

THREE PEAKS RACE REPORT FOR 2018

Tom Owens proved he does know the way off Whernside when he won the Three Peaks Race in the Yorkshire Dales for the second time on Saturday, but he missed breaking the course record and claiming a £500 bonus prize by a margin of three minutes five seconds.

The 36-year-old, running for Shettleston Harriers in Glasgow, finished in 2hrs 49mins 8secs, which was 4mins 26secs quicker than his 2011 win. It also made amends for last year when he was well in the lead until a wrong turning on the descent from Whernside summit to the Hill Inn checkpoint.

His mistake in 2017 gave the race to Murray Strain, from Hunters Bog Trotters in Edinburgh, who now lives near Cambridge. On Saturday their positions were reversed with Owens coming home 3mins 28secs in the lead in a race which has the all-terrain footwear and equipment company Inov-8 as its main sponsor.

Tom, a Salomon International runner, said: "I was so relieved to stay on route and finish in first place. After messing up last year I was a bit scared to come back. This year there was a sign and a marshal at the junction where I went wrong, so I knew I was on track. But Murray is such a good runner. I remember glancing back on Whernside and thinking how close he was. Then he chased me off Ingleborough. He is super strong."

Third place went to Cumbrian firefighter Ricky Lightfoot, of Ellenborough Running Club, a Salomon International Team member, who won in 2014 and 2015. At the finish, runners toasted his third place in a special edition Three Peaks Race beer from Northern Monk Brewery in Leeds, which had the event's history on a pull-off label and each can signed by Ricky.

The race is billed as the "Marathon with Mountains" as it takes runners 23.3 miles over the summits of Pen-y-ghent, Whernside and Ingleborough with 5,279ft of ascent and descent. The race record of 2hrs 46mins 3secs over the current course was set by Andy Peace, of Bingley Harriers, in 1996. This year the Three Peaks was the selection race for the World Long Distance Mountain Running Championships.

Inov-8's Tom Payn, competing in the Three Peaks Race for the first time, finished 13th in 3hrs 9mins 34secs after starting strongly. Owens was on Pen-y-ghent summit in 28mins 25secs with Payn only 18secs behind. But a week of training in the Dales was not enough for Payn. He was slower on the ascent of Whernside, part of the route which is out of bounds except on race day, and he fell further behind on Ingleborough.

The 769 starters streamed away from the race headquarters at Horton-in-Ribblesdale, near Settle, past an articulated lorry trailer vinyl wrapped with an image of Victoria Wilkinson, who knocked five minutes off the women's record to claim a £500 bonus prize in 2017.

The British International runner first claimed the ladies' title in 2014. On Saturday, the Inov-8 ambassador, made it three wins in succession – 2016, 2017 and 2018. Last year, from her home in Sedbergh in Cumbria, Victoria dedicated months of training to beat the record. The 39-year-old has a totally different plan for 2018.

The Bingley Harriers' athlete, who has represented Britain in six running and cycling disciplines, has her mind set on the World Mountain Running Championships in Karpacz, Poland, in June, followed by Sky Races in Italy and Andorra. She has paced her training for the World Mountain goal and knows she was fitter at this point last year.

Her dedication means she can focus on her running and shut out other influences, including social media, where followers have kept asking if she was attempting to repeat the Three Peaks record in 2018. Immediately before the race, she looked at the 10ft tall photograph of herself, which will be seen around Britain on the CSH Transport lorry, but shut it from her mind.

"At the start I ran past without seeing it," she said. "My mind was set on the race. It was not a record breaking attempt, which was a bit sad in a way, but I achieved what I set out to do." On Saturday she finished 33rd in 3hrs 22mins 17secs, compared with 13th in 2017 in 3hrs 9mins 19secs.

Second highest woman was Georgia Tindley, of Hunters Bog Trotters, 43rd overall in 3hrs 26mins 2secs, with Beth Pascall, of Belper Harriers, 3rd and 48th overall in 3hrs 28mins 46secs.

In the veterans' classes, Ken Taylor, 70, of Rossendale Harriers (pictured below),knocked 12 minutes off the Men's Over-70 record. His time of 4hrs 32mins 31secs broke the record set by Kieran Carr, of Clayton-le-Moors Harriers, who set 4hrs 44mins 18secs in 2015.



For the second year in succession John Owen, of Barnet and District AC, was the oldest person ever to have competed the Three Peaks Race. On Saturday he was 74 years and five months. The oldest lady finisher in the 2018 race was Wendy Dodds, of Clayton-le-Moors Harriers, who was 67 years and four months.

Full results: <https://www.threepeaksrace.org/>

Brian Dooks, Three Peaks Race Committee