

SHOCK, HORROR, DISASTER - BUNNY SERIES IN JEOPARDY

Enjoy that chocolate Easter egg while you can, it could well be your last!

Cocoa growers are facing a worldwide crisis that could lead to dwindling supplies and higher prices. Growers on the Ivory Coast, source of most of the cocoa that goes into British chocolate, face crop devastation from black pod disease. At the same time Brazil, another major supplier, is being hit by fungus which attacks the trees. These combined diseases could wipe out the industry.

However never fear the Woodentops are already monitoring the chocolate situation closely, and are confident that Easter eggs will be the major prizes at the 1999 Bunny run series, the word is: "Chocolate lovers should not despair."

The British are the world's biggest chocoholics, munching their way through an extra 850,000 tonnes a year - 16% up on 10 years ago, have the Bunny runs which were conceived 6 years ago helped this mammoth increase of consumption?

BUNNY RUN SERIES REPORTS - THE FOUR SEASONS

Dry Bunny One

Despite admitting to making "a massive mistake" in choice of footwear, course record holder Ian Holmes had no difficulty in holding off a 189 strong field. This despite opting for road shoe flats instead of the more traditional studded fell shoe, he realised this after skirting round a deep puddle within the first 200 yards, and found things more difficult than anticipated.

17 year old Alan Baker of Rochdale Harriers caused the upset of the evening, he decided to run for the 'Egg Stage' prize that is incorporated within each race, his 50 yard lead was dramatically reduced approaching the rocky outcrop marker, as he paid for his exertions. He did hang on to clock 3.30, with Holmes a mere second behind, Alan's lactic acid legs then only allowed him to jog down the field before getting his second wind to finish 40th overall in 21.40.

Holmes went on to win by almost half a minute from Bingley team mate Robert Jebb who was celebrating his England call - up for the Knockdhu International at Co. Antrim, Northern Ireland. A regular bunny runner Holmes achieved his 11th victory since the races conception in 1992.

Spenboro's housewife Kath Drake, who set the W35 record of 21.27 last year, won the women's race in 53rd position half a minute ahead of Bradford's Andrea Dennison.

Drake wasn't the only female to steal the show however. Traditionally - attired 'Eccleshill Bunny Girl' Shelagh Hopkinson toed the line to raise money for the Scope Charity Appeal. Thankfully she was persuaded not to run in her black stilettos or her finishing time might well have been lower than her 33.55 for 167th position - a time that includes her 3-minute handicap to enable all the other

competitors to witness her charity effort. It was a busy evening's work for Shelagh, because afterwards she raised £90 with a raffle, and then sank a half-yard of ale in 2 minutes 10 seconds to rapturous applause all this still clad in her bunny outfit!

A new innovation this year was the introduction of the free yard and half yard of ale drinking contests, tonight's half yard was won by Ian Hill in 10.05 seconds, with over 60 Bernard Crowther second in 11.40 seconds.

Snowy Bunny Two

Road closures and white-out conditions couldn't deter an impressive turn out of 164 runners, just 25 down on the previous Tuesday.

Although snow started falling at mid-day with about 2 inch falling during the race itself - many braved the long journey across the Pennines and from all points in Yorkshire to compete in arguably the most popular race series on the fell calendar. Joint British champion Ian Holmes and Kath Drake both made it two wins out of two with Holmes taking the 'Egg Stage' prize en-route in 3.47, two seconds clear of Gary Devine.

Despite the heavy snow and almost zero visibility, Holmes still clocked a respectable 18.05 - just six seconds down on the previous week, Drake faired almost as well running just nine seconds slower.

One evident feature was the amount of ladies having the energy to sprint finish, Ruth Dorrington beat Ruth Whitehead by one second for second, Helen Johnson defied Ann Lloyd by the same margin and Sharon Taylor beat Julie Holdsworth by the thickness of a vest. The list goes on.

Race organiser Dave Woodhead admitted to being "amazed" by the large turnout, adding "to be honest, when you think of how difficult it was

to just get here - people from places like Rochdale had to make a detour via Queensbury - I was expecting about forty to fifty. In the end we got 164 turning out to run 3 miles in a blizzard just for a Cadbury's Crème Egg! Can you believe it? It's not just the hardened fell runners either. We had 37 women finishers this time compared to 45 last Tuesday - an excellent turnout given the conditions."

The yard of ale contest attracted 3 competitors with Bernard Crowther ahead with 43.36 seconds, second Mark Bellas 48.56 seconds and Baildon's Quentin Lewis 122.25 seconds savouring the flavour.

Wet Bunny Three

Former English junior champion Sean Willis notched up his second win in 3 days with a convincing late dash race surge. Willis, who won the English junior title 13 years ago, moved clear of Clayton's Mark Horrocks approaching the en-route 'Egg Stage' marker (which he won in 3.38) before allowing Dale Wilkinson of Rochdale back on level terms in the woods.

The Todmorden runner remained composed, however, and made his decisive burst in the final mile to come home half a minute clear of Wilkinson with Horrocks taking third a further 6 seconds back.

It was touch and go, though, whether Willis was going to make it to the start line. Although unsure of whether he would have recovered from his efforts in winning the Wardle Skyline over the weekend, Willis had been driving a van for much of the day for the engineering company he works for and only arrived at the start minutes before the off.

"Joanne (his fiancé) had been able to get a lift to the race before me as I wasn't sure



Steve Bottomley and Mick Addison find bunny girl Shelagh Hopkinson (Eccleshill) at the start of the race.
Photo: Hazel Maddocks - Eccleshill's club supporter

