

DORSET ROAD RACE LEAGUE

Round the Lakes 10k – The Business End of the Season

Race Report

With nine races of the Dorset Road Race League season completed, the Round the Lakes 10k arrived at precisely the point where the championship tables start to take on a rather more serious appearance. The early-season pleasantries were long forgotten, promotion and relegation battles were beginning to crystallise, and there was precious little room left for anyone hoping to make up ground.

Poole AC had virtually wrapped up the Men's First Division title with their victory at the Stur Half, leaving Twemlow Track Club requiring something approaching a mathematical miracle to overhaul them. Realistically, the battle was now for second place, with Twemlow and Bournemouth AC looking to settle that particular argument over the remaining fixtures.

The Ladies First Division was a rather different proposition. Littledown Harriers' victory at the Stur Half had kept things interesting, with four of the five teams still having a mathematical route to the title. Egdon Heath Harriers remained firmly in the driving seat, but Poole AC, Poole Runners and Littledown were not yet ready to concede anything.

In the Men's Second Division, Littledown Harriers' win at the Stur Half had tightened the contest at the top, leaving them and Poole Runners to battle for the promotion place. The Bournemouth ladies, meanwhile, had moved a step closer to promotion with another win in the Ladies Second Division. Another victory at Round the Lakes would make their elevation to the top flight a mathematical certainty.

Dorchester RIOT were in a similarly commanding position in the Men's Third Division after their latest win, although Verwood Runners and Purbeck Runners were still very much in pursuit. In the Ladies Third Division, Lytchett Manor Striders had already won six from six and needed just one more victory to complete a perfect league campaign and confirm promotion to the second tier.

With the season reaching its business end, there was plenty to race for before anyone had even laced up their shoes.

A new course, an old rivalry

Poole AC had made changes to the Round the Lakes 10k course, seemingly finding yet another way to make an already quick race even quicker. Whether the new route was responsible for the times or the prospect of league glory had everyone running a little

harder is open to debate. What was clear was that the usual suspects were once again at the sharp end.

The men's team contest has tended to be a tussle between Poole AC and Bournemouth AC, and this occasion was no exception. Poole AC, however, had a significant advantage in the shape of Thomas Corbin, who took the individual victory in 32:43.

Corbin finished nine seconds ahead of Shaun Dixon of Bridport Runners, with Bournemouth AC's returning Alex Knauf claiming third in 33:09. Knauf just edged out Twemlow Track Club's Rupert Allison, who finished fourth in 33:11.

Cam Clarke of Poole Runners took fifth in 33:16, with Egdon Heath Harriers' Charlie Williams sixth in 33:32. The top six therefore featured one runner apiece from each of the four Men's First Division clubs, alongside representatives of Bridport Runners and Poole Runners. There was no shortage of talent at the front, and the team battle was already taking shape.

Callum Wadlow arrived in seventh place in 34:14 to provide Poole AC with their second scorer. Bournemouth AC's Casper Jakobsen followed in eighth in 34:24, while Harry Lauste was Twemlow's first contribution to the team contest, finishing ninth in 34:29.

It was shaping up to be a fascinating three-way contest between Poole AC, Bournemouth AC and Twemlow Track Club. Unattached runner Martin Pertet took 10th in 34:31, but his excellent run did little to disturb the league calculations.

Brian Underwood kept Poole AC firmly in control with 11th place in 34:34, just ahead of Bournemouth AC's Adam Corbin, who finished four seconds later. Mark Savage of Wimborne AC was 13th in 34:42, while Littledown Harriers' Gergely Arvay took 14th in 35:34.

Andrew Smith, fresh from his Upton Summer Series victory, was next home for Poole Runners in 35:34, followed by Egdon Heath Harriers' Oliver Edwards in 35:37. Myles Peacham added another useful Poole Runners finish in 35:47.

Then came the decisive blow.

Timothy Rooke completed the Poole AC scoring sequence in 17th place, sealing the race victory for his club and, in the process, confirming the Men's First Division title. With the championship virtually in the bag already, Poole AC had now made the arithmetic considerably less interesting for their rivals.

Bournemouth AC's Luke de-Bendictis was their fifth scorer in 35:52, and his finish proved crucial in securing second place on the day. That put Bournemouth AC and Twemlow Track Club neck and neck in the battle for the division's runner-up position.

Luke Terry was Poole AC's sixth man inside the top 20, finishing in 35:57, while Tom Casson completed Bournemouth AC's six-man contingent in 36:11. Louis Verdi of Wimborne AC followed in 36:22.

Poole AC took the team victory, with Bournemouth AC ahead of Twemlow Track Club and Wimborne AC. Bournemouth had done enough to take second on the day, but the overall

league battle remained delicately poised, with Bournemouth AC and Twemlow Track Club now level on points in the fight for second place.

Poole AC could start planning the celebrations. The rest of the division would have to wait a little longer.

Johnson leads the women's charge

The women's race was dominated by Egdon Heath Harriers' Madeleine Johnson, who produced an outstanding performance to finish first female and 25th overall in 36:37.

Johnson had a comfortable margin over her nearest female rival, Dorchester RIOT's Louise Fox, who finished 71st overall in 40:15. Poole AC's Rachael Haddow took third female in 40:24, finishing 73rd overall.

Unattached runner Lizzy Squibbs was fourth female in 41:05, narrowly edging out Bournemouth AC's Kitty Cook, who crossed the line just two seconds later in 41:07. Jenny Marshall of Purbeck Runners was sixth female in 41:18, with Poole AC's Dawn Andrews next in 41:25.

Bournemouth AC's Katie Bentley was eighth female in 41:37, while Egdon Heath Harriers' Victoria Pye finished ninth in 41:42. Pye's result was particularly noteworthy given her position at the top of the women's individual standings. Lauren Baker-Little of Poole Runners rounded out the top 10 in 41:49.

For Johnson, the victory was a clear statement of intent. For Pye, another strong performance kept her individual campaign moving in the right direction. And for the clubs chasing the Ladies First Division title, the team results were every bit as important as the individual honours.

Ladies First Division: Poole AC keep the pressure on

Poole AC took the Ladies First Division team victory, with Wimborne AC second and Egdon Heath Harriers third.

The result gave Poole AC their third win of the season, bringing them level with Egdon Heath Harriers in the number of victories and ensuring the title race remained very much alive.

Egdon Heath Harriers still held the advantage in the overall standings, but they could no longer afford to assume that the championship would simply fall into place. Poole AC were proving persistent challengers, Poole Runners remained in contention, and Littledown Harriers retained a mathematical route to the title.

Four clubs had arrived at Round the Lakes with their championship hopes intact. The result did little to simplify matters, setting up an intriguing run-in to the end of the season.

There was less uncertainty at the other end of the table. Wimborne AC's result meant their relegation to the Ladies Second Division was now confirmed, bringing an end to their stay in the top flight.

Bournemouth ladies book their place in the top flight

There was little suspense in the Ladies Second Division once the team results were calculated. Bournemouth AC recorded the lowest score among the division's competing teams, securing another victory and, more importantly, confirming their promotion to the Ladies First Division.

Their consistency throughout the season had put them in a commanding position, and Round the Lakes provided the final confirmation. They can now look forward to taking on the leading clubs in the top tier next season.

Dorchester RIOT finished second, but the result was not enough to give them a mathematical chance of catching Bournemouth AC at the top of the table.

At the other end of the standings, Dorset Doodlers were looking increasingly likely to find themselves in the Third Division next season. With the season nearing its conclusion, their margin for recovery was becoming ever smaller.

For Bournemouth, however, the hard work had been rewarded. Promotion secured, and one less thing to worry about in the final fixtures.

Lytchett Manor Striders make it seven from seven

The Ladies Third Division provided another demonstration of Lytchett Manor Striders' remarkable consistency. They secured their seventh victory of the season, completing a clean sweep despite fielding just two runners.

The division was not exactly overflowing with numbers on this occasion, with no club managing to field a full team. Weymouth St Paul's Harriers were the only other club to turn out two runners, but that did not prevent Lytchett Manor Striders from taking the honours once again.

Seven races, seven victories, and a promotion place that was now beyond doubt. There are worse ways to spend a season.

Men's Second Division: Poole Runners hold their nerve

The Men's Second Division produced another important result in the promotion race, with Poole Runners taking victory to strengthen their position at the top of the standings.

Littledown Harriers remain firmly in the hunt, however, and the battle for promotion to the First Division is far from settled. Their earlier victory at the Stur Half had ensured that Poole Runners could not simply coast through the remaining fixtures, and the Round the Lakes result kept the pressure on.

Poole Runners have given themselves the advantage, but Littledown Harriers are still close enough to make the remaining races count. With only a handful of opportunities left to influence the table, every runner and every team score could prove decisive.

Third Division: Verwood strike back

The Men's Third Division was another source of considerable interest, with Verwood Runners taking victory at Round the Lakes ahead of Dorchester RIOT and Weymouth St Paul's Harriers.

Dorchester RIOT arrived with a strong position at the top of the table following their previous victory, but Verwood's win ensured that the promotion battle remained alive.

Dorchester RIOT still lead the way, with Verwood Runners in second and Purbeck Runners in third. All three clubs retain a mathematical chance of finishing top, meaning the division is set for a tense conclusion.

Dorchester RIOT have the advantage, but Verwood have shown that they are capable of taking points off them, while Purbeck remain close enough to exploit any slip.

With the league campaign approaching its final stages, there is no room for complacency. The next result could alter the picture considerably.

The final reckoning

Round the Lakes was another reminder that the Dorset Road Race League is about much more than the first runner across the line. Individual victories make the headlines, but it is the combined efforts of the team that determine who celebrates promotion, who lifts the title and who spends the summer contemplating life in a lower division.

Poole AC's men can now regard the First Division championship as secured, while Bournemouth AC and Twemlow Track Club prepare for what promises to be a compelling contest for second place.

The Ladies First Division remains open, with Egdon Heath Harriers still in the strongest position but Poole AC, Poole Runners and Littledown Harriers refusing to go away. Bournemouth AC's ladies, meanwhile, can celebrate a promotion well earned.

Poole Runners and Littledown Harriers continue their battle in the Men's Second Division, while Lytchett Manor Striders have completed a perfect seven-win campaign in the Ladies Third Division. In the Men's Third Division, Dorchester RIOT, Verwood Runners and Purbeck Runners still have everything to race for.

Nine races down, the business end of the season has well and truly arrived. Some clubs can start celebrating, others can start calculating, and a few may already be looking nervously over their shoulders.

There is still plenty to settle before the final whistle.