

Gaymer's/IAC City Centre Road Races

Ovett The Master In Oxford

Final burst just too much for game Davies-Hale

IF PROOF were needed that Steve Ovett's top class racing days aren't over yet, it came in Oxford on May 11th in the second race of the Gaymer's-sponsored IAC Road Series. In only his second race in half a year, the former Olympic champion soundly defeated a strong domestic line-up over the eight kilometres and again speculation arose as to his potential over 5000m on the track this summer. Certainly there were enough specialists at the distance behind the 'Phoenix Flyer' on this occasion, not least a self-admittedly strong Paul Davies-Hale: "I'm very strong at the moment. I'm not quite so sharp, I'll leave that side of the training for another few weeks yet, but this will be a very, very good guide to how the summer will go", the Cannock man said before the race. As it turned out, his lack of sharpness proved his undoing, but he was still good enough to outpace the likes of Dave Clarke, Jon Richards, a returning Nick Rose, Dave Lewis and Nat Muir.

Brian Smyth Reports

All of those, plus quite a few more spent most of the first half of the race almost tripping over each other's heels as they navigated the tight bends and long straights of the 800m lap of Oxford's widest street, and up until halfway, the 'horde' comprised Rose, Muir, Lewis, Clarke, Richards, Ovett, Davies-Hale, Mark Scrutton, Carl Thackery, Karl Harrison, Alan Salter, Kevin Capper, Alan Guilder and Simeon Kigen, while Tony Milovsorov then Colin Reitz made their way up to join the rest approaching the third circuit. Of the little foreign interest, Kenya's Kigen was to improve on his 51st spot in the York race but wasn't to trouble the leaders after the opening few laps, although Australia's Garry Henry (a 28:18 10,000m man) was to exert a certain amount of influence later in the proceedings.

There was still a group of 15 or 16 runners together by the halfway mark, reached in 11:12, which coincided with Reitz's disappearance down the field. By the sixth circuit, Dave Clarke, Series winner last year, had taken hold of the pace from Ovett, who had been and was still to be, impeccably positioned throughout, and they led Henry, Scrutton, Milovsorov, Thackery, Rose, Richards, Lewis, Davies-Hale, Guilder, Kigen, Muir and Harrison. There were



Garry Henry (37) forces the pace with Paul Davies-Hale (left), Steve Ovett (30 — last October!), David Lewis and Tony Milovsorov (210) in close attendance. Photo: Peter Tempest

a few strides now to Salter and Reitz, but the changes of leadership up front meant that the pace was maintained and the group began to loosen bit by bit. Garry Henry made the first noticeable effort on the seventh lap, followed by Davies-Hale on lap eight, both tracked closely by Ovett; but it soon transpired that Davies-Hale's effort was to be the decider as far as pruning the bunch was concerned and only Ovett and Milovsorov stuck with him. Henry, Thackery, Rose and Clarke detached themselves also, but try as Milovsorov might, he couldn't stick with the leaders for very long and soon started to make his way back to that chasing foursome.

By the 'bell' Davies-Hale and Ovett were safely

clear and that's how it stayed until the final sharp turn for home. Ovett, who had looked a little worried until then, surged with just over 100m remaining and gained a yard or two. The former steeplechaser responded, but 50m out a flick of the finger in the air proved to onlookers that Ovett had it in the bag and it was done with an air of 'I dare you to make me run any faster' from the great man. The effort was visible on his face after the race, but 5000m looked a sweet prospect on the track this summer.

Almost everyone ended up happy; the crowd which had enjoyed an enthralling race, waiting to see if Ovett could be 'broken', Davies-Hale, with his performance: "It's always disappointing when you lose a race, but on the whole I was quite pleased for this time of the year to have a little bit of a turn of speed like that", and Ovett: "I'm very pleased obviously. It was a tough race. Paul really pushed the pace with about three laps to go and you had to dig really deep to stay with it, but I'm very pleased for my second race coming into the summer so it's looking good for the summertime". Ovett added: "I wasn't that decisive. We were both very tired but my ability is that I can change pace probably a lot quicker than Paul can. We were probably both running at the same speed through the line, but I got that extra two or three yards on him coming off the bend".

Still no 5000 commitment

Of course, the quote everyone wanted to hear was 'Yes, I will do 5000', but Steve wouldn't be drawn fully. He said: "I think any race over 5000, and this is 8k, augurs well for the shorter distance, because I'm more of a speed orientated runner rather than an endurance racer. As it drops down in the distances I should be getting better at them, so it looks like it could be a good year for me. But you never know, a lot of these things sometimes don't fall into place; but I'll keep my fingers crossed on this one, it's looking good".

It was only in the closing stages that the women's race was decided also, but Kirsty Wade managed it slightly earlier than Ovett. Kirsty certainly had her work cut out against specialist Cornelia Buerki, fifth in the Olympic 3000, but who appeared to be suffering here from a slight cold. Again most of the field of 23 runners were all in contention for the opening laps of the 3200m race, and Sarah Rowell led them through the first 800m lap in 2:27. Up at the head of the group were Chris Benning, Gillian Green, Alison Hollington and Kirsty, with Philippa Mason and Susan Tooby tagging on. Buerki had moved up by the second lap, where the leaders read Green, Buerki, Tooby, Wade, Mason, Benning, Rowell and Christine Whittingham. A few gaps started to appear further down the field after this, and Philippa dropped off the pace on the third circuit. The two 'stars',

Buerki and Wade, exerted their superiority at this point and began their move clear, opening quickly on Susan Tooby and Gillian Green, and were 15 to 20m clear entering the final lap.

The penultimate turn sealed the issue for Kirsty as the 800m specialist surged away from Buerki, leaving a sprint finish, which she probably would have won anyway, unnecessary. Kirsty had looked comfortable throughout and in the end it didn't seem surprising that she had won, even considering the distance. She said afterwards: "I'm very happy with that, in the middle of really heavy training. I just went out for a good, hard run and I really enjoyed it, which was a surprise". It was a pity that York winner Yvonne Murray didn't contest the race (neither will she Cardiff), as it's a fair bet the pace would have been a bit hotter and the outcome definitely less predictable, although with the likes of Yvonne and Kirsty not running the full series, the current overall leader is Gillian Green who, to be fair, has impressed with her two thirds so far.

Men's 8000m

- 1, Steve Ovett (Phoenix).....22:24
- 2, Paul Davies-Hale (Cannock & Stafford).....22:25
- 3, Dave Clarke (Hercules Wimbledon).....22:32
- 4, J. Richards (Corn) 22:34; 5, C. Thackery (Hallam) 22:35;
- 6, M. Scrutton (Ton) 22:37; 7, N. Rose (Bris) 22:40; 8, T. Milovsorov (Tip) 22:41; 9, G. Henry (Aus) 22:44; 10, K. Harrison (Stret) 22:46; 11, D. Lewis (Ross) 22:56; 12, N. Muir (Shett) 22:58; 13, A. Salter (Bir) 23:00; 14, P. Fleming (Bella) 23:01; 15, A. Green (Warr) 23:02; 16, A. Guilder (GEC) 23:03; 17, G. Payne (S'end) 23:04; 18, S. Kigen (Ken) 23:07; 19, M. Fromant (North) 23:08; 20, G. Crowther (Sal) 23:08; 21, S. Dry (Bing) 23:10; 22, D. Pemberton (Bir) 23:12; 23, R. Crabb (Bris) 23:13; 24, P. Wagner (Tip) 23:14; 25, G. Helme (St. H) 23:22; 26, S. Emson (W&B) 23:23; 27, N. Gates (Bath) 23:25; 28, N. Rimmer (Warr) 23:28; 29, C. Reitz (N&EB) 23:29; 30, N. O'Brien (Stret) 23:29; 31, A. Power (W&B) 23:30; 32, M. Gratton (Inv) 23:31; 33, I. White (Bir) 23:33; 34, N. Brawn (Inv) 23:34; 35, M. Flint (Tel) 23:35; 36, C. Dagnall (Liv) 23:35; 37, B. Knight (Torh) 23:35; 38, A. Simmons (Lut) 23:36; 39, A. Catton (Ilf) 23:38; 40, J. Orr (Cam) 23:38; 41, A. West (Lut) 23:39; 42, J. Sherban (Shaft) 23:41; 43,

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