

# Three Peaks Race Report for 2017

It was mission accomplished on Saturday when months of training paid off for Victoria Wilkinson, who claimed a £500 bonus prize for breaking the ladies' record in the Three Peaks Race across the mountains of the Yorkshire Dales.

Wilkinson, 38, who is an ambassador for the event's main sponsor Inov-8, one of the world's leading all-terrain footwear, clothing and equipment brands, knocked a decisive 5mins 24secs off the time set by Anna Pichrtova, of the Czech Republic, when the Three Peaks hosted the World Long Distance Mountain Running Championships in 2008.

The Bingley Harriers runner finished in 13<sup>th</sup> place overall in a race won by Murray Strain, 34, of Hunters Bog Trotters in Edinburgh. He set a time of 2hrs 49mins 38secs – 3mins 35secs outside the men's record for the current course, which Andy Peace, of Bingley Harriers established 21-years-ago in 1996.

The previous highest finishing female was Sarah Rowell - 15th in 1992. Wilkinson, whose family live at Hebden, near Grassington, in the Yorkshire Dales, had predicted that Pichrtova's record was beatable, but knew it required the correct combination of near-perfect weather conditions before and on race day with peak personal performance.

Wilkinson, a remedial and sports masseur, who added the 2017 title to her wins in 2014 and 2016, had long held an ambition to bring the record back to Yorkshire. Doing it when the Three Peaks was the selection event for the World Long Distance Mountain Running Championships at Gir de Mont, Italy, in August, was even better.

She said: "If there was a guarantee of a record you would not need to run. A lot can go wrong in a race of this length, so you have to do it stage by stage." The work started months ago when she began a series of training runs over the 23-miles across Penyghent, Whernside and Ingleborough.

The race, which has 5,279ft of ascent, is billed as the "Marathon with Mountains" and provides a punishing training schedule. She said: "You have to do it stage by stage. I have done different sections six or seven times this year, with different combinations of two hills, one hill, and the flat bits. I have done a lot of work on it."

Some of the work is solo running, but Wilkinson has also trained with Martin Peace and three-times race winner Rob Jebb, both Bingley Harriers, as well as with Inov-8 team-mate Ben Mouncey and her partner Darren Kay. Jebb, 42, was ninth on Saturday in 3hrs 3mins 2secs. .

Before Saturday's race started Wilkinson, who has competed for Great Britain in six disciplines in running and cycling, knew she was ready for a record challenge. "The results I have done in the past few months have been promising, but those races were much shorter, so they were in a different category, I know my training has been pretty good. I have been really lucky. I have not been ill and I have not been injured. Not many runners can say that."

Asked how much more she thought she could shave off the record, Wilkinson said: "I don't know. I was trying hard today. It is knowing how much you can push in the first half to be able to survive the second half. I tried to run it knowing that. I would have to change something in my training. I would have to reassess it and see what else I could do."

After hundreds of spectators cheered her to the finish line in Horton-in-Ribblesdale, near Settle, Wilkinson said she was very relieved to have broken the record to claim the £500 bonus price as well as the £200 ladies prize, plus a £100 Inov-8 voucher, adding: "I am very happy. Mission accomplished, job done."

It had been quite a week for Murray Strain, who took a surprise victory in his second attempt on the Three Peaks. Strain, who finished seventh in 2016 in a time of 3hrs 3mins 7secs, said: "I had an exam this week on Monday to become a qualified actuary. It has been a long haul for that. I have had a couple of hours running each day, which has been the break."

A navigation error on the descent from Whernside probably cost 2011 winner Tom Owens the race. Strain beat him by 4mins 22secs, with Christopher Holdsworth, of Clayton-le-Moors Harriers in third place in a time of 2hrs 54mins 49secs. But it was a surprise for Strain to discover he was in the lead up Ingleborough.

Strain said: "I knew I was a bit fitter this year. I had a strong winter. After running it last year it was always the plan to come back and have a good one and then when form started to come together I thought maybe I might get a place."

Next year he plans to concentrate on orienteering. "We will see how the calendar pans out, but I will definitely be back at some point on the Three Peaks."

It was a bad day for Cumbrian firefighter Ricky Lightfoot, of Ellenborough Athletics Club, who won in 2014 and 2015. Strain said: "Ricky seemed to be struggling a bit on the hills. He was walking up Penyghent, which did not look right." Lightfoot, who had been running in the Himalayas with his Salomon team-mate Tom Owens for the last two weeks, subsequently retired at the Hill Inn checkpoint.

Strain said: "Then Tom Owens shot himself in the foot. He missed the turning off Whernside. He was a minute ahead of me on the top. I did not know he had gone wrong. I thought he was away and gone. It was only half way up Ingleborough that people were shouting that I had a massive lead. I thought OK, alright, where's Tom. I knew I had a chance of winning, so I pushed hard."

Strain, Owens and Holdsworth all "dibbed" into the electronic timing equipment on Penyghent summit in 28 minutes with Owens 20 seconds in the lead. Strain was in third place at High Birkwith, 1min 13secs behind Owens. The long valley bottom run to Ribblehead put more pressure on Strain who arrived third in 1hr 13mins 4secs, 36secs behind Holdsworth, with Owens 1min 30secs in the lead.

Then came the punishing climb up the face of Whernside, which Owens reached in 99mins 38secs with Strain and Holdsworth a minute behind. Down the rocky steps to the Hill Inn, Strain took the lead, reaching the checkpoint in 1hrs 55mins 59secs. Holdsworth recorded 1hr 57mins 51secs with Owens 12 seconds under two hours.

Strain reached Ingleborough summit 3mins 31secs ahead of Holdsworth and nearly four minutes in front of Owens and, having been told that he was in the lead, pushed on to finish at Horton in 2hrs 49mins 38secs. Owens finished in 2hrs 54mins, with Holdsworth completing the race 49 seconds later.

In the ladies' race, Victoria Wilkinson was followed home by Nichola Jackson, 25, of Preston Harriers, in 40<sup>th</sup> place, recording 3hrs 26mins 17secs . Third lady, claiming 49<sup>th</sup> place, was Charlotte Morgan, 40, of Carnethy Hill Racing Club, in 3hrs 33mins 19secs.

Scotsman Terence Thomson, 62, became the 20,000<sup>th</sup> finisher in the Three Peaks Race's 63-year history when he crossed the line in 637<sup>th</sup> place in a time of 5hrs 10mins 37secs. It was his first attempt. Thomson originated from Wishaw in North Lanarkshire, but graduated in civil engineering at Leeds University and now lives in the city.

Race results: <http://www.threepeaksrace.org.uk/>

Brian Dooks