

Dartford Harriers Annual Awards 2021/22

Before we get started with the first award, special thanks to Claire Capon who has been responsible for our annual club awards for years. It's a lot of hard work researching for each specific award, and comparing the nominees, writing a tribute for each, and getting the trophies engraved – so thank you Claire for all your hard work on this over the years.

Whilst this presentation is taking place in the middle of July, let me remind you that the awards are based on the previous season for track & field, and the latest winter cross country season, and last year's road running, so any marvellous achievements more recently this year will be reflected in next year's award ceremony.

Dartford dasher of the year

As mentioned, these awards relate to last season, and whilst this award winner is now a fully fledged competing U13 Dartford Harrier, last season she was still a Dasher. She used to train with my own under 11s group, and showed bags of enthusiasm whatever we did – any sort of running, throwing or jumping suited her just fine. She'd always willingly volunteer to do demos for the new athletes in the group, or take others under her wing. She'd show a healthy competitive spirit when battling the other girls and boys. She outgrew the group younger than most do, and stepped up to training with athletes of 11 years and above early. She's gone on to compete in everything from javelin and hurdles to long jump this year, and given her enthusiasm for all sorts of sports and athletics, it's unsurprising that it's often hard to pin down what her actual favourite events are as she'd probably do the lot, if time, and rules, permitted. She was first to put her hand up when we mentioned pole vault tasters for younger athletes, and she's become a promising young member of that specialist group. Her exemplary attitude is matched by her brilliant talent: this year's Dartford Dasher award goes to Isabelle Rider.

Male cross country athlete of the year

Before awarding this year's male cross country athlete accolade, I'd like to give special mention to some of the athletes who had a similarly strong claim to the award this year. Firstly, Bob Coombes, whose 4th, 4th, 4th and 5th placings in the 70+ Mens category in the Kent XC League resulted in an overall 4th place. Miles Brierley was 1st overall in the U17M, after finishing 14th, 12th, 10th and 6th in the same series in his age group. Daniel Moulton also put together an excellent series to come out on top overall in the rankings for U20M, with 2 x 4th places and 2 x 5th places.

This might have been enough to edge our eventual winner, whose own performances in the Kent Cross Country League series were positions 6th, 7th, 7th and 14th, resulting in a final standing of 3rd overall in his age group. However, his excellent individual performance in the County Championships at Brands Hatch as an U13B has earned him the prize this year ahead of these other worthy nominees in a close run race.

Nearly as close as the Kent Champs itself where he so narrowly pipped his training rival Oakley. The Male XC Athlete of the Year prize goes to Daniel Francis.

Hurdler of the Year

Before awarding this prize I'd like to pay tribute to an athlete who has competed for Dartford Harriers for many years and been our standout hurdler, with number one national rankings and titles. Emily Newnham is no longer a first claim Dartford Harrier, but she is a great example and inspiration to those young sprinters and hurdlers that train with her, under the guidance of coach Paul Searing and her dad Martin.

This year a new name will be etched into the Hurdler of the Year trophy. And who knows, perhaps in the future this multi-eventing athlete's name might equally be found on the Field Athlete of the Year trophy, such are the breadth of her talents across jumping events as well as hurdles – indeed, this season she's reached the number one spot in the country for her age group in Triple Jump. She was ranked 13th, nationally, over the sprint hurdles, back in 2020, and she's pushing the top 20 again this year. She's an exemplary team player, who always competes in the most events that she can at any league meeting, bringing in a great many points for the team with outstanding performances every time she long or triple jumps, high jumps, sprints and, of course, hurdles. At the rate she's going, the Power of Ten directory is going to need to buy more storage, as she recorded over 70 performances last year alone. Highlights in county and regional level U15G competitions last year include Gold at the Kent Cross Country Champs in the Triple Jump, along with Silver in the South of England Champs, Bronze in the 200m at the Kent Schools Champs, and Bronze in the Pentathlon at the Kent Combined Events Champs, where she shows great all round ability across the 800m, High Jump, Long Jump, Shot and Sprint Hurdles. She really excels at this discipline, and recorded the 8th highest score in the country for her age group last year. Congratulations to our multi-talented, Hurdler of the Year, Isabella Amartey.

Female road runner of the year

Last year was simply phenomenal for this female road runner. She had already been competing at a really high level, and she's somehow taken it up another notch. She features more often than not in the weekly roundup of fastest parkruns in the country as she's routinely one of the fastest every week. She impresses her coaches and fellow athletes with her relentless commitment and drive as she never gives any less than 100% whether it's training or racing. I've no doubt this time next year, at the next edition of our annual awards, we'll be talking about all of her even greater achievements from this year, as she's getting better and better. She's already been captain of the England Masters team over half marathon distance, for example. And no other 40+ woman has run a faster parkrun than her this year – in her case a time of 17:30.

Last year was also a great year for her: 1st female home at the Deal Castle 5 miler in a new sub 30 minute PB. First female Kent athlete home in the Paddock Wood Half, slicing 2 mins 40 off her PB. Knocking nearly 2 mins off her 10 mile PB at the

RunThrough event at Lee Valley, where she was not only 1st female, but there were only 2 guys ahead of her. 1st in her age group at the RunThrough 10k at Battersea Park in a new PB of 37:47. In a single year she's smashed her PBs for 3k, 5k, parkrun, 10k, 10 mile, half marathon and marathon...

Surely her proudest achievement last year was her terrific performance at the marathon distance, in York, at a large event attended by many of the country's best athletes as it is one of the events where you can qualify to represent your country at Masters events. She went on to do just that, as the 3rd female finisher overall, and of course the winner in her own age group, earning the right to represent England in international competition. She clocked a huge PB, smashing the 3 hour barrier with 2 hours 57 minutes. Our Female Road Runner of the Year is Hannah Roberts.

Clubman of the Year

As our volunteers at Dartford Harriers will all be aware, there's always much to do, and many of us end up doubling up and tripling up with all kinds of roles to keep the club moving forward – coaching, officiating, team managing and various administrative roles. Some of our coaches are especially creative when it comes to juggling the demands day job with their unpaid coaching and other club roles – making sacrifices to find the time not just to attend coaching sessions but to plan meticulously, and to give support to individual athletes in their group with their own particular needs. This year's Clubman of the Year routinely travels up and down the country with his athletes to support them at events, plans popular getaways in the spring and the autumn to help his athletes bond and prepare for the summer and winter seasons ahead, and this year he added to his busy regime a Dartford Harriers after school club at a local primary, the Brent School, who recently just so happened to go ahead and finish first in their interschools athletics champs ahead of the other local schools who normally win, no doubt in part thanks to this year's Clubman of the Year who always goes above and beyond – Jason Marchant.

Dedicated athlete of the year

One of the challenges with hosting our Awards at this time of year is that I'm supposed to be telling you all about how these athletes have earned the trophy based on their exploits in the previous summer and winter season, and then they've gone and eclipsed their own successes of last year with even greater victories this summer! That's true of this athlete, too, who has just been crowned world champion in one of the many events in which she has been a world class performer for several years. As athletes seem to be obsessed with Power of Ten rankings these days, you may be particularly interested in this statistic: This year marks the 10th year in a row that this athlete, our "Dedicated Athlete of the Year" has been ranked the number one in the country in her age group for at least one of her specialist events. Considering we all battle injuries and form from time to time, that's an incredible achievement. Perhaps it would be more apt to rename the trophy "Dedicated Athlete of the Decade" in the case of this winner. She's the finest 60+ woman triple jumper our country has ever

produced, and the 2nd best 60+ British woman of all time at pole vault and high jump too. To top it off, for the 2021 track season she was also the 3rd fastest 60+ woman nationally over 100m, and the second highest ranked long jumper. And as mentioned at the outset, as if domestic domination across the jumps events wasn't enough, she's the reigning 60+ pole vault world champion after her recent win in Finland, the latest in a long list in European and World Masters titles she's earned in recent years across sprint and jumps events. Well done to our Dedicated Athlete of The Year, Teresa Eades.

Male road runner of the year

When you're a Veteran, or "Masters" as we call it, turning 40 years old, and you're not far off a sub 2 mins clocking for the 800m and getting close to 4 mins for the 1500m, then you're clearly a pretty special track athlete. But this runner has been our standout performer on the road too, hence earning our Male Road Runner of the Year accolade. This year he backed up the previous season's 31:21 clocking over 10k, his fastest in 6 years and the 10th fastest of any 35+ male in the country that year, with another impressive 32:41 at the large 10k event at Kew Gardens. This Kew Gardens 10k saw all the best Masters in the country competing against one another, and our Male Road Runner of the Year managed to finish 2nd overall, and first in his new 40+ age category. For an outstanding athlete, going up an age category is a great opportunity to poach some club records, which this runner duly did last year. As well as setting a new 40+ male club record of 32:41 over 10k, he recorded two sub 16 minute 5ks on route to a brace of RunThrough race series victories, registering a new 40+ club record over 5k of 15:46 at the Olympic Park. Congratulations to Sam Coombes.

Female master of the year

The 2021 season was supposed to be one to remember for this athlete, as she made her debut in the Masters category of F35, as she planned to take a trip overseas to test herself at international level against masters around the world. Covid took such gallivanting off the cards, but she still had a mighty fine year domestically instead in her first year as a 35+ female master. 11th fastest nationally over the 100m, 12th over the 200, 13th in the high jump, 19th in the long jump, 7th in the discus and of even greater note, 4th in the hammer, picking up bronze medals in the 200m and Hammer in the British Masters national champs along the way. Whilst she's now a Masters athlete, she's shown she's still one of the club's prize assets in Senior events too, with top 3 finishes in every one of her 13 performances in the Southern Athletics League fixtures last summer, including a number of 1st places. It's a shame there wasn't much by way of masters competition, due to lingering concerns over covid, but this athlete has certainly been making up for lost time this year!! She's been in blistering form in the Vets league, devastating the competition. At this rate, she may dominate the masters scene for years to come just like her father Gary! Congrats to this year's Female Master of the Year Claire Capon.

Female track athlete of the year

It's already very hard to see this runner being beaten to the Female Road Runner crown next year, as she made headlines in April for her tremendous 10k clocking of 34:41, 5th fastest time of any U23W this year, finishing first female against a very tough field, and she's run the 3rd fastest parkrun of all U23 females this year too, with a PB run of 16:43.

This award is for Female Track Athlete of the Year, though, so let's hear some more about her track exploits. This term she's already blasted round the 5000 in 16:21, the 8th best 5k clocking amongst U23W, and last year she earned this trophy for her impressive steeplechase performances, with her 10:16.3 clocking over the 3k s/c sufficient to finish the year 4th in the national ranking at U23 level. We don't see as much of this athlete anymore as she lives up in Edinburgh, but we are always immensely proud when we hear about her continued success, such as her recent team Gold Medal representing Great Britain in Uphill Mountain Racing at the European Champs in Spain. Congrats to maintain runner, road runner and "Female Track Athlete of the Year" Holly Page.

Male track athlete of the Year

We've got such a depth of talent at the club, I'll need to briefly mention a couple of our Male Track Athlete of the Year contenders before announcing our winner. Firstly let's recognise Adam Bernard's 35+ Masters club records last year: 12.09 over 100m, 24.58 over 200m, and 53.02 over 400m. He super dedicated to his individual performance, yet he's also a great team player, rallying our SAL and Vets teams, and leading the charge when it comes to our relay teams.

Chris Turner's commitment and results warrant a special mention too – after a long injury lay off a couple of years ago, he has since been a perfect role model in terms of his recognition of the importance of strength training rather than just running, and carefully regulating his training intensity, and factoring in recovery time, as well as training very hard. He's been laser focused, with a keen eye on club records for his age group, lowering our 3000m and 5 mile records to 10 mins and 28:45 respectively. On to our winner this time round. We all love a medal, but this athlete REALLY loves a medal, so it's a good job he picked up Kent Masters Champs 60+ age group Silvers for the 100 and 200m, and Gold in his favoured 400m, along with a 5th place in the 400m at the British Masters Champs.

He's similarly motivated by his Masters rankings nationally, and in his favoured events of the 400 and 800 he ended the season ranked 8th and 6th in the country, respectively. He was especially sharp over the shorter distances last summer, recording three new outdoor club records 61.80 in the 400, 44.04 in the 300, and 27.79 in the 200 – faster than he's gone in his previous 5 seasons. With this combination of multiple medal wins, Top 10 national rankings and club records, our Male Track Athlete of the Year is Colin Bates.

Team of the year

A fair claim for the Team of the Year trophy might have been one of our track relay teams, as records tumbled last year, including the new club medley relay record set by Richard Brooks, Colin Bates, Adam Bernard and Stuart McNally (a combination of 200, 400 and 800 legs), and the mens 4 x 200m and mixed 4 x 400m marks set by Adam Bernard, Trey McPherson Ademola Odunowo, Abass Jah, Kat Sutton and Maisy Rose. Instead we've turned to our cross country teams once again.

In fact, we nearly etched the same names into the trophy for the 2nd year running, as last year's winning XC team of Daniel Moulton, Christopher Archer, Samuel Crowley-May and George Tanner once again impressed in the Kent XC League series by taking the U20M team title.

Narrowly edging them for the trophy this year, however, is their female counterparts – our U20W cross country team. There's always a lot of drop off when athletes reach this age, so it's great to see a Dartford Harriers U20W team still going strong. Spearheaded by the excellent Maisy Rose, one of the country's best steeplechasers and cross-country athletes, at this year's Kent Cross Country Champs at Brands Hatch, our athletes finished 1st (Maisy), 7th and 8th (Isabel and Rebecca Lloyd) and 11th (Lilly Gibbs), taking the team title, with our first three athletes home counting towards our total team score. Congratulations to our U20W XC team – this year's Team of the Year.

Male master of the year

An awards ceremony like this is a great opportunity to remind our young athletes that their coaches haven't just been there, done it and got the T-shirt – in many cases they're still out there breaking records as an athlete.

This year's winner is the perfect example. He devotes so much of his time to the club, and athletics in the country and region as a whole, with his various time-consuming tasks and roles, coaching, officiating, and organising many of the club's activities – yet he somehow still manages to find the energy to stay at the top of his game as an athlete. He finished the year ranked nationally by Power of 10 as the country's 2nd best high jumper, 4th best triple jumper 7th best long jumper and 10th best pole vaulter in his age group, hence arguably the nation's finest male jumps athlete. To underline his fine form, he recorded a new club record in each of these four events: 1.50m in the high jump, 4.58m in the long jump, 9.92m in the triple, and 2.36m in the pole vault. Not to mention the three indoor club records he also broke.

You can tell a 60+ athlete is pretty damn good when he finishes in the top 3 positions in all four of the events he participates in in the SAL – competing against athletes up to 40 years his junior! Needless to say, when it comes to competitions against his own age group, he's really peerless – at the Kent Masters Jumps Champs he won all of his events – the high jump, long jump and triple jump.

He's going to need to stay on his toes if he wants to be considered the best masters athlete in his family though, now that Claire is cleaning up at masters events! Our Male Master of the Year is Gary Capon.

Female cross country athlete of the year

I've already waxed lyrical about this award winner's achievements, so I'll keep this second narrative shorter. Earlier, I didn't even mention this athlete's cross country exploits, and they're actually just as impressive as her successes on the track and road. For example, when racing the best athletes in the county in the Kent County Cross Country League, she finished third overall, nearly a minute ahead of any competitors in her own Masters Age Group, instead mixing it with younger athletes in the Senior category. Same in the Kent Champs, she was the first Masters athlete (i.e. 35+) home by some margin with a 6th place finish. Her performance at the Kent County Vets Champs was a sheer masterclass in front running, where she relentlessly pushed the pace, front running from gun to tape, coming home 35 second clear of 2nd. Hats off to our Female XC Athlete of the Year Hannah Roberts.

Male field athlete of the year

We are truly blessed with some outstanding talent in the throwing events. At recent county competitions we seem to have dominated podiums in hammer, shot and discus in all teenage male categories. At national level, we regularly have multiple athletes in the Top 20 for their age group.

Special mentions are due in particular to Arun Menon, who finished last year ranked 5th nationally for U15B discus, and has since progressed further this year. Timi Babatunde was number 2 nationally at discus last year, and his 51m54 throw at Loughborough last September was a particular highlight.

It's impossible to look beyond this athlete for the Male Field Athlete of the Year trophy. He was unbeaten all year in the hammer, which meant his gold medal haul included Dartford Harriers club championships, South of England U17 championships, English Schools Championships, England U17 Championships, UK School Games and the SIAB Schools Home International, where he made his successful debut for England Schools U17 team. He finished the year several metres ahead of the next best U17M hammer thrower in the Power of Ten rankings. He's earned this trophy on the strength of his flawless year in 2021, but it would be remiss not to mention his further successes this year, extending his margin at the top of the rankings with an immense throw of 71.39, which was enough to book his seat on the plane, representing Team GB at the recent European U18 Champs, where he managed to qualify for the final in the blistering heat even when forced to use a borrowed hammer when one of the other athletes used the competition hammer he took with him on the plane and smashed it. We're proud to award the Male Field athlete accolade to Kai Barham.

Perpetual cross country challenge cup

The perpetual cross country challenge cup is one of the easiest trophies to determine, as it's strictly awarded to our best placed Senior Mens XC runner in county. But this athlete hasn't just been our top placed Senior Man, he's actually a Masters athlete 4

years into the 50+ category, outperforming our younger athletes! His meticulous planning and dedication really paid off for this year's XC campaign – in the Kent League he was 2nd highest placed 50+ male in the county with a super consistent 3rd, 2nd, 2nd and 1st place. He matched this performance with a 2nd place in the Master XC Champs too. In Kent there is an immensely talented contingent of over 50s, so this is a particularly noteworthy achievement, and a credit to lots of hard work on this athlete's behalf. Well done to our Perpetual cross country challenge cup winner Chris Turner.

Female performance of the year

There was much to admire last year, by way of Dartford Harriers female performances, aside from those successes I've already mentioned, and will mention later, Kirstie Cooper has added to her list of club records, for example, with impressive new Masters marks in the 100m and 200m sprints.

When a lot of youngster first get into athletics, they have running in mind. They don't always have much of an idea of the wonderful world of hammer throwing and triple jumping and such like. In fact, many athletes young and old "take their hat off" to some of their field athlete counterparts who do particularly technical events. When you see Pole Vaulters sailing over a 3m high bar, some people think "I'd love to do that", or "I could never do that". The training is so multifaceted and committed for these sorts of events.

Our female performance of the year award goes to an athlete who has embraced this challenge and has spent the past 3+ years raising the bar higher and higher in the pole vault. She finished the 2021 season ranked 16th in the country for the U20W pole vault, achieving a 3m 10 height, eclipsing the old club record that Grace Clements set nearly 20 years ago. She picked up a series of 1st and 2nd places representing Dartford Harriers in the SAL and YDL league competitions along the way. Winning the double, the Kent County Champs and Kent Schools Champs, has earned her this year's Female performance of the year trophy – well done to Lily Smith.

Female field athlete of the year

Sometimes an athlete comes along who has a fantastic attitude, is a genuine team player, super hard working, and has bags of talent on top of these attributes. You end up really rooting for them, and when they achieve the success they deserve, you are as ecstatic as they are. This athlete has displayed all these great qualities since joining the club, and last year she was rewarded with the following successes: a series of victories for the club in county and regional level league competitions in hammer, discus and shot; two gold and a silver in the hammer, discus and shot in the Kent Champs; gold in the Kent Schools Champs in her favoured event, the hammer throw; 5th place in the English Schools Champs, and a new club record of 45m37 in the hammer on home turf at the club champs, where she was also our U15W discus champ, with another club record of 25m 69, and of course she was our top female shot putter too. She finished the season ranked 12th nationally in the U15G discus and 5th

best U15G hammer thrower in the country. Congratulations to our Female Field Athlete of the Year, Hope Still.

Male performance of the year

We've already heard about this athlete's impressive exploits over the course of 2021. As well as dominating at county, regional and national events, Kai Barham's performance and potential are such that he's firmly established himself on the hammer scene, earning invitations to events such as the England Throws Camp Throws Fest and the annual Hammer Circle Reunion event where he rubs shoulders with some of the best throwers around in older age categories. He consistently rises to the occasion, for example beating older, established athletes to win the weight trophy at the Hammer Circle Reunion, throwing a 9kg weight over 20m. At the same event, he also picked up the prestigious Hammer Circle trophy for best performance at the Reunion, a Dartford Harriers club record of 65m 88 in the hammer throw. Hence Kai Barham picks up his 2nd award of the afternoon, for Male Performance of the Year.

Clubwoman of the year

Without the hard work of our volunteers, we'd have no club at all. As we all know, other sports cost a lot more, and therefore have paid staff, whereas we try to offer opportunities to everyone at a super low cost, and rely on our volunteers. The recipient of this award is someone who has given so much over the years, including this year, and last year, and many years before, in roles on the committee, serving as club secretary, membership secretary, coordinating our officials, organising our presentations and trophies, sorting licences for our track meetings, coordinating with other clubs, officiating for us at competitions, coaching our young athletes, and many more roles and tasks. Without her contributions over the years the wheels would definitely have come off. It's finally time for her to allow her own athletic performance to take priority for once, and rightly so, given the fine form she's in, as I've already touched upon today. As she steps down from her role on the Dartford Harriers Committee and as Club Secretary, we thank her for her long service, and recognise her many contributions with the Clubwoman of the Year award. Thank you Claire Capon.

The Harrier Trophy

This year we had a particularly large number of votes for the Harrier Trophy – the award that is voted for by the members. It was great to see our athletes' appreciation for coaches like Lee Capon, Paul Head, Terry Povey and Sophie Price, and for athletes and coaches to be applauding committed athletes who have shown dedication and been team players, like Imogen Smith, Richard Nash and Gary Capon. The vast majority of the vote count, though, went to this year's thoroughly deserved recipient. He started coaching with the Harriers over 30 years ago, and athletes now in their late 30s and 40s have spoken of the positive impact he has had on their lives, helping them become the athletes and adults they are today. Our current crop of endurance athletes feel similarly warmly about him, as shown by the large number of athletes

past and present who joined his long-time coaching partner Jason Marchant on a tribute run to the home where he sadly passed recently, and as shown by the many athletes and friends who attended his funeral recently. Every interaction I've had with him since I joined the club has been pleasant, as he was such a friendly and positive character. His son Stuart recently showed me some of the records he'd kept for so many years of his athletes' performances and it was touching to see how dedicated he was. As Sam Coombes mentioned in his tribute to him: "Merv was a great coach who made training fun. It was not only about the athletics it was also about the group enjoying their time at the track and building lasting friendships. A kind, warm hearted, giving man, he has supported and encouraged hundreds of athletes during his time at Dartford Harriers. With this award we salute his dedication to the club and his athletes this year and every year – the Harrier Trophy goes to Meryn Waterman.