

John Britton

Age: 62 until September

Clubs: Always MDOC

Home Town: Marple, Stockport

Achievements: British Champion M60L 2014 Thrunton Woods and Callaly – my very first gold medal!

Assorted silvers and bronzes in British Night Champs M60L 2011-2014; British Champs M55L 2006; M60L 2012, JK M55L 2006, British Sprints 2011, JK Sprints 2012, 2014, British Middle 2011.

Bob Graham Round member 283 (23hrs 13mins in 1982) – my support team was provided as a trade for a computerised race results system I'd written.

First man to run the Staffordshire Way (96 miles) - 18 hours - 1983

2:35 marathon (London 1985); 53:19 10 miles (1983)

KIMM - A Class winner with Mark Seddon (Arrochar 1990); Long Score winner with John Kewley (St Mary's Loch 1993)

Invented and organised the Mow Cop Killer Mile from 1982-1988

Led winning ICL/Fujitsu Challengers Trophy teams 1991-1994, 1998

Played cricket pretty well and football pretty badly up to age 30-ish; played squash pretty well up to age 50-ish. Started regular running about age 12. Never been remotely unfit.

When and why did you start orienteering? 1988. I'd known for a while I needed more navigational skills to be safer on the fells, and my job moved - my lunchtime running group changed from mostly runners to mostly orienteers, and I got sucked in. As a runner, over an hour, I was about 5 minutes behind a decent Brit, and 10 minutes behind top world class, so my target has always been to get within those kinds of distances of the top orienteers.

Why do you carry on orienteering? I just love everything about it except path-runs-and-dive-into-brambles areas. Classic, Middle, Sprint, Urban, Night, Streets, mountain marathons, all types of score events, the Blodslitet, the odd MTB event ... anything involving charging about with a map and I'm in.

What do you do when you are not? Haven't had much off-duty time in recent years - mostly watching TV, films, gardening, reading. Playing piano and painting landscapes need to make a comeback, but we've just acquired an allotment.

What is your favourite area? Roseisle as it was 10 years ago – the

perfect combo of fast running and interesting detail.



John Britton MDOC at MV White Downs 25th Feb 2007 National Event.

© Mark Cheesman

What has been the biggest turning point(s) in your O life? Hanging controls for the NW Junior Squad around 2001 – you feel pressure to get it right and I was surprised to discover it was actually possible to read every detail on the map and be completely confident.

What is your most memorable O race(s)? BOC 2014 – first Gold, and recent enough to still be in memory. Eccleshall Woods Blue 1988 (ish) – my first event, when extremely fit – I hurtled round for 2hrs 45mins, thought I must have done really well and then discovered it had been won in 45mins. Next event, a couple of weeks later, was on the Roaches, and blow me, exactly the same thing happened again! Something was happening but I didn't know what it was ...

What training do you do? I retired 4 years ago in order to try being a full-time athlete and see how good I could become as an M60. At this age, you need a low-impact regime, but I've always thrived on quantity rather than quality. Orienteering's rough surfaces demand solid core strength. So, I have a multi-discipline approach that takes most of every morning Monday-Friday (weekends are race or rest), with the killer cardio sessions being the two (exercise-bike) spin classes. I'm pretty good at being bullied into really hard work; not so good at forcing myself. All

running is as off-road as much as possible. Low key races are pretty much all I have for technique training. Monday and Thursday – 10k gentle run, 1 hour circuit class, often something else as well.

Tuesday and Friday – 10k gentle run, 45-min spin class, 30-minute swim.

Wednesday – 1 hour pilates class, 30-minute swim, typically 12k club run.

One issue with having every week based on the gym's fixed timetable is periodisation – which I try to achieve by amount of effort expended rather than changing activities.

What advice would you give people below you in the results to get up to the top? Don't listen to me – I'm a long way short of the finished article.

Have you ever had a coach? Mark Seddon mentored me very gently and helpfully through my first years. I used to run the same course as him, compare routes, and very slowly began to see some convergence. Junior Squad coaches have always been an inspiration in terms of what they do to make development possible, but I think you've really got to work it out for yourself.



BOC Long M60 Podium with John Britton MDOC at the top, Steve Whitehead EBOR 2nd, Mikhail Gryaznevich TVOC in 3rd.

© Anthony Barrable

Why do you normally make mistakes? Too much hurry, not enough proper looking at the map. Often because other people have distracted me somehow, but in general I don't look at my map enough.

What is your favourite discipline? Classic orienteering – after a good hour's racing you can be physically and mentally obliterated.

How many races will you do this year? About 100

What do you think of WMOC?

Fabulous racing in all sorts of unfamiliar terrain. I've been to four (Norway, Austria, Hungary, Germany) – I've placed 6= (12 secs off bronze) and 9th in recent Sprints and comfortably reached the A final last time without threatening the top twenty.

Silva, Moscow or Suunto, baseplate or Thumb – which do you prefer to win with? Any quick-settling thumb compass – winning isn't to do with your compass.

How many pairs of O shoes do you have? 3 racing pairs, several old pairs for when I'm not really racing.

Lycra Tights or Nylon bottoms? Tights seem to have less chance of getting snagged.

Your normal pre-race drink? Sports drinks – for the sugars and salts.

What is your favourite O top? Depends on the weather.

If you hadn't discovered orienteering, what would have happened? I'd have done a lot more fell running, insane challenges and ultra stuff like Rogaines (24-hour mountain marathon score events).

How many countries have you O'ed in? 12 so far, outside the UK. Hopefully quite a few more in the future.

Which relay leg do you like to run and why? Anything but first leg, as distraction is inevitable until they've all cleared off – which isn't really the idea.

Who is the most inspiring member of your club? Grahame Crawshaw – a class orienteer, an out-of-reach target for many years, and still highly active despite having to operate at a different level since an accident.

Have you an interesting story from a foreign O event? The flooded Venice 2013 race that was cancelled when we were 100m from the start was a novel experience, but a great week's holiday. My first WMOC in Norway lingers in the memory as I couldn't get my head round hills made of solid surface rock and mapped as white.

We lived in Portland, Oregon for 3 years (1995-7). Very limited but sociable orienteering and very few maps. I spent 700 hours on a new map of the Hoyt Arboretum - half of it teaching myself OCAD and half of it teaching myself surveying and cartography. Everyone should try to draw a map – it completely changes your expectations and should make you a much better orienteer.

If you had to be born in another country, which one would you choose and why? Anywhere democratic where it is less common to get cold and wet.

What would you ban from Orienteering? Brambles, nettles, windblow, brashings – I like to run.

How do you file your maps? Alphabetical order of area name, though it isn't very successful when areas have several names. Foreign/urban/sprint filed separately.

Do you listen to music? Do you order your CDs/Vinyl? Still have tapes/vinyl/CDs but all transcribed to MP3 and mostly listened to in the car or at the computer. Last purchase – Leonard Cohen's excellent last album.

If the radio is on, what are you listening to? Radio 4 or 5 Live Sports Extra or 6 Music

What is your earliest memory from school? Organising races round the field behind the Primary School.

What is the hardest thing you have ever done? I tried a 24-hour road race, did 126 miles in 20 hours and simply couldn't carry on. Trying to bat against (soon-to-be West Indies fast bowler) Andy Roberts was also beyond me, though he didn't get me out. Sometimes, your limits get exposed very effectively.



WMOC 2012 Sprint Final Goslar with Martin Roome SROC in the background.
© Sarah-Jane Gaffney

What is the strangest, most valuable, best thing you have ever won? The MDOC Street League Owl trophy is truly awesome.

If you could have any superpower, what would it be? Photographic memory - one look at the map would be enough.

Do you do any Volunteering? Too much - planning, controlling, mapping, map printing, committee-ising, occasional coaching. However, I believe most of these activities make you a better competitor.

If you could change the result of any race, which one would it be and why?

Sheffield urban final 2008 – I threw away the very first Nopesport League M55 title by running straight past the next-to-last control without punching it.

Do you like your shoes with spikes or without? Depends on the area. I'm a recent convert to dobs as a default.

What is the longest bus/coach ride you have ever done? Interland 2012.

We came back home from Portland by driving 4200 miles in a month across to New York.

What have you always wanted to do but not done yet? Run fast and clean.

What is the funniest thing you have heard recently? Every cartoon by Steve Bell. Mock the Week, HIGNFY. My own contribution to world happiness is a desperate stream of preschool puns.

How strong do you like your post finish line squash? I don't. I once got hypothermic after a couple of cold finish line drinks and a long walk back to the car.

If you could go back in time, when and where would you go to and why?

There's oodles of horrendous mistakes that I'd like to have another go at. One day, I'll be consistent enough to shine at multi-day events.

What is your favourite film? Actor? Actress? Showing my age – Star Wars, Jack Nicholson, Jane Fonda. If the film's any good I remember the film not the actors' names.

Which British Orienteer is our best future hope for becoming our next World Champion in the Senior Open World O Champs? No idea. I wish all of them the best and believe we should do what we can to support our elites.