

THE STOOP RACE

Keighley, W Yorks

FORMER British champion Ian Holmes shrugged off recent illness worries to claim his ninth successive victory in the 10th running of this well-established festive event, Gareth Webb reports.

Holmes' domination of this race - he was runner up behind Allan 'Boff' Whalley (of chart-topping band Chumbawamba fame) in the inaugural race in 1990 - is such that few would bet against the 'King of Haworth Moor' extending his unbeaten streak in years to come.

Despite a severe stomach upset in the days leading up to the event, the 34-year-old was in aggressive mood from the outset. And after building a sizeable lead on the opening climb, continued to take advantage of the fast, frozen conditions to extend his margin all the way to the finish and hold off English championship bronze medalist Paul Sheard by almost a minute.

"It's the first time in quite a few years that it's been as fast as this," said Holmes who, opted to run the race in road shoes. "I always like to lead, though - especially on home ground.

"I've had food poisoning, so it was pleasing to run as well as I did. I couldn't eat for two days - and only managed to eat from Friday onwards. My aim was just to see how things went and take it from there.

"The race is very special to me - not just because it's on home ground. Dave (Woodhead) always puts on a good event. The atmosphere is brilliant and once I've won a race I always like to defend it."

Steve Oldfield defended his M40 title from Graham Schofield with Jonny Butler - the M40 course record holder (28:56) from 1995 - taking third.

English M50 champion Tony Hesketh took the over-50 honours in 27th place overall, less than a minute outside Ken Taylor's mark of 32:17. Fred Gibbs won the M60, finishing just 10 seconds adrift of John Barker's over-60 best of 38:02.

Both Oldfield and Hesketh were presented with new trophies to mark their respective victories. Oldfield's was donated by Ian Holmes, Mark Kinch and Neil Wilkinson after their second place at the Trofeo Vanoni Race in Italy last year with Hesketh receiving his courtesy of Keswick Festival winner Paul Thompson.

Harrogate's Chris Miller won the U18 race from Ray Edgar who demonstrated his stamina - not to mention keenness - only a short while earlier by holding off brother Neil to win the U16 race over two miles.

English championship bronze medalist and Snowdon winner Helen Johnson was a popular winner of the women's race.

Johnson, arguably the revelation of the season in only her first serious season on the fells, placed 43rd overall from the record 226-strong field.

Men (5M, 800ft)

1 I Holmes (Bing) 27:47; 2 P Sheard (P&B) 28:41; 3 R Hope (P&B) 28:54; 4 K Smith (Toc) 29:56; 5 S Livesey (Clay) 30:02; 6 S Oldfield (Brad A, M40) 30:09; 7 P Stevenson (P&B) 30:15; 8 G Oldfield (P&B) 30:38; 9 A Whalley (P&B) 30:57; 10 A Payne (unatt) 31:00; 11 G Schofield (Horw, M40) 31:06; 12 C Loftus (K&C) 31:12; 13 J Butler (K&C, M40) 31:20; 14 S Bottomley (P&B) 31:44; 15 S Macina (P&B) 31:48; 16 C Valentine (Kesw) 31:58; 17 R Griffiths (Holm, M40) 32:06; 18 A Clarke (Cald V) 32:21; 19 C Shuttleworth (Prest, M40) 32:25; 20 J Hemsley (P&B) 32:25; 21 J Mason (unatt) 32:28; 22 S Addison (Clay, M40) 32:44; 23 B Goodison (Abbey R, M40) 32:48; 24 M Pickering (Ik, M40) 32:52; 25 C Miller (Har, U18) 32:54; 26 I Ferguson (Bing) 32:57; 27 T Hesketh (Horw,