

Blizzard takes its toll on fells

Arctic conditions forced organisers of the Auld Lang Syne fell race to delay the start of the New Year's Eve event — and re-route the run.

Biting winds and blizzard conditions took their toll on runners, but Ian Holmes turned in a blistering performance to defy the weather and beat a top class field which included six international athletes.

"Until about 20 minutes before the race we only had about 12 people entered, people were having great difficulty reaching Penistone Hill and we decided to delay the start by 15 minutes and the decision paid off," said organiser Dave Woodhead.

Eventually a total of 137 people took part in the event, but even getting to the start line caused problems.

Nelson runner Steve Whittaker, a milkman, crashed his vehicle into a ditch on the moorland road between Colne and Haworth close to The Herders public house. A number of people on their way to the race stopped to help, but Steve missed the event and had to drive home through

the snow storm without a windscreen in his car.

"I would like to thank a man in a silver SAAB who was on his way to the race and stopped to help," he said.

The race course was shortened to follow the 'Stoop' course to ensure runners spent as little time as possible on the exposed high level sections. "We decided it was safer to send people up to the Stoop and straight back down and keep them off the skyline. Snow had already started drifting two or three feet deep next to the walls," Dave Woodhead said.

Holmes completed the five-mile course in 30min 08secs, just 19 seconds slower than his pre-Christmas Stoop race triumph. But he finished covered in snow and completed shattered by the strength-sapping conditions.

He beat Scottish international Colin Donnelly (31.02) and Ambleside fell runner Shaun Willis who was on top form after winning six races including the

Whinbury Naze in Rossendale on Boxing Day. Robert Hope of Horwich, a former England under-20 international, was fourth in 32:29.

Bingley's Ian Ferguson took fifth place (32:43) ahead of Keighley Road Runner Jonnie Butler who was first veteran. Organiser Dave Woodhead was seventh with Matt Woods (33:45) in eighth place.

Carol Greenwood, who has represented England at every discipline, on the fells, cross country, track and road races, continued her domination of the fells in 36:04, repeating his Stoop success as first woman home. Former British marathon record holder, Sarah Rowell, was second woman with international Nikki Wilkinson third.

Keighley Hill Runner Vince Whitehead (25th in 36:30) got the better of his brother, Damian, who was 40th in 37:50.

● Runners battle their way through the snow in the Auld Lang Syne run.

More running Page 18

