

Winning race of life

1997



RUNNERS turned the Withens Skyline fell race into an emotional celebration for top veteran runner Christine Porritt – in her personal race against cancer.

Just a year ago Christine, who holds many Over-50 records, was told the devastating news that she was suffering from leukaemia.

"At the time everyone in the sport was totally shocked. We had a collection during last year's Withens race and bought Christine a sculpture of an Otter which was signed by the artist and inscribed with the name of the race," said race organiser Dave Woodhead.

The gesture of support gave Christine a goal which helped sustain her through months of gruelling treatment which included chemotherapy and long stays in hospital.

From September through to April she was undergoing treatment, and even after her last dose of chemotherapy it took almost three months to start to recover her strength.

"No matter how fit you are before hand the chemical treatment takes everyone down to the same base line. Your immune system is knocked out completely and your main task is to avoid infections.

"You can't do anything about, but you have to try to go on living and I was determined not to become institutionalised – I had to have goals to aim for," Christine said.

The beacon which kept her spirits up was a determination to return to running, and get back among her friends throughout the sport. Before the illness struck she had been super-fit running in ultra-long distance events.

The longer the race the better for Christine who was more than happy to tag two marathons together, and would run any distance up to 100 miles.

By JOHN HEALD

hours before runners to walk round the course in a bid to rebuild her strength and fitness.

Throughout the summer she developed her own training schedule, and her new target was to run the Skyline.

"I rang Dave Woodhead about two months before the race and asked if it would be alright to take part and everyone was very helpful. It was the ideal race because it's only seven miles.

"I was determined to finish, but was worried it would take too long. The slowest time was one hour 30 minutes, so I set myself a target of being 10 minutes faster than that."

There was a huge welcome when she crossed the line on 1hr 8mins – and was not the back marker.

"I struggled for the last mile, but crossing the line was very emotional, it was fantastic to be back – now I'm quite content to be able to run at all," Christine said.

● Kenny Stirrat of Halifax Harriers won the race in a time of 40 minutes, ahead of Shaun Livesey of Clayton-le-Moors.

Steve Oldfield took the Over-40's prize in fourth place with Pudsey and Bramley's Gary Devine in sixth place.

Lee Broadley sacrificed his chances of winning the junior event, and set a new Under-18 record even though he is still able to run at Under-16 level.

Carol Greenwood won the women's race, over five min-