

► INSPIRING RUNNER Sally Musson

FIFTY-SEVEN-year-old veteran runner Sally Musson must have one of the biggest trophy cabinets in Kent. Over the last three years alone, she has won her age group (F55) in 70 out of the 71 races she has taken part in and made top 10 women in all but one event. Sally is also currently ranked as the UK's number one marathoner for V55 women after her stunning 3hrs 5mins 21secs at the Virgin London Marathon this year, when she also set a new British Record.

The diminutive, and incredibly modest, Tonbridge AC athlete has been a regular face on the road running scene in the South East for almost a decade. Even though she came to competitive running "somewhat later in life", Sally has always been fit, playing hockey to county standard, and dabbling in running "for fun and enjoyment" as far back as 1984 when she completed the third ever London Marathon. Sally estimates she has competed in almost 250 races (mostly over the last 10 years) and 11 London Marathons, during her incredible running career.

This year has already seen her pick up 14 'age category' wins across all distances (despite hypothermia at a half marathon in February) and the incredible marathon record back in April. But



2010 has also been tragic for Sally, because in June she lost her beloved husband of 25 years to cancer.

"Roger was my coach, loyal supporter and encourager as well as my husband. He was one who gave me the confidence and belief in myself," she explains. "When I first started running, Roger was the one who convinced me I could be quite good and he gave me the confidence to try to become a better runner. He kept records of all my races and times in a book that we called the 'oracle' and came with me to almost every race. He was always there, come rain or shine and I miss him dearly."

A sub-3 hour marathon has been one of Sally's goals over last 10 years – one she missed by 22 seconds back in 2003 – and she was devastated not to be able to give that to Roger as her final gift. "He was so pleased with my UK record though," she says. "That was almost better than the sub-3 for him and he was so thrilled."

But despite being only a couple of years away from turning 60, Sally hasn't given up on her sub 3-hour marathon goal – in fact, far from it. "I still feel as though I have a sub-3 in me," she says, "so I think I'll have a try at Abingdon Marathon later in the year and possibly London

again in 2011. The trouble with marathons is that you can't do too many of them and things can simply just go badly on the day." Having clocked 1hr 28mins 58secs at a recent half marathon (her fastest time on that particular course), Sally is getting faster this year already and claims the marathon is probably her "best distance", which bodes well for the rest of her season. Not only is a sub-3 marathon still within her grasp, but the current F60 World Record stands at 3hrs 1min 30secs, which surely must be tempting in a couple of years time.

For a runner with such incredible performances, by her own admission, Sally doesn't really train as much as she would like. "I may do about 35 miles running a week," she says "and mix up the terrain and do some cross training too. Inherited bad feet won't allow me to do 100 miles a week, so I have to be sensible. You probably have to be careful when you get older as one can get injured more easily, so I focus on quality training rather than quantity, and keep the mileage down. Because I work full time and have responsibilities with my Church, I'm also limited with the amount of training and racing I can do.

"When you come to running late in life, it can be more motivating," she explains. "You don't always feel like you're chasing PBs from your younger days, and there's plenty of room for improvement."

And it still looks as if Sally has plenty of room for improvement, despite not having Roger at her side. "I wondered how I'd feel after he died," she says, "whether I'd be emotionally exhausted or just wouldn't want to do it. But so far, I'm running faster this year than I was in 2009 and really enjoying it. I do miss Roger very much, but still feel he is with me spiritually and willing me on."

From all of us here at *Running fitness*, Sally, so are we.

