

Three Peaks Race Report for 2016

Report on the 2016 Three Peaks Race held on Saturday, April 30th

Marc Lauenstein claims he is an orienteer rather than a fell runner but on his first visit to the Three Peaks Race in the Yorkshire Dales the Swiss dentist won the event in a near record time round a 23-mile course made challenging by four days of snow and ice.

Lauenstein, 35, finished in 2hrs 48mins 58secs, only nine seconds ahead of his Salomon team-mate Ricky Lightfoot, the winner in 2014 and 2015. It was 2mins 55secs slower than the record over the current course set by Andy Peace, of Bingley Harriers, in 1996.

It meant the Three Peaks Association treasurer Graham Newby, who was team leader of the marshals on Ingleborough, did not have to pay out the £500 bonus prize on offer for a winner who could break the men's record in a race which had Pete Bland Sports, Hanson UK and Inov-8 as its main sponsors.

His accounts looked even better when Victoria Wilkinson, of Bingley Harriers, claimed the women's prize and 35th place overall to beat ultra-runner Mira Rai from Nepal, but was outside Czech runner Anna Pichrtova's record of 3hrs 14min 43secs when the Three Peaks hosted the World Mountain Running Championship in 2008. Wilkinson set 3hrs 26mins 47secs with Rai 9mins 8secs behind.

Lauenstein reached the 2,277ft summit of Penyghent from Horton-in-Ribblesdale in 28mins 19secs – three seconds ahead of Lightfoot, but the firefighter from Maryport in Cumbria, then edged into the lead as it turned into a race with their Salomon team-mate Tom Owens, 34, the winner in 2011, closely involved.

At High Birkwith only 42 seconds separated them with Lightfoot in the lead, Owens 14 seconds behind and Lauenstein 42 seconds in arrears. Lightfoot reached Ribblehead in 1hrs 12mins 13 secs with Lauenstein, winner of the Pikes Peak Marathon in 2014 and the Marathon du Mont Blanc in 2015, third.

But Lauenstein dug deep on the steep ascent to Whernside's 2,415ft summit, a climb made treacherous by three days of heavy snow showers and freezing conditions overnight. Whernside marshals lift a gate off its hinges to allow runners easy passage, but struggled when they found it partly buried in frozen snow.

Lightfoot, 31, knew the tricky descent down the natural rock steps to Bruntscar and reached the valley bottom Hill Inn checkpoint two seconds ahead of Lauenstein with Owens now just over a minute behind.

But it seemed to be the ascent of Ingleborough which made the difference. Lauenstein reached the 2,372ft summit 1min 4secs ahead of Lightfoot, but the race was far from over and he and Lightfoot gave spectators at Horton a thrilling finish after a five-mile run for home.

Lauenstein, from Neuchatel, near Berne, in Switzerland, won a silver medal in the long distance category at the 2005 World Orienteering Championships at Aichi and silver at Aarhus in 2006 and won the South African Otter Trail Run at his first attempt in 2015, but claimed the Three Peaks was his first real fell race.

Asked if he found conditions tough over what is billed as the “marathon with mountains” Lauenstein said: “Well, actually it is my first fell race. Really I am an orienteer which is why I had some trouble running the section up to Ribbleshead, but running up Wharfedale it was my terrain.”

He said: “On the way up Ingleborough I was able to get away from Ricky, but on the way down he was so fast. He is such an incredible runner. I really did have to push hard. When he was getting close I was swearing. I used to think fell running was the thing to do and I always wished I could do it. Today was the day.”

Tom Owens was third in 2hrs 52mins 14secs. Two other runners – both in the Male Veteran Over-40 class - finished in under three hours. They were Karl Gray, of Calder Valley Fell runners in 2hrs 57mins 13secs and Robert Hope of Pudsey and Bramley Athletics Club in in 2hrs 58mins 14secs.

In the ladies’ race Rai, who won the women’s prize in the 50K race at the Himalayan Outdoor Festival in 2014 and 2015 and set a new record in the 2015 Mont Blanc 80K race, finished 65th overall at the Three Peaks. Helen Berry, of Holmfirth Harriers, was in third place and 71st overall in 3hrs 37mins 20secs. There were 800 starters and 703 finished.

Team results

Men: 1, Hunters’ Bog Trotters - Murray Strain, Duncan Coombs, Douglas Tuley and Colin Doig; 2, Pudsey and Bramley AC – Robert Hope, Graham Pearce, Joe Baxter and Matthew Hobbs; 3, Wharfedale Harriers – Sam Watson, Ted Mason, Mark McGoldrick and Nathan Martin.

Men V40: 1, Helm Hill Runners – Nigel Wood, Kieran Hodgson and Craig Burrow; 2,

Dark Peak Fell Runners’ Club – John Hunt, Gareth Briggs and Craig Jeffery.

Men V50: 1, Keighley and Craven AC – Shaun Wilkinson, Simon Farrar, David Copping; 2, Clayton-le-Moors Harriers – Brian Horrocks, Paul Shackleton, Nicholas Olszewski; 3, Bowland Fell Runners – Christopher Balderson, Steve Sweeney, Martin Walsh.

Ladies:1, Bingley Harriers and AC – Victoria Wilkinson, Ruth Whitehead and Lesley Watson; 2, Holmfirth Harriers AC – Helen Berry, Helena Croft and Jean Shotter; 3, Helm Hill Runners – Sharon Taylor, Carrie Gibson and Amanda Burrow.

Brian Dooks

Three Peaks Race Committee