



Martin Clarke

Name: Martin Clarke

Born: 29/02/1952 (Oldchurch Hospital Romford).

Date Joined : 1997

Personal Bests: (most as a vet 45+, bit of a late starter)

Track

800m	2min 20? sec
1500m	4min 55sec
3000m	10min 03sec
3000m s/c	?? Forever. Spent most of the evening trying to get out the water jump
5000m	17.00 dead. (Special thanks go to the Timekeeper for rounding up)
10000m	35min 45sec

Road

5k	16min 55sec
5 miles	27min 56sec
10k	34min 55sec
10 miles	58min 21sec (over 50 club record)
Half Mar	77min 17sec
20 miles	2hr 5min 15sec
Marathon	2hr 52min 03sec

What was your pathway into running:

I was always fairly fit and had enjoyed and participated in many sports but I was also a reasonably heavy smoker so long distance running and xc for me was literally a "frightful wheeze". I took up running when nearly 40 as a means of trying to give up the dreadful nicotine sticks figuring if I ran I couldn't smoke, or at least any attempt to do both would be foolish. This was a theory ex Ilford man Steve Macdonald frequently challenged by lighting up during races at any opportunity even at the 19 mile water station in London one year I believe. However despite this contradictory image the running worked fine for me. Initially I joined the old London Road Runners Club which was a bit of a cop out really and didn't really give me the opportunity to train with anybody. Luckily I was soon to meet an obsessive running maniac at work in the form of Terence John Anthony Knightley who led me to that secret door that unlocked the shining passageway to running enlightenment by signing me up to join Barking RR, also home of the revered Owen Roger Charles Phipps, a veteran runner



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of some local status. For a small club Barking was surprisingly full of quality runners and many an Essex Championship medal rewarded them for their endeavours. For many years a zenith of their achievement was their complete dominance of the Essex Way, sadly nowadays the crown being worn by the overpopulated Springfield Striders, then itself just a small club of agricultural artisans based in a cowshed in the middle of a field just north of Chelmsford. Then after a few years of basking in complete and unwarranted narcissistic glory the awful realisation dawned.....we were just tiddlers in a muddy puddle....the vast ocean of Ilford AC beckoned and the 3 of us took the plunge in 1997.

First Club Race:

It was either the Club Road Championships on the old course at Chigwell Row or it might have been the Aveley 5k where I came 5th according to one of Terry's newspaper cuttings.

However when Terry, Owen and myself first transferred over from Barking we used to go off and race as an Ilford team anywhere and everywhere so quite hard to remember. The Ipswich Jaffa, 5,10 and 15 mile were always popular with us.

Notable Performances:

I've had quite a bit of success as a vet and often been first in my category with the odd smattering of a county medal thrown in but doing well in the overall race was always the more rewarding. Although these were not outright wins I'd count coming 3rd overall in both the Havering Half Marathon and Great Dunmow to Thaxted Half Marathon as 2 of my best performances.

However there has also been a few outright yet unnoteworthy victories that have littered a star waning pot hunting career. Strangely most of the races were discontinued soon after I had won them...maybe it was felt they had now been somehow devalued by the last winner.

Without doubt the Limes Farm 4 miler must rank amongst the naffest of them all. I won the race in a shade under 22 minutes owing to the thankful no show of Malcolm John Muir who (and much to his later regret) had decided the race was beneath him and went training over Hainault instead. Then there was the Danbury 5k where both Muir and Knightley did both show but mercifully elected to race themselves over the longer distance of 10k leaving the ebullient Clarke to sweep away all opposition in a staggering sub 17 clocking, and in so doing passed the hapless Ben Matthews of Witham RC who for some reason thought it necessary to confess that he had in fact been sick 3 times no less.



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Then again who could forget my first ever victory, the Doddinghurst 5 miles – having already breezed the vet prize in the main race I decided to forgo any scruples re embarrassment and go again over the distance in the fun run. I was a bit green behind the gills at this time and only later came to realise that a runner exhibiting such behaviour is generally considered something akin to a prize twat. As I had effectively won 2 prizes the organiser asked for a gesture on my parthe got one.

At the Waltham Abbey 5 held in the idyllic setting of Lee Valley Park and Nature reserve I was able to celebrate the demise of Orion's latest up and coming starlet with another dodgy victory and a bacon bap to die for. This came courtesy of a Michelin accredited (it had tyres underneath it) establishment in the form of a very small dilapidated 1930s model caravan parked adjacent to the finishing line. A piece of driftwood secured by string and a couple of clothes pegs to a broken serving hatch announced the curators' enterprise with the annotation "Bob and Bas's mobile food emporium".

In case you may think I'm making some of these races up as they no longer exist history will attest to the fact that I was also first to breast the tape once in the 1500m Ilford track champs laying to waste yet another quality packed field. True the more astute connoisseur of the sport may have considered the time to be a bit on the slow side and therefore untroublesome to any selector present. I remember at Presentation night an intoxicated (we all were) Peter Clinch grinning and shouting out What was your time? My reply was the time doesn't go on the trophy mate. In any case I think Alan Lovett wasn't at his sharpest by this time and got the wrong trophy engraved with my name where I believe it erroneously remains on the 3000m pot until this day.

However probably the most serious accolade I ever achieved was SCVAC grand prix winner. 1998 (held over 5miles, 10k, 10 miles, half marathon, marathon). Under severe pressure from the very nimblest of all the Southern old wrinklies brigade I had to finish the Abingdon marathon in a reasonable time in order to secure the series victory. This turned out to be the scene of my famous "blanket" finish with Owen Phipps...not that we came into together as he had pressed on when I started to struggle at 20. It was because he and Joan had found me all of a quiver and a shiver under a blanket after feeling decidedly queasy but still happy enough to clock 2.57 which as it turned out was good enough to secure the spoils and a feature write up in "The Southerner" (SCVAC's equivalent of Cosmopolitan) which after all is what any old master dreams of isn't it?



Slough half marathon (Part of the SCVAC Grand Prix races)



The SCVAC grand prix winning year (subtitled Joe Jogger complete with sponge and in oxygen debt - apologies no Ilford vest this time)

Favourite and least favourite Races:

I enjoyed the Friday Night 5 series of races. Based in North Essex and Suffolk these usually involved a mad dash up the A12 after work just to make the start line in time. I seem to remember Great Bentley was a very popular venue with Karaoke and the lock-in at the Plough featuring prominently on a couple of occasions so much so that one year we actually booked in for the night at a nearby camp site so we could fully appreciate the post-race festivities. I seem to recall the Ilford AC Maple/Gillam cover of Bye Bye Miss American Pie received great acclaim one year.

The Benfleet 15 can either be a running delight or a running mare depending on weather conditions. The Downs and views of the Thames Estuary are quite inspiring and the light catching the effluent of the oil refinery chimneys strangely beautiful on a clear day but when the weather turns inclement your progress is somewhat hampered with half the country park stuck to the bottom of your mudclaws. Just down the road is another beast, the notorious Hadleigh XC course. I think the course has changed over the years in the interests of health and safety but we used to get directed up that ridiculously steep hill leading up to the castle.



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I remember following Grant Reynolds up one year and having to literally pull myself up the hill by grabbing hold of any vegetation I could find to stop myself falling back down. The setting of the race always reminded me of a surrealistic Dali painting where strewn across the landscape are mummified hands sticking through the mud from previous years still trying to hand in their finishing discs. Compare the original below and hopefully you'll see what I mean.



Metamorphosis of Narcissus (inspired by The start of the Essex XC Relays at Hadleigh) by Salvador Dali

As a footnote this was also the venue of Ray Rawlinson's mishap in the relays one year when wearing only trainers and on a particularly muddy stretch he slid off the hill at the finish gathering pace, his momentum finally being halted by a thick clump of gorse bushes. In the pub afterwards Mel Jones excused Ray's somewhat terse and irascible manner to the waitress thus "You'll have to excuse my friend, he's been a bit prickly of late". The ensuing laughter reached such a crescendo that even Karen Sindall briefly appeared out of the toilet to see what was going on.

Biggest Disappointment:



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Feeling the worst for wear after a previous night out with Mr Muir at O'Neills Ilford and only coming 7th in the Essex Over 50 xc champs at Stubbers. Andy Catton won the race with Gary Murdock, myself and Owen Phipps getting team gold. This was of little consolation to me as I was in good shape at the time and thought I had a good chance of winning it myself. PS. Muir's overpowering flatulence on the journey also did little to improve my chances. I resolved that next time I travel alone.

Typical Weeks Training at your peak :

Mon 5-8 miles road

Tues Track session/ offroad reps

Weds 8-10 miles road

Thurs Forest fartlek or hills (summer) 8 miles Tomswood Hill Club run (winter)

Fri 4-5 miles easy recovery running or day off when needed

Sat Race or Forest

Sun LSD - 13-22 miles

Basically it was the same weekly pattern which was just tweaked depending on my target race. For example if marathon training I would up the mileage on both the Wednesday and Sunday runs and generally increase the distance on efforts for the rest of the week. Would select long races to do on Sunday leading up to the Marathon (halves to 20 miles). Saturday would then be more gentle in the Forest.

PS When training for London 1998 I managed to actually record 100 miles per week 3 weeks before but it was only one week. I wouldn't recommend it though....I probably overtrained.

Favourite Sessions:

Definitely the Tomswood Hill blast at Ilford on a Thursday night (I can hear Andy hooting in discomfort as I write), reps at Raphaels Park, Lunchtime blasts from work up around OrangeTree Hill and back in super quick time with Terry. Forest fartlek.



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Favourite race distance:

Probably 10k...Doesn't feel too eyeballs out and gives you a chance to relax into your running.

Favourite event:

Vets relays, Road or XC. Also loved racing vets champs abroad in places such as Brugges and Malta enjoying some wonderful times in some great company and collecting some very funny stories on the way.

Most Embarrassing Moment:

Being sent the wrong way by marshals and subsequently losing the plot is bad enough but have you ever been announced as having won a prize only to be told there's been an admin error and then you have to leave the stage grasping thin air? That really sucks and has happened to me twice, once at the Barking and Dagenham Half and again at Harlow. The picture below shows me holding Sweet Fanny Adams as I leave the stage at Harlow where the observant will spot Marc Delea in the foreground having to turn away as laughter starts to gain the better of him.





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What advice would you give our current crop of youngsters :

Well if you consider that you're liable to look like an undernourished weasel, suffer mood swings and severe depression until you've done your daily run, unlikely to have any long term relationship with a partner even if your lucky enough to get one in the first place, can only spout out times, races, distances and descriptions of your latest injury as your staple topics of conversation and after all this still want to continue in the sport despite rapidly becoming a crushing bore then this would be my advice:-

Do your best and always give 100 percent but remember every athlete has their day in the sun, enjoy it while it shines but never take yourself too seriously. Avoid self congratulation, let others do it for you. Train with the herd but avoid the instinct, take the advice but always try and follow what works best for you.

Who is the most Famous Athlete you Trained with or would like to train with:

I could dredge up a few if really pushed but surely this would only be considered as gratuitous name dropping. Rumour has it former Olympic marathon champion Constantina Dita and myself have partied together.

How would you improve the sport:

I certainly believe that our governing body doesn't do enough to encourage athletics at grass roots...we need more coaches and enthusiasm generated in our schools and policies put in place to promote the sport nationally. It is good that an alternative body such as the ARC (Association of Running Clubs) has evolved to challenge some of these policies and make the protocols more flexible at least in the road running arena. Maybe we need to break the monopoly and encourage more such competition of ideas and challenges throughout the whole athletic spectrum.

I don't think TV helps either. As much as I still follow football I think TV is helping to make the game poorer by the amount of air time, discussion and in-depth analysis. Do I really care how many assists Kevin Du Bruyne made last season? The amount of air time and importance dedicated to this sort of stuff with all its accompanying technical paraphernalia has the effect of turning sports like athletics into fringe sports. Moreover the coverage, especially of road and xc has become sporadic over the years to say the least. As for the track the distance events from 3000m upwards even get chopped. Inspired by some of the great distance track battles of the past involving people like Dave Bedford, Brendan Foster, and the Finns



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Vaatainen and Lasse Viren we saw all of the race, not just the beginning and the end. Had the policy of chopping out the middle of the race been in place then we would certainly have missed the magnificent sight of the charismatic Kenyan John Ngugi running like Groucho Marks, falling over and the still catching up the field to win. We need to see all of the race and not cut to the field events after the 2nd lap only to finally see the latest Ethiopian or Kenyan winner striding down the finishing straight. Field events can be recorded and played back after the race has finished.

A life ban for all cheats.

Favourite Athlete or Sportsman:

I like the showmen who are that good they are able to win with style and panache. Jimmy Connors, Bjorn Borg and Roger Federer in Tennis...Athletics Dave Bedford ,Steve Ovett, Paula Radcliffe.....Boxing Ali.....Football....Pele, George Best....Snooker Alex Higgins, Ronnie O'Sullivan.

But my favourite of all time is Jimmy Greaves (Spurs and England) who I used to go and watch on many occasions and turned scoring goals into an art form.

What other sports do you follow:

I love most sports except WWF crap. Used to play Rugby, cricket and hockey at school and then continued to play for the Old Boys and various work teams at Rugby. Also Sunday football when time allowed. Squash for Redbridge SC. Also I like triathlon, cycling, boxing, darts and snooker.

I support Spurs but so far not enjoying the Mourinho tenure. Its not only winning but how you win that matters. Guess I'm old-fashioned but I hanker after the Glory days of the 60s.

Greatest Rivals:

I always used to enjoy a tussle with a fellow vet for the coveted age category pot. Stan Coleman from Havering AC and his brother Andy from Woodford Green were of course mustard together, Owen Phipps was class and difficult to beat but there were others such as



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Steve Fulker of Billericay, Steve Williams of Pitsea, Johnny (the Man) Wallace and Billy (hairpiece) Wooton both of Woodford Green.

Best Country Visited :

Mauritius for a tropical paradise but Blighty has something of everything and always good to return home to.

Favourite Food & Drink :

Steak and Chips, Red grape juice with strong alcohol content(a good Malbec, Rioja, or Merlot) and not forgetting the good ol' boy from Tennessee Jack D.

Favourite TV Shows:

I dislike much of TV these days but will watch stuff like Have I got News for You, Would I lie to You, Eggheads, The Chase, Question of Sport.

Most of my TV viewing is centred on Sports programs.

Last Films Seen :

1917, Jean De Florette (Gerard Depardieu), also recently rewatched 2 old classics - One Flew Over the Cuckoos Nest and To Kill a Mocking Bird.

Last Books Read:

The Shack (William P. Young), Adolf Hitler - My part in his downfall (a reread) - Spike Milligan,

Favourite Band Singer:

Very wide musical tastes - anything ranging from Glenn Miller to Stormzyas long as it is a "tune". Have a large vinyl collection of many of the old standards from wayback Stones , Bowie, Beatles, Deep Purple, Black Sabbath, Eagles, Elvis, Led Zeppelin, Boston, Tom Petty, Cat Stevens

Been getting into some Country and Western lately as well - yeeee-hah!



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Last Album Bought or Downloaded :

Ray La Montagne : Part of the Light

Last Concert Attended:

I haven't been to one for years but back in the day regularly got tickets for The Albert Hall seeing bands such as Black Sabbath, Deep Purple, Zappa and The Mothers of Invention.

Any Pets:

Nope not any more but love animals especially cats and dogs...just don't enjoy mess and destruction

What are your aims for next season:

Actually run in some of the Elvis races rather than only being able to watch or officiate.

Tell us a Joke:

I went to a meeting for premature ejaculators. I left early.

What job do you hold

I've had many jobs ...including insurance, banking, and in the holiday industry but in the end settled for a career in IT. I was a freelance programmer/analyst retiring early around 2005/6. I can remember driving over Hainault one morning for my early run before work and thinking after 30 years of toil I've had enough of this. I did my run, went straight back home and that was it....Game Over.

Do you belong to any other Clubs:

I moved to the Harwich area in 2011 and joined Harwich Runners 2nd claim whilst maintaining Ilford AC as my first claim club. During my time I have also 2nd claimed at Havering 90, Orion and Barking (mainly to compete in Sunday xc leagues) whilst taking utmost care never to compete against my first claim club. I see this as an extension of club networking rather than raising any issues of disloyalty.

What roles have you held since joining Ilford AC:



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I have served the club on Committee both as General Secretary and Press and Media officer, a position I held for many years before handing over to Billy. I have also been Road and XC officer and captain of the vets T&F team before handing over to Henry.

Distance has forced me to reduce some of my involvement but I still run the website and get involved when and where I'm able.

I was privileged to be the coach of the Thursday night and Saturday morning running group at Hainault for a number of years.

I was also honoured to be proposed and accepted as a life member of Ilford AC a few years ago.

What do you consider your best achievements at Ilford AC

I'm actually more proud of my non running achievements at the Club. I'm particularly happy to have been involved with what I hope are seen as very worthwhile projects, initiatives and causes which include the formation of the Elvis Series, the Harriers, Valentines Park events (parkrun and the Elvis 5k) and the purchase of the land at Chigwell Row.

I have also greatly enjoyed taking an active role in hosting races whether that be as Race Director, announcer or just compiling results, whether this be for the Club or further afield in the County. I'm constantly updating and enhancing our race Software which is used for the Newman Hilly, Club 10 and Elvis Series.



Flying the Flag in Malta with Owen and Terry. I seem to have won something.



More bling at Dunmow 5. Everyone's a winner.



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Mass Start of the Southend Half (I think) with Nick Berrill and Terry.



And now in splendid isolation finishing The Hilly 5

Martin answers your follow up questions