

NEWS

Hawker takes the long road

LIZ HAWKER is an example of a rare breed in British athletics – a world and European champion – but she only entered the sport by chance.

When she won the World 100km Challenge in South Korea earlier this month, the 30-year-old became the first British senior this year – outside of the World Paralympic Championships – to claim a global or continental title in our multi-faceted sport.

In just over 18 months since taking up running seriously, Britain's first winner of that title since 1999 has gone to second on the UK all-time list.

Hawker competed in her first marathon in 2000 but it was only a chance visit to some friends that led to her first GB cap.

"I have always enjoyed running, but for a long time it was always something I just did for myself," she said. "However, I have never run with a club and don't have a history of racing at all. I started in ultra-running really by chance – I was visiting friends in South Wales who persuaded me to enter the Barry 40 in March 2005."

ULTRA British winner at recent World IAU 100km challenge was a lucky discovery

Her win in 5 hours 12 minutes 46 seconds was enough to win her England selection for a 100km. "That was my first big race, and was only a few days after returning from a ski-mountaineering expedition in Turkey!" she said.

Hawker has come a long way since and her time of 7:29:12 in her third 100km in South Korea was less than two minutes outside the British best of her team-manager Carolyn Hunter-Rowe, the last British woman to win the title.

After a fightback from Monica Carlin, she needed a sprint finish to win by just four seconds.

She averaged a staggering 7:14 per mile over 62 miles but Hawker admitted it was full of ups and downs.

"During the race itself, of course, there are times when you feel great and times when you feel like you can't go on," said the environmental scientist, who is no relation to Heather Foundling-Hawker, her British team-



mate who was ninth. "There comes a point where you really do believe you will go the distance, but it's never over until it's over. But a sprint finish at the end of a 100km race shows

you can draw reserves that you thought had been drained!"

Training for ultra-marathons is naturally time-consuming and Hawker's full-time job with the British Antarctic Survey makes that particularly difficult.

"It can make training difficult, especially since my work entails research cruises," said the Road Running Club runner, who left last week for a two-month research cruise in the Southern Ocean.

However, Hawker has time on her side as far as her running career is concerned, still being relatively young for an ultra competitor. She thinks she can improve further but really just wants to enjoy herself.

"I do feel that I will improve a lot once I learn how to draw out my potential," she said. "I am still a relative novice since I ran my first ultra only 18 months ago. I have a lot to learn! But perhaps the most important thing is just to always try to run for the love of it."