

Meet the athlete – Q and A with John Butters

John Butters is one of the club's leading Masters runners. Last year he won his age category in the British Masters Championships 10k at Blyth and was also selected to run for England in the International Masters Cross Country Championships at Glasgow in 2016. He was a member of the Morpeth team that set a new course record when winning the BMAF Relays at Sutton Park in 2015, and has been a member of successful teams in such local events as the Durham, Jarrow and Elswick Relays, and the NEHL. Also a highly respected off road runner, he is a leading member of Northumberland Fell Runners and has twice won the Chevy Chase. Last year he completed the gruelling Bob Graham Round in the Lakes in a highly impressive time of 19 hours 11 minutes

1/ Tell us how you came to running, and when and how did you join the club?

I first joined Morpeth Harriers in 1983 when I was 8 years old. My Dad had joined the previous year and took me along to try the junior group. I really enjoyed it. My brother joined at the same time. My coaches back then were Micky Groves, George, Mike Bateman and Adrian Barnes. I turned to football in my mid-teens and that took up most of my spare time. I re-joined Morpeth when I was 32 (I think) and have been a member ever since.

2/ What would you consider to be your best performances in a blue and white vest (or an NFRA vest), from any time in your career?

For Northumberland Fell Runners I'd say winning the Chevy Chase fell race two years in succession (2016 & 2017) after coming so close in previous years. Also, finishing 3rd in the Anniversary Waltz race in the Lake District was amazing.

For Morpeth, being part of the British Masters relay National Champions team was fantastic. Also, being selected for England in the International Masters cross country championships.

Overall though, my greatest achievement was completing my Bob Graham Round in 2019. An amazing day with friends.

3/ Tell us about some of the runners you most admire, and any memorable characters you have trained or run with or indeed competed against.

I've made lots of friends over the years through running and there are many I look up to. Internationally, I most admire Kilian Jornet in his modesty and humility. Joss Naylor for his fell running legacy, I think he deserves a lot more recognition than he has had. Locally there are so many to list. I'm just pleased to know these people, they keep me motivated!

4/ And what's the worst thing that's ever happened to you in connection with running, including injuries? Your accident this year – ironically on a bike – sounded horrendous.

Being knocked off my bike by a van from behind was not pleasant but it could have been so much worse. Very grateful to everyone who helped during that time. I was back running within 3 weeks, albeit tentatively.

I've had a couple of overuse injuries in the past which made me realise the importance of doing other activities, especially as we get older.

Prior to a race in the Alps in 2015 (which had been planned for some time) I injured my lower back. It was touch and go whether I would make the start line but luckily it recovered in time. This prompted me to take up Pilates.

5/ What are your best and what are your favourite sessions?

I enjoy a hill session, 8 – 10 reps of around 60-70s of effort and a jog back. I also enjoy a long effort session such as 3 or 4 x 1 mile. I don't tend to enjoy track sessions, they don't really agree with me

6/ What does a current training week look like?

I run most days incorporating two sessions per week and a long run. I cycle 1-2 times per week and up until recently a swim session once per week. In between I do two strength and conditioning sessions as well as some pilates and yoga.

7/ What special skills, qualities and aptitudes does a fell runner needs as opposed to the 'ordinary' runner?

Fell running is completely different to road running. It takes practice to become confident with technique like downhill running at speed. Also, it's ok to walk uphill. The distances vary so much from small 2 mile races right up to ultra distance so there's plenty choice for everyone. And the environment you run in can be spectacular. A great way to see places. You must try at least one fell race.

8/ What ambitions do you still have for the future?

I had planned on trying my first triathlon this year, but with the current situation I doubt that will happen. I'm certainly not as competitive as I was so I try to enjoy running in different places and explore new routes. I like the adventure of a long day in the hills. I'm keen to help others and maybe some coaching at some point.

9/ You recently qualified as a pilates instructor and your classes have proved very popular with athletes. Tell us how you became interested in pilates, and what does it offer to the runner?

As mentioned previously I injured my back in 2015. This is when I realised I needed to add in some core strength work into my regular routine. I joined a local class and I was hooked. I enjoyed it so much that I undertook a course to qualify as an instructor. I've been teaching for two years. I have a great group of regulars, mostly runners. Pilates is fantastic for improving core strength, mobility, flexibility. It helps to balance out muscular strength and improves posture in daily life. All of these benefits go hand in

hand with athletes and complement each other. Also, the older we get the greater the importance of strength work to maintain muscle mass and to keep our joints mobile.

10) And finally, what advice would you have for younger runners and club colleagues?

Try to have a broad outlook by trying other sports. There seems to be a lot of obsession about getting the miles in week in week out but for longevity you should incorporate rest days and some strength work. Try not to focus on one thing, it's a big world out there, go and explore.

JOHN BUTTERS PHOTO GALLERY



FELL RACE 2012



BRITISH MASTERS SUTTON PARK 2016



ENGLAND MASTERS SQUAD 2017



BOB GRAHAM EVENT CUMBRIA 2019



MORPETH HARRIERS AT BLAYDON EACE 2019