

CHESHIRE ROAD RUNNING 2013

- *The Park Run Effect*

Detailed information on participation and performance levels have been collected for Cheshire club runners in road racing since 2008, which now provides a comparison over a 6 year period. The data covers events from 5K to the marathon distance and is for road races, but includes Park Runs which were first held in 2008.

Data for 2013 shows that increases have taken place in the numbers participating, the number of events in which Cheshire runners have taken part, and the overall number of performances as follows :

- the number of active athletes, which had begun increasing in 2011 was, in 2013, the highest of the 6 years at 1113 males and 701 females showing a significant increase in both cases from 2012.
- The number of performances in 2013 at 7296 by males and 3515 by females shows a substantial increase on 2012, again being the highest of the 6 years.
- The number of events in which Cheshire club members participated has also followed the same trends, increasing each year from 327 in 2008 to 711 in 2013.

The significant increases from 2012 to 2013 cannot be explained by the addition of 2 clubs to the Cheshire road running scene in 2012 and again in 2013, although they have become very active participants. Most clubs have seen an increase in the numbers of active runners in 2013 from previous years.

A breakdown of participation by distance for 2013 provides a rather different picture. Using the 6 most widely contested distances (5K, 5ml, 10K, 10ml, half and full marathon) all except 5K have not varied greatly over the 6 years.

The 10K has bounced back up after two lean years, but is still below the levels of 2008-2010. The half-marathon saw the highest number of events for the six year period, but the lowest number of participants for 3 years (the loss of the 4 Villages Helsby event in January 2013 due to snow and ice for which there were just over 500 Cheshire club entrants, and which in recent years has seem c.350 Cheshire club members finish would have pushed the numbers back up – just over 400 Cheshire runners finished the 2014 event).

At 5 mile and 10 mile there is not much variation over the 6 years, with the 5 mile seemingly dependent on the number of Borders League races held at that distance. The number of 10 miles was equal lowest of the 6 years, with participation also down.

Despite an increase in the number of marathons in which Cheshire athletes competed in 2013 participation numbers have been remarkably constant with a difference of only 1 in the last two years despite a fall in the number of individuals actually running this distance.

It is the 5K distance which has shown the dramatic changes, particularly in the last 3 years. The number of 5Ks (which includes Park Runs) has more than quadrupled over the six years, the number of athletes running the distance has increased 3 times and the number of performances has increased by 5.5 times.

The increase is **totally** due to the dramatic upsurge in participation in Park Runs (which before 2013 were included in the 5K information). During 2013, Park Runs were recorded separately and this has produced the following information :

- the number of Park Run events in 2013 which saw Cheshire runners take part was 460 (65% of total events) , compared to 41 (12% of total events) in 2008
- 79.5% of male and 76.4% of female 5K performances in 2013 were in Park Runs
- 38% of performances at **all** distances were in Park Runs in 2013 (2% in 2008)
- 12.8% of all active males and 14.7% of all active females **only** participated in Park Runs which is not solely due to youngsters, but includes a number of our noted top runners.

- 33% of males and 46.6% of females who took part at the 5K distance only did so in Park Runs.

When Park Runs are separated out from road races it shows that the number of 5K races in 2013 (38) is almost the lowest of the 6 year period; in 2008 and again in 2012 there were 55 5K races with a minimum of 36 reached in 2011.

With the exclusion of Park Runs, basically the total number of road races at all distances which saw Cheshire runners take part has decreased from a high of 286 in 2008 to 251 in 2013, with a low of 220 in 2011, when Park Runs would have added the same number.

Some would argue that I should ignore Park Run performances. However for some runners Park Run events are clearly competitive – times improving week on week. We have observed the movement of some runners to local clubs. They also provide a measured means for those returning to running after injury, illness, pregnancy, or after a lengthy period away from the sport. However, based on the data collected we are not yet seeing a positive knock-on effect from Park Runs to significant increases in participation in races at 5K and at longer distances.

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NOTE :A version of this information was submitted to Athletics Weekly for publication 10 days ago, but was not in last week's issue.