved their best times in the late 70's / early 80's, and the other five who have achieved their best times in the last 15 years. Collectively the older generation hold five of the six records, but their total points score is only just ahead 1606 to 1597, a difference of only 10 points – a margin of less than 1% !

In close contention to the Top 10, Ranks 11 – 15 all have total scores at approx 95% compared to the maximum, and the next 16 – 20 rank all score close to 94%. A further 5 runners ranked 21 - 25 and scoring approx 93% are Paul Sheard 308, Colin Valentine 306, Stuart Bland 306, Bob Ashworth 306, and Robin Jamieson 305.

To my knowledge, only one other runner meets the criteria of achieving PB's better than the Standard Times at 3 races, and thus in total scoring higher than 300 points. As with the Top 20 / 25 his name is very familiar to all fell runners – his score 302. Who is he ? Perhaps someone will reveal his name on the FRA Forum ?

Winners & Records

It would be remiss just to list the PB times of these top fell runners without drawing attention also to their notable multiple wins and record breaking achievements.

1968-77

Joss Naylor won the first 9 Ennerdale races 1968-77, the inaugural 1973 Langdale race, and Wasdale races in 1973 & 1975. The other prominent race winner in these early years was Mike Short – he won Ennerdale, Wasdale & Borrowdale in 1977 having previously won Borrowdale in 1975, plus three consecutive wins at Langdale 1974-76. So in this initial period 1968-77, Joss Naylor 12 wins and Mike Short 7 wins, won 19 races between them out of a total 25 races held.

Only 4 of the 6 races existed during this period - Wasdale starting in 1972, Langdale in 1973, and Borrowdale in 1974. Following the inaugural race records being set, Joss Naylor reduced the Ennerdale record a further 3 times and twice set new records at Wasdale during the initial few years of these events. Mike Short broke records at both the 1975 Langdale and 1977 Borrowdale races, before going on to further reducing the record at the 1978 Borrowdale race - his last Lakeland Classic win.

The only record still remaining from this initial period is the Langdale record set in 1977 by Andy Styan with 3 other runners – Billy Bland, Alan McGee, and Mike Short – all within 65 seconds of the record; such that these 4 times still remain the best 4 in the Langdale Top 50 Best Times list.

1978-88

The inaugural 1978 Duddon Valley and 1983 Three Shires races were both won by Billy Bland. During this period of 11 years Billy Bland achieved a magnificent series of 35 wins from 49 races completed, also including 5 second and 4 third places. These 35 wins comprised 6 wins at Duddon Valley, 4 consecutive wins at Ennerdale 1980-83, plus a 5th win in 1987, 9 consecutive wins at Wasdale 1980-88 after being 2nd in both 1978 & 79 races, 9 Borrowdale wins 1979-82 and 1984-88, plus 5 wins at Langdale and the inaugural Three Shires race.

This was probably the most competitive period of the Lakeland Classics history featuring three other Top 10 runners in addition to the previously mentioned Mike Short. Andy Styan won a further 6 races (3 wins in 1979) in addition to his one record Langdale win, and Kenny Stuart and Bob Whitfield each won 4 races.

Billy Bland set his 3 race records in 1981-82, and Kenny Stuart his Ennerdale record in 1985. But between them these top runners were regularly setting new records at these Lakeland Classics – 12 records being set during these 11 years, in addition to the 2 inaugural race records mentioned.

In fact during this period and ever since 1968, race records were being set nearly every year, and only in 1969, 1986 & 1988 were no new records established. Thus after the initial 4 years of Ennerdale 1968-71, the next period 1972-87 saw 25 new records being set, whereas the most recent years from 1989-2004 have seen only 2 new records set - both at Three Shires in 1989 & 1997.

1991-97

Billy Bland's last win was achieved at Duddon Valley in 1991 when 43, by which time his nephew Gavin was winning the English Championship in his 20th year, and starting a comparable sequence of wins between 1991-97.

During these 7 years Gavin Bland gained 19 wins; comprising 5 consecutive wins at Duddon Valley 1992-96, 3 consecutive wins at both Ennerdale and Borrowdale, 2 wins at Wasdale, 3 wins at Three Shires & Langdale; and concluding by setting the Three Shires record and the best time for 20 years at the 1997 Langdale.

Other multiple winners during this period were Gavin's cousin Jonny Bland with 5 wins, Ian Holmes 4 wins, and Simon Booth 3 wins.

1998-2006

The most prominent winner of these races since 1998 is Simon Booth, accumulating 14 wins, including 9 consecutive wins at Borrowdale, with other wins at Duddon Valley, Ennerdale & Wasdale. Two runners have won 4 Lakeland Long A races during this period. Jonny Bland's 4 wins gives him a current total of 9 wins and makes him the 5th most prolific winner behind Joss Naylor 12 wins, Simon Booth 17 wins, Gavin Bland 22 wins, and Billy Bland 37 wins in total.

Andrew Schofield's 4 wins at Super Long races since the start of the LCT series in

2002 makes him only the fifth runner to achieve wins at each of the Super Long races - the others being Billy Bland, Andy Styan, Gavin Bland and Simon Booth.

Yearly Total Scores

In addition to those top fell runners that have dominated certain time periods, some of the Top 20 runners have also scored impressive total points scores in a single year.

Joss Naylor	301	1973
Mike Short	311	1978
Andy Styan	319, 311	1979, 1980
Billy Bland	325, 325	1981, 1982
Mark Rigby	308, 305	1987, 1988
Colin Donnelly	313	1988
Mike Fanning	314	1988
Gavin Bland	313, 312	1992, 1993

Billy Bland's yearly scores ranged from 308 – 325 during the period 1978-88, achieving high scores in 10 of these 11 years, and his yearly scores of 325 in both 1981 & 82 have not been beaten by any other runners' lifetime scores !!

Since the start of the Lakeland Classic Trophy series, as yet no runner has achieved a yearly total score higher than 300 points. The best scores to-date : (2002-06 LCT on same basis as PB lifetime scores)

Lloyd Taggart	300	2006
Andrew Schofield	292	2004
Jonny Bland	288	2002
Gavin Bland	288	2004

Some Conclusions

Billy Bland's achievements on the Lakeland fells are so exceptional that it can be difficult to give due prominence to other fell runners performances. Certainly a tough act to follow, but both Gavin Bland's achievements in the 1990's and Simon Booth's consecutive wins at Borrowdale in recent years demonstrate that the performances of the current generation merit comparison with previous Champions.

In addition to Gavin's Three Shires record, these two Borrowdale runners have achieved times very close, within 1% of four existing race records - 3 of these 4 being achieved in Championship races. The Wasdale race is the exception, agreed to be the toughest of these 6 races, where few runners have achieved times better than 3.50 – only 8 since 1990 and none within 10 minutes of Billy Bland's record.

It would be fascinating to know how the current Lakeland runners might have performed in the competitive environment of the late 70's and early 80's when these races were frequently Championship events, prior to the new British and English Championship formats established in 1986. The rankings derived from this analysis suggest that the current top fell runners would have gained their fair share

of the honours, although no doubt Billy Bland would still have been the favourite at many events, particularly Wasdale.

New records were frequently set in the initial 10-15 years of these Lakeland races, but though times have been set very close, most records have existed for 20+ years. Not, I suggest, a reflection on the capability of the current generation of fell runners; more a case of changing competitive agendas over the years, and that records do become progressively harder to beat - patently it is easier to beat the previous record time than the existing record ! Also, it is worth noting that minor course changes at some of these races may not make the task any easier.

But some of these records and rankings will change. Many of these top runners are in their thirties or early forties and still have opportunities to improve on their best times.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Bill Smith and Graham Breeze for their stimulating articles on these and other Classic races, and for providing race results – also thanks to Jon Broxap, the race organizers, and those runners who provided or checked PB times.

Update

This article appeared in the Fellrunner of June 2005 and now has been updated at the end of 2006, but no changes were recorded in the Top 20 Men's PB times or rankings.