



Dave Ainsworth



Like so many, Dave commenced race walking through his employer, in his case the Royal Air Force which he'd joined in 1965.

While training at RAF Hereford (now SAS HQ) 2 were needed for an Inter-Squadron athletics meeting in May 1966. None volunteered, so the Sergeant in charge of the athletics team called out names of the first 2 on his alphabetical roll call, hence 'A' was a selection cert. The Sergeant himself was a celebrity - Irishman Jack Murray - as his sister was the late Ruby "Softly Softly" Murray whose name now lives on in cockney rhyming slang.

One of Dave's instructors was then Flight Lieutenant Mike Shannon, a 4-times' senior Welsh



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champion in times when it was hard to attain such status, and twice AAA Junior 1 Mile Champion when this race featured great names. Come the day, Dave won the mile – on a bumpy grass track – in 8 minutes and 1 second as a 17 year old (a AAA Junior standard ensued). Anybody remember grass track racing? This gained selections for Inter-Station matches where the distance rose to 2 miles (not much metric then). The now late Mike had retired from race walking by then, to take up basketball, making International level. Mike lent a copy of Race Walking by Harold Whitlock – a great book! After one Inter-Station match, then current Welsh Senior Champion Roy Hart – one in the 1966 Commonwealth Games – invited all to join him on a joint training/warm down session. As a youngster Dave didn't fancy the abuse that race walking training in public places attracted, so dropped out. When was posted to RAF Coltishall on the Norfolk Broads, where also stationed was Dave Gulliver (London Vidarians). Dave's claim to fame when growing up in Northants, he dated Judy Carne, later in Danger Man & The Rag Trade before finding Hollywood fame as the "Sock-it-to-me-Girl" in Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In. Sadly no longer with us, one wonders if she remembered Dave when marrying Burt Reynolds? Dave G rekindled Dave A's race walking interest and in a 1967 Station Sports Day, again on a grass track, the latter won the 2 miles' walk in a sub-16 minutes' sprint finish between them. With a number of good walkers, which later included future sub-20 hours' 100 miler Ken Roost, RAF Coltishall, won the RAF Inter-Station 7 Miles' twice and were 2nd at 20K. While in Norfolk Dave completed the last ever Colchester-to-Ipswich classic, organised by Barry Ingarfield. RAF races were of high standard and well supported – the 1972 RAF 7 Miles in Rutland (won by Steve Holliday) had 101 on its start line! In the late 60s Dave G introduced Dave A. to the "Open 7's", his first such race commencing with a mountainous climb at Highgate. He also signed for "The London Vidarians". In such times "Clubmen" aimed for an RWA 7 Miles-in-an-Hour badge, which was only gained in races with a certified distance and a proper judges' panel appointed. Gaining it was one of Dave's proudest moments. Dave was posted to RAF Innsworth (Gloucester) in 1970, where again was a good race walking team – here he met up with nearby Bristol WC (led by inspirational Chas Shelley) and stepped up distances. This saw a first RWA 50K at Ewell (Bob Dobson won), then a London-to-Brighton (10.18.20) when aged 22. The next posting in 1971 was to RAF Henlow (near Hitchin) where the Physical Training Officer was legendary Centurion Dickie Bird and a Corporal physical training instructor was British Lions' wing-three quarter Billy Steele. This station had good race walkers, as you'd expect with Dickie in charge! Afterwards "the call of the drum" took Dave to Rutland, and then Belfast Airport, where the RAF controlled security, which secured a General Service Campaign medal.

An athletics' career highlight of Dave's was joining a long list of notables who've become Welsh Senior 3,000 Metres Champion.



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Come 1973 and back in Civvy Street, Dave became Vidarians' Captain when Paul Maidment began work at Belfast University, leading them to a "Sparta Trophy" win as the country's most improved Club based on National Championships. September that year saw him complete the Brighton (10.28.06) and 3 weeks' later attempt the Bristol 100 Miles organised by Chas Shelley. Alas only 54 miles were accomplished, probably as it was too soon after the Brighton. Another non-finisher that day was soon to be clubmate Geoff Hunwicks with Len Ruddock as attendant. In 1973 Dave joined local Club Ilford AC (2nd claim) then early in 1974 upped his status to 1st claim. His first claim debut wasn't good, as competing after a night shift at Ford, he was disqualified (for a 1st time) in the opening stages of a Garnet 10 Miles at Haywards Heath.

1974 saw him "do the double", i.e. Leicester Mercury (then 20 miles) on Saturday afternoon and Bradford 50K on Bank Holiday Monday morning, gaining a time standard medal in the latter. This built up mileage for the Leicester-to-Skegness 100 Miles which he finished in 22:44.41. It was the first time Ilford AC completed a 3-strong team in a 100 miles, as Dave Neagle (went off course twice) & Alan Barber (waited ages at a level crossing 5 miles short of the sea front) crossed the line in 19:15.11 & 21:59.59 respectively. This trio enjoyed a reunion luncheon 40 years later! Ilford AC now have a high percentage of members, past and present, who've become Centurions (athletes who've completed a 100 Miles' race in under 24 hours). In the '70s Dave recalls 2 great and enjoyable Essex walking trips : to a National 20 Miles on the Isle of Man (organiser Tony Perkins) and to the Rotterdam 20K (organiser : late former Essex County President John Hedgethorpe). The mid-1970s saw him take over as RWA Press & Publicity Officer, a position he held until 1985. His time in post saw race walking feature with regularity in National newspapers, radio and television - the proverbial icing on the cake being "The Ken Matthews Campaign". Only the late Ken, of 4 GB 1964 athletics' Olympic gold medalist athletes, wasn't awarded an MBE in the first Honours' List after those Tokyo Games. This campaign made TV, radio and National newspapers and, 13 years' late, came an MBE presented by Queen Elizabeth at a Buckingham Palace 1977 investiture. Dave's other big National publicity achievement was getting BBC2 to screen a half-hour documentary on the sadly now defunct Hastings-to-Brighton Walk in their "Getaways" series.

He's a long serving RWA Southern Area Press & Publicity Officer, only interrupted by a short spell when this post was occupied by former Ilford AC 2nd claimer Martin Oliver. The highlight here was getting "BBC Breakfast Time" to screen a Battersea Park walk (in which Mike Bushell competed) to be shown on 4 separate occasions times on the same day before being put on a website. He's edited "Essex Walker" for 2 periods, the current one commencing in 1992 and still continuing. Dave's been a regular announcer at Ilford AC home meetings and



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on other occasions; such as at a memorable Northern Area Diamond Jubilee Meeting in Bolton, Area meetings, the Olympic Tryout meeting and then professionally engaged (£300-a-day for 6 days' work) as the 2012 London Olympics race walking co-commentator (with Geoff Wightman) for all 3 walks. He's in regular demand as Toastmaster/Mc for dinners/functions including Olympic (2012), Commonwealth Games (2016) & IAAF Tribute Luncheons (2017). Dave's been voted a Life Member of the Race Walking Association, our Essex County AA and Ilford AC.

Bill Cockle, then Dennis Snow had performed (with distinction) our toastmaster's role at Club Dinners. Then in 1978, when Brian Armstrong was Ilford's youngest ever President, Dave offered to step in at short notice when somebody upset Mr.Snow who stormed off in a huff a couple of days before our function at the PLA Club in The Drive. Dave stepped in and offered to do it once - but continued for all Dinner & Dances since, except for 1989 when Dave was President and Dennis Snow again wielded his gavel and 1991 at Ilford Con Club when Margaret Gilham was President and a man in a red jacket and bow tie filled the role. That was the infamous occasion where a riot nearly ensued as bar shutters came down suddenly with no warning call of "Time".

In 2003 Dave spent 11 days in hospital with heart trouble (atrial fibrillation) and has suffered an irregular heartbeat since. He now seldom competes, and obviously not at a level of past times - due to this, and of course, his veteran status!

Like so many Ilford AC members, Dave has so many happy memories of a truly friendly Club - long may it continue as such!



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Which Race walker would you most like to have met and had a chat with?

I'll answer the question's 2nd bit - who would I have liked to chat with? I met that great Ukrainian Vladimir Golubnichy at the 1977 Lugano Cup Final (in Milton Keynes) and got his autograph. He was an idol - he appeared in 5 Olympic 20K walks (1960-1976 inclusive) winning 2 golds, a silver and bronze - he signed off with a commendable 7th place. He dominated world race walking in the '60s/early '70s and is still with us - aged 83. Every time he passed where most of the crowd were (yes, a crowd at a race walk!) he got a huge cheer; egged-on by commentator John Lees who boomed, "Good golly - let's hear it for Golly". Top official Arthur Gold didn't like enthusiastic commentators and was heard to say, "Get him off". However I couldn't chat with Vladimir as he knew no English, me no Russian!

What was it that attracted you to the RAF? What was the exercise regime like



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there?

I attended an air show at RAF North Weald (now closed), picked-up eye-catching literature on a recruiting stall and was seduced by it. Probably a mistake to enlist - I did the minimum time and moved on. Their fitness regime was less intense than in the Army & Royal Navy - but they introduced me to race walking, and it was great to have a British Lion rugby international (Billy Steele) as my Physical Training Corporal for a while. I met some friends for life and enjoy attending occasional RAF reunions - as all ex-Servicemen have a few good yarns in them!

Although you are a race Walker, have you ever considered doing running races and if you have what were your running PB's

I wasn't attracted to running, however when Ilford AC President I was determined to support all Club Sections - so appeared in every Metropolitan League race during my time in Office, plus Club X-Country & Road Championships, including 10 miles at Chigwell Row and an infamous Pudding Lane 5 miles. I won our Club handicap in the latter event, which was my last appearance as President before handing over my chain to Alan Lovett. In my Presidential year the "Howard Williams Winter Trophy" was introduced. In its early days a venturesome spirit, an enquiring mind, a lot of logarithm tables and Glasses Guide were needed to work out positions. One clause (of many) was a "short turnout bonus" - offering double-points for all if less than 12 appeared - rationale being that if short, the contribution of those present was even more important that day. My first race was at Ruislip Lido and I turned-up near to "the off" One Ilford runner said, "You're not turning out are you?" - and when I replied "Yes" he shouted to others, "We've now got 12 so we've lost our double points". What a welcome? My second Met.League appearance was at Horsenden Hill where the distance between the changing room and start line - well - I haven't been that far on my holidays!

I've run, well gone round with joggers/fun runners at 4 London Marathons, a Southend Marathon and one of Ernie Barratt's British-American Friendship Marathons based on the delights of Basildon. I recall when racing the London, that wonderful greeting Ilford AC athletics get when passing our Club's Canary Wharf water station. For years I helped when not actually racing, but heart trouble in recent years makes standing for 6+ hours a bit much. If you've not yet been a helper, please consider turning-up as it's an enjoyable day out.

You have been very successful but what is your most memorable win and or experience of race walking.



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In the 1970's I twice won Essex County individual 50K Walk medals (1975 bronze/1979 silver) in times when this Championship had many big names on its start line. So well supported was it, we put out 'A' & 'B' teams. Walking Section Secretary Tony Perkins studied fields so meticulously, he declared our line-ups in such a way he got us team awards to boot – no wonder Tony became a GB Walking Team Manager! And – of course – I covet my Race Walking Association 7 miles-in-hour star and membership of The Centurions (100 miles within 24 hours). Best title : Welsh (Athletau Cymru) Senior 3,000 Metres Championship gold.

What would have been a typical week's race walking training for you in your heyday.

I liked training up Tomswood Hill when pushed by hard taskmaster Roger Mills. Also training around Hainault starting/finishing at Tony Perkins' then address where was always a nice welcome back with cups of tea and cakes waiting our return. I've always preferred squad groups, such as those headed by Roger. As a teenager I never really liked the abuse race walkers attract – not to mention an odd apple core and tin can being thrown. Alas that's a reason there's now little youth recruitment in race walking – as so many think it daft (it's not cool" they say) to progress using "a rolling gait" which attracts more amusement and abuse than acclaim. I did most training when building up for the 1974 100 miles. A 10 miles' circuit was worked out from my front door, which I did 3 or 4 times – popping indoors at the end of each circuit for a brief drink. Overnight walking is essential training for 100 milers – so I walked from home (starting 11pm) to Colchester – before getting a train home. RAF airfield perimeter tracks were perfect – miles' long with no members of the public in sight!

Have you ever considered Core or weights and strength training for walking?

Never used weights – but was once gullible enough to buy a Bullworker on mail order when falling for advertising blurb. It's still at the bottom of a wardrobe, having been there for decades. Car boot sales are staged for such items!

What is your race walking PB for a mile?

7.50, good enough for a AAA Junior Standard (they were all the rage in those days).

Did you ever race old Ilford AC member Steve Allen - was he a rival?

I've raced Steve on many occasions, but Steve was in his heyday as I was "over the hill" when we were both on start lines – so were never rivals. First met Steve when I officiated at



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a Post Office walking race in Clerkenwell. I persuaded him to join Ilford AC, as he then lived in Plaistow. He gave our Club great service as both a runner & race walker. His best London Marathon run in our colours was 2.41. He's hung up his racing pumps - but I'm still trying to get him to make a comeback, as he'd do well in the M60 category (at both running and race walking modes). I was present and looked on with pride as Steve became a Centurion at Colchester's Lower Castle Park in 2016.

What is your opinion of International Race Walker Tom Bosworth and his chances for next year's Olympics?

Tom has a lot to say - and always talks a good game. While Russians remain on the sidelines, all others move up a few places - but I still can't see it happening for Tom, but I'd love to be proved wrong. In ballroom dancing the object is to attract the attention of judges - in race walking it's the exact opposite. Tom seems to attract their attention and, when doing so, it often doesn't end well.

What was Last competitive race you did?

August Bank Holiday Monday 2019 - Southend Mile. I became ill in June 2018 and unable to race. I spent 6 days in King George Hospital in August 2018 (spent my 70th birthday on a ward). My treatment wasn't successful and I was put on a waiting list for an operation. This happened in August 2019, when admitted to the same hospital for an operation under general anaesthetic, it was successful. A few weeks after discharge I did the Southend Mile - 4 times around Garon Park track, flat and short. I competed for selfish reasons - as I wanted to extend my active span into another decade. I commenced in my teens (1966) but had been unable to race since entering my 70s, so this was the one to put that right (age 71). I've great admiration for what former race walker June Cork (Southend-on-Sea AC organiser & former Essex County AA President) does for athletics, so might try to support her big Bank Holiday meeting yearly, if I don't line-up anywhere else. As for that race - hmmm - I recorded a personal worst, but it was enjoyable!

Have you done any other sports?

Was a middle-of-the-road footballer in the RAF but won a few medals. Then took up refereeing and managed to officiate at over 1,000 games before hanging up my whistle. Plenty of medals, plaques etc. in that. In the RAF also took part in volleyball, basketball, squash, swimming (backstroke) and cross-country running (was just a jogger, before it caught on). Much free time in the RAF!



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and

Favourite Band of all time and song?

Band : Kinks. Best singer : Kirsty MacColl – sweetest voice you'll ever hear and tragic she left us so early. I also like Billy Bragg. All 3 come together as Kirsty sang brilliant cover versions of Bragg's "New England" & The Kinks "Days".

Favourite football team?

A tie : Crystal Palace & Norwich City (50% apiece) – supporters of both soon realise there'll always be more disappointments than rare successes! I like to see Dagenham & Redbridge succeed. I also subscribe to Barry Hearn's view that every Londoner's second favourite Club is Leyton Orient. I've no great wish to support them – but for some quaint reason I always wish them well. In the 70s Ilford had a good distance walker in Alan Barber, who we often see at functions today. He completed 4 London-to-Brighton Walks (52 miles) – all under 9.30. Alas, due to Orient, Ilford only had his services every other Saturday during football seasons as he was a volunteer turnstile operator at Brisbane Road (turnstile shut 10 minutes after kick off allowing operators to watch matches buckshee). Then all football kicked off at 3pm on Saturday. I met with Alan 2 years ago on New Year's Day to see Dagenham v Orient (0-0).