

## North East Cross Country Champs

THE 103rd North Eastern Counties Cross-Country Championships were not for the faint hearted.

Persistent heavy rain throughout the 10-race programme made an already tough course at Wrekenton, Gateshead even more demanding.

However, the 12k senior men's championship was a triumph for Sunderland's Mark Hood who, after an early scare when he was locked in combat with Morpeth's former junior World Cross representative Nick Swinburn, got away to win by 150 metres.

Hood, winner in 2006 and 2007, was going for a hat-trick of victories and with a number of the county's leading runners opting to give the championships a miss, it looked as though the Wearsider only had to keep out of trouble to make it three in a row.

But it was Swinburn who threw down the gauntlet taking the race to his senior rival.

"Nick caught me by surprise with his aggressive running on the first lap of three," said Hood, who earned his first England vest earlier this year.

"I take my hat off to him for the way he attacked the race. Due to him the pair of us were out on our own very quickly.

"I kept telling myself to be patient though a few little doubts were coming into my head as I knew he was a good fell runner so the course with it's twists and hills would be no problem for him.

"Midway round the second lap I eased ahead and put in a strong effort which gave me a gap to work on and though the gap didn't widen too much at that point I felt in control.

"Going into the final lap it was a case of keeping my concentration for it was absolutely freezing and in the end I must have had something still in the tank for I pulled out about 13 seconds in the final mile.

"I'm really pleased to have won again. I love competing in championship races and now I'm looking forward to the Northerns in January."

At the line Hood's advantage was 29 seconds over Swinburn with Andrew Wiles (New Marske) having his best-ever run to finish in third place albeit over a minute-and-a-half down on the runner-up.

Swinburn had the honour of leading Morpeth to team victory.

Mary Ferrier, last year's under-20 champion, moved up into the senior ranks and showed no mercy to her rivals.



The rain hadn't let up when the field set off on it's 8k journey and quickly to the head of affairs was Leeds University student Ferrier and Gateshead team-mate Charlotte Wickham, runner-up behind Sonia Thomas (Sale Harriers, Manchester) 12 months previously.

It was nip-and-tuck for the first 4k circuit with the Gateshead duo 20 metres ahead of Carolyn Summersgill (Middlesbrough & Cleaveland) and Morag McDonnell (Chester-le-Street), back in action after the birth of her baby, a similar distance

adrift in fourth place.

"I only managed to get ahead at the start of the second lap when we started to climb one of the two hills," said 20-year-old Ferrier, who has the distinction of winning North of England Cross-Country titles at under-13, under-15, under-17 and under-20.

"It was still a long way to go but I stuck in until the finish.

"I've never known a course be so muddy - it was the penultimate race on the programme - but I'm really pleased to have won.

"I have to put it down as my best-ever run."

Wickham, who was making her seasonal debut kept working away and was only eight seconds adrift at the line.

Chester-le-Street's Maxine Czarnecka came through strongly on the second circuit to finish third and lift a well-rewarded first-ever individual medal.

In the age-group races, Ricky Stevenson had no difficulty retaining his under-20 crown with New Marske team-mate, Dominic Shaw finishing runner-up.

In the combined under-17/20 women's race victory went to Shildon's Kate Avery (under-17) with Jess Russon (New Marske) crossing the line in second place to lift the under-20 gold medal.

The under-17 men's event was won by Durham City's Michael Grimes while the under-15 and under-13 boys races were won by Mark Shaw (New Marske) and Robbie Loraine (Gateshead) respectively.

Multi-talented Nicole Burlinson (Darlington) triumphed in the under-15 girls contest with victory going to Anna Fawcett (Chester-le-Street) in the under-13 girls race.

From the 10 races, seven clubs from the region supplied winners while Gateshead Harriers picked up the trophies for the strongest overall team in both the men's and women's sections.

In extremely trying conditions a special thank you to all officials who battled against the elements for nearly four hours and to Saltwell Harriers for hosting the championships and to those members who were out at first light to put up the course and were still at it in the dying gloom to dismantle it. **Results**

**Report & Photo Bill McGuirk**

**Results George Ogle**