



Mel Jones

**Name:** Mel Jones

**Born:** 11/3/68

**Date Joined** October 1988

**Personal Bests:**

Track

200m - 27.00,

300m - 41.2 sec,

400m - 59.9,

800m - 2.23,

1500 - 5.01

Road

5k - 21.05

10k - 41.36

10 miles - 1.12.14

Half marathon - 1.31

20 miles - 2.44.5

Marathon - 3.47.16

**First Club Race:** Southern league 1979 Essex Beagles 800m 2.40.2

**Favourite Race:** Stebbing 10

**Notable Performances:** Being selected to run for Essex after achieving 7<sup>th</sup> in the Cross Country championships as an 11 year old

Winning Masters medals after hitting 40

**Biggest Disappointment:**

Being disqualified from winning the Essex 400m title due to a clerical error

Losing on the TV series Gladiators as I did not win the holiday, car and money



### **Typical Weeks Training at your peak .**

It has been so long ago since I was at my peak and able to train 6 days a week but here goes when I was 17

Monday - 6-7 Mile road run

Tuesday - Track session 20 x 200m intervals

Wednesday - 5 mile road run

Thursday - Track session 10 x 400m

Friday - Rest day

Saturday - Fartlek over Hainault forest

Sunday - Track session easy 150m x 8

Here's what I did before I stopped competing in 2016

Monday - Weights and pilates

Tuesday - 6 mile run

Wednesday - Weights

Thursday - Intervals on the road

Friday - Rest day

Saturday - Swimming

Sunday - Long run over Hainault

### **Favourite Sessions:**

I loved the fartlek over Hainault as you really felt that you were pushing your anaerobic system and those type of sessions really improved your fitness.



Mel Jones

**Favourite race distance** 10 miles

**Favourite event - Track, Road or Cross Country** Cross country

**What advice would you give our current crop of youngsters**

As I trained far too much as a youngster and are now paying for it with an arthritic knee, make sure you avoid too many hard surfaces. Avoid running every day, combine strength training, flexibility training and some other form of endurance cross training like cycling and swimming so you don't pick up overuse injuries which I have suffered with the whole of my running career.

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

Well I did train with all the gladiators when I was on the show in 1995, does that count?

I also somehow ended up at the elite start for the first London 10km in 2014. Everybody was talking about having a letter on their number indicating their start time or wave. I didn't have a number for some reason. Then I received an email giving me the information about the elite start times. Of course I turned up in the elite start tent with everyone looking at me, because I was certainly should not have been there. Mo Farah started the race which was down the Mall and everyone just cam running past and I found myself completely on my own until the first wave of runners came along and lifted me off my feet.



**How would you improve the sport**

It's important to get kids interested in running early on by combining it with fun activities



Mel Jones

rather than just to run. It needs to be tackled at grass roots level. My job as a PE teacher is frustrating as something happens to kids when they start secondary school. At primary they are encouraged to take part in a mile a day run. When they get to me, they hate running and simply cannot be bothered. Unfortunately, the drop in numbers over the years in races has confirmed that it is difficult to keep children in the sport during after their teenage years.

### **Favourite Athlete or Sportsman:**

Jessica Ennis-Hill, what a sports woman and how on earth did she not crack under the pressure during 2012

### **What other sports do you follow:**

So these are what I take part in over a typical year

Open water swimming (still going even in the winter when Boris lets us)



Skiing

Rock Climbing

Scuba Diving

Hiking

### **Best Country Visited**

I have been very fortunate as a teacher to have had the holidays to travel. I have to say Peru



Mel Jones

having completed the Inca trail, Machu Picchu and the amazon twice. Once on holiday and once as part of a school world challenge.

Although I have also been to Borneo twice on a World Challenge and recently had the pleasure of seeing wild Orangutans as we were planting trees to help restore some of their natural habitat

Ooo not it might be Nepal due to seeing Everest



**Favourite Food & Drink :**

Ooo, not sure probably between pizza and curry. I do like a flavoured gin and tonic

**Favourite TV Shows:**

Anything to do with nature, I love David Attenborough

**Last Film Seen :**

1917 before lockdown

**Last Book Read**

“Killing for Company” which was about Dennis Neilson the serial killer

**Favourite Band Singer:**

Cold play



Mel Jones

### **Last Album Bought or Downloaded**

Can't remember (that's sad)

### **Last Concert Attended:**

David Grey 2005 I think

### **Any Pets:**

No but would love a dog but travel too much (well used to before COVID)

### **What are your aims for next season**

My aim for every season is to try to run in some shape or form. I was diagnosed with having osteo-arthritis in 2016 having struggled with a knee injury for several months. I'll never give up trying to run, however it's getting harder the older I get. So, I cross train to keep fit and have now taken up open water swimming since lockdown. I would like to enter a few 1km swim races next year.

### **Tell us a Joke:**

OMG really! Here goes. A man goes into a pet shop and sees an octopus for sale. He decides to buy it, but before he leaves the shop the shop owner briefs him on how to look after him. "what ever you do, do not put him on a flat surface when you clean the tank". So the man took the octopus back home. Several weeks later when he couldn't see the octopus as the water was so minging so he thought about cleaning the tank. He took off the cover, lifted the octopus out of the tank and put it on the table. Straight away the octopus spread out his tentacles across the table and became stuck fast. Only then did the man remember the shop owner's last words. Crap he thought and went to the shop to get some advice. As soon as the man walked into the shop, the owner said to him "I bet you took him out of the tank and put him down somewhere flat" Well of course the man had to own up that he forgot the advice given to him weeks ago. "Hang on" said the shop owner and then came out with a shovel to which he handed over and said "try this".

On his way home the man could not come up with any ideas of how to use the shovel. When he got home, the octopus looked at him with a knowing eye. The man tried to use the shovel to prise off its tentacles. Finally, it was no use and the man went back to the shop. This time

the shop owner came home with him, picked up the shovel, raised it above his head and then attempted to hit the octopus on the head. The octopus seeing this was going to happen put all of his legs on top of his head to avoid the blow.

This joke is so much better with a human impression of the octopus putting his tentacles over his head.



Sorry did try!

## MEL ANSWERS YOUR QUESTIONS

**Are you still in contact with Vivian Grisogono, the knee specialist physio you used to see for your injuries? Mel's knees are in one of her books (which I can't find at home)**



Mel Jones

Yes, I have been in contact with Vivian to ask her advice when I found out I had arthritis in my knee. She moved back to Croatia in 2004 to the island of Hvar near Split. I remember when that photo was taken and I was rewarded with a signed copy of the book.

**Do you like your Orca wetsuit and would you recommend it as a durable, strong and comfortable wetsuit?**

I only bought that wetsuit as I had borrowed my friends to do my first open water swim this year as the pools were all closed. I like it because it is so easy to get on and off and is comfortable. However, it is a triathlon suit rather than an open water suit so the arms and legs are shorter, so not really suitable for real open water swimmers.

**How did you manage to get on Gladiators in 1995 and tell us about your experience on the TV Show ?**

I only applied because the kids at my first teaching school said I should give it a go. I made the short list and had to do physical tests and a screen test to get on. I thought it was a joke at first when I received the acceptance letter. I had a film crew follow me round for a whole day, I had only just moved to a new school and I suddenly had 100 students attend my lunchtime rounders club. We had to train for the first two weeks before the show was filmed to have a go at the majority of the games. Some of the games didn't suit me as I wanted to do the climbing and the gauntlet. Instead I got hang tough and the pugil stick one (can't remember the proper name) which was hard. A lot of the contenders picked up injuries during this time playing the games and so there were loads of subs on standby. I guess I enjoyed it but was really too nervous at the time, especially as I had arranged 100 Frances Bardsley students to be part of the audience. A stupid error on the eliminator saw me "eliminated" by a second which was gutting.

**What was the clerical error that stopped you winning the Essex 400 Meters ?**





Mel Jones

The club admin at the time (not Ilford) put down the wrong age category and I should have been in the seniors not the inters. That was before they had all the u17, u19 etc. I had all my photos in the local paper and then a week later I received a letter telling me to hand back my medal. I was heartbroken at the time.

### **What made you initially join Ilford AC ?**

I was persuaded by an Ilford Athlete called Alun Jones who I met at my brothers wedding. I ended up marrying him.

### **What School and where are you a Teacher at and what is that like under Lockdown rules ?**

I teach at Frances Bardsley Academy in Romford which is all girls. Lockdown was hell as a PE teacher, you would normally be out enjoying the sunshine and also the girls mellow as the weather gets warmer. As I teach GCSE and A level PE, I spent lots of time recording voice over PowerPoints and marking work sent through on-line. Then it began to move to on-line learning which can be soul destroying if students refuse to engage. I did have to go into school every few weeks on a rota to supervise the key worker kids which was scary as they could not social distance. I found I was logging on at 8.30am and then logging off around 4pm, a long day to be sitting on your backside.

### **How did you get into cold open water swimming ?**

My friend Jill texted me to ask if I was interested in going to Redricks Lake to swim as the pools were still closed in June. I replied a big fat NO! I wear 2 costumes in a pool as I feel the cold so much. The week after the weather became really hot, and she asked me again. I only agreed if she would lend me her (ORCA) wetsuit. We have been every week since then; apart from when I was in a self-isolation period, which was frustrating as I was going to join Steve Parker and Alan for their 2 mile swim. They were supposed to do the Serpentine classic but COVID prevented that from happening. Since then, I have also swam in lakes in the Lake District on holiday. The coldest has been 5 degrees and I expect it to freeze over New Year.



Mel Jones

### **Favourite Park Run and PB ?**

I never got into the Park runs as they were too early in the morning and I was already committed to swimming at Loughton tri club on Saturdays. The Elvis had a race over Leyton Jubilee park and I had such a good run to better my PB to 21.05. I don't know if they still hold it over there but it was more interesting than the average park run venues

### **How and when did you first notice you had osteo-arthritis and what do you now do to cope with it ?**

I was doing a session on the road in Hainault and I felt sharp pains in my right knee which did not go. I had previously left my custom-made orthotics in France at half term when skiing, I continued to train and race until May when I decided to take a couple of weeks off. However, those weeks went into months and then a year until a bog standard x-ray picked up arthritis and the doctor told me to give up running forever. As runners we never listen to doctors and so I trained hard to improve the strength around the knee so I can at least jog every so often. This all happened in 2016 and my brain tells me to keep trying so I could compete again someday. However, as the gyms keep closing I don't have access to all the rehab machines to help me so I have had a month off to let the knee settle. I just work with the pain and when its bad I just stop and do something else low impact, hence the open water swimming.

### **Do you still have and wear your prestigious Red 'Essex' Vest ?**

No and No. I was 12 when I ran for Essex. Bit bigger now.

### **Greatest Triumph in Running and any BIG Trophies ?**

I don't have any big trophies, but I did enjoy the 2014 season where Jenni Sheehan and Bree Nordin, Krystle and I cleaned up all the Elvis runs and won overall. Finishing the London marathon in 2002 on just 3 training days a week and no running 6 weeks before was pretty intense and breaking the 4 hour mark. I couldn't walk or run properly for 2 weeks. I have also won Masters titles over 10km. I probably won more since I became a 40 vet than at any other time. So you youngsters keep at it.



Mel Jones

**Did you meet Alun at the club and did you ever train together?**

I met Alun at my brother's wedding as they worked together. He persuaded me to come to the track to train. As my current running club was about to fold, I thought I might as well. Alun was a sprinter so I did join their group which was hard as they always gave me a head start and I hate running blind. I joined but had to serve a 9 months ban from competing which were the rules at the time when you moved clubs. My letter of hardship was turned down by Margaret Gillham who was on the Ilford Committee which was disappointing. Alun and I only started training together when he retired from sprinting and wanted to keep fit. We were always very competitive on the Ilford Hilly 5 but he never beat me!

**When yourself and Alun were at your peaks which of you trained harder?**

I'm probably going to say Alun as he was much more of a successful athlete than I was. However, I would say that I always trained longer as I was a distance runner.

**If you could tell your 16 year old self anything (doesn't have to be about sport) what would it be?**

Not to run marathon distances and train six days when you are still growing.

**You have kept yourself very trim in all the years I have known you. Is this down mainly to sport or are you careful about what you eat?**

When you build exercise into your life it becomes normal. I have tried to cross train as much as I can so avoid repetitive injuries but unfortunately, I am prone to picking up niggles regularly. However, running is the only activity that keeps my weight right down so I have to work hard on CV machines to get an equivalent workout. My job helps me to stay slim as just being on your feet burns calories (not during lockdown) and I also teach a lot of fitness classes so I get free workouts during the day.

I have been a vegetarian for a year now and will take part in Veganuary and dry January. I try not to eat processed foods and make most of my meals from scratch. I do like takeaways though and have one once a week.



Mel Jones

### **Are your medals on display at home?**

Yes I have a few plaques and shields on the window ledge.

### **Who would be at your fantasy dinner party and what 'signature dish' would you serve them?**

I would have Henry VIII at the top of the table and Queen Elizabeth II at the other end. Sandwiched between would be Elvis, Martin Luther-King, Emmeline Pankhurst, Edmund Hillary, Mallory and Irvine.

### **What was your trainer of choice and would you spend £200+ on a pair of trainers to give you an advantage?**

As I have suffered from injuries since my 20's, I needed to wear flexible but supportive trainers. I always run in Mizuno wave riders, I never pay the full price as I buy an old model as I think it is a money-making scheme. I would never pay £200 for a pair of trainers. The Africans have been running barefoot since the beginning of time and it never did them any harm.

### **Technology. Heart monitors, sports watches with hundreds of stats etc. Do you embrace it or do you simply want to know how far you went and how long it took you? Maybe somewhere in between?**

I tend to just time my runs so I know how long I have been out so as not to overdo my sessions. I do have a Garmin Forerunner which does everything but tend not to wear that unless I start to get fitter. The danger is trying to beat every stat and that leads to overuse injuries.