

FALKIRK Victoria Harriers dramatically pipped the favourites and reigning champions Dundee Hawkhill Harriers in the closest finish ever witnessed in the 52-year history of the Edinburgh to Glasgow Road Relay on Sunday.

Only four seconds separated the two teams at the end of the 45-mile, eight-stage battle across central Scotland. Dundee, hitherto unbeaten in relay races this season, will point to being without top man Peter McColgan as the decisive factor in their narrow defeat. McColgan's absence was due to two factors: wife Liz was due to give birth to their first child at any moment, and the Northern Irishman was suffering from the effects of a cold.

For a variety of reasons, many other top runners were missing. Caledon Park were without Allister Hutton and John Robson, Cambuslang were missing Eddie Stewart, Bellahouston were without Peter Fleming, Greenock Glenpark had to compete without Tommy Murray, Shettleston were without Nat Muir and Springburn Harriers were without Adrian Callan. Nevertheless the race retained its ability to create a multitude of issues which will be recalled and debated in clubrooms up and down the country for at least the next 12 months.

Caledon Park surprised many people by taking third place although Edinburgh rivals ESPC AC almost caught them in the closing stages. Another Edinburgh outfit, Hunters Bog Trotters, won the prize for the most meritorious performance. In the Trotters' three other appearances in this race they had managed no better than 19th place but on this occasion they ran well to come home eighth.

The weather played its part in depressing the overall times. On the highest and most exposed parts of the course, particularly fierce gale force winds blasted the runners with the result that the winning time was the slowest since 1949.

Stage One

STEEPLECHASER Tom Hanlon gave Caledon Park a narrow lead over Kilbarchan with Cambuslang, Shettleston and Dundee Hawkhill only a few metres behind.

The remarkable 47-year-old Adrian Weatherhead brought ESPC through in sixth place less than 100 metres behind Hanlon, while Falkirk Victoria were back in eighth place.

Fastest legs: 1, T Hanlon (Cal Pk) 27:49; 2, T Hearle (Kilb) 27:51; 3, M Gormley (Cambus) 27:53; 4, A Coyne (Shett) 27:54; 5, I Campbell (Dund HH) 28:00

Stage Two

THE big guns came out on the second stage. In 1972 Ian Stewart clocked a remarkable time of 27:14 for this six-mile leg. No one has got near that since and with a headwind on this occasion it was clear that Stewart's record would not be challenged.

Falkirk's recent recruit from down south, John Sherban, ran a brilliant leg to put the Vics into a

Vics take high road to victory

Falkirk Victoria Harriers emerged in this 45-mile race to seal victory in the final strides. FRASER CLYNE reports on the nail-biting finish

five-second lead over ESPC who had moved into second spot courtesy of a fine run from Ian Hamer. Sherban finished his stint covered in blood after he and a number of others had fallen on a pedestrian ramp early in the stage. Ironically, the pedestrian-only part of the course had been introduced this year in order to avoid a busy traffic junction and improve the safety of the runners.

Andy Beattie held third spot for Cambuslang and Pat McCavanna kept Dundee Hawkhill in contention in fourth place. Caledon Park slipped back to fifth while Steve Doig brought Clydesdale up from 13th to sixth.

Fastest legs: 1, J Sherban (FVH) 31:18; 2, I Hamer (ESPC) 31:32; 3, P McCavanna (Dund HH) 31:48; 4, A Beattie (Cambus) 31:54; 5, S Doig (C'dale) 31:55

Stage Three

PETER FAULDS battled hard to maintain Falkirk's advantage with Brian Kirkwood (ESPC) never far behind. These two clubs were now beginning to pull away although Alan Puckrin brought Caledon Park back into third spot with the fastest stage time.

Dundee Hawkhill held fourth place with Brian Cook but lost ground on the leaders.

Fastest legs: 1, A Puckrin (Cal Pk) 25:23; 2, P Faulds (FVH) 25:45; 3, B Kirkwood (ESPC) 25:47; 4, D Cameron (Shett) 26:35; 5, B Cook (Dund HH) 27:04

Stage Four

IAN JOHNSTON did all the damage for the Vics on stage four, opening up a lead of almost a minute on ESPC. Welshman Chris Hall edged Dundee Hawkhill up into third place just ahead of Caledon Park.

Fastest legs: 1, I Johnston (FVH) 28:55; 2, C Hall (Dund HH) 29:32; 3, G Crawford (ESPC) 239:45; 4, G Croll (Cambus) 30:03; 5, K Logan (Tev) 30:04

Stage Five

DAVID ROSS (Caledon Park) and Charlie Haskett (Dundee Hawkhill) set off in hot pursuit of Falkirk. These two battled hard against each other and they gradually whittled down Falkirk's big lead. By the end of the stage the Vics' advantage had

been reduced to 41 seconds. ESPC slipped back into an isolated fourth place with Cambuslang equally alone in fifth.



SHERBAN: Gave Falkirk the lead on stage two

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Fastest legs: 1, D Ross (Cal Pk) 29:55; 2, C Haskett (Dund HH) 30:02; 3, J Musgrave (A'dean) 30:52; 4, R Hall (Tev) 31:26; 5, D Bain (FVH) 31:33

Stage Six

THE longest stage of the race started at the highest point on the route, at the Forestfield Inn. Those who have done their stint can indulge in a quick beer while others warm up for the task ahead. Quite often this is the leg on which the race can be won or lost. This year it was the leg on which the outcome of the race was thrown well and truly back into the melting pot.

Alan Robson of Caledon Park sheltered behind Dundee's big Ian Campbell into the headwind. Both men gradually pulled in Falkirk's Gary Grindley before Robson broke clear, opening up 15 seconds' advantage over Dundee and Falkirk.

Fastest legs: 1, A Robson (Cal Pk) 35:45; 2, D Cavers (Tev) 35:56; 3, I Campbell (Dund HH) 36:00; 4, R Quinn (Kilb) 36:23; 5, G Grindley (FVH) 36:43

Stage Seven

CALEDON Park's lead was short-lived as Dundee's recent signing Barry Paterson took the Taysiders into pole position for the first time in the race with the equal fastest lap time.

Mike McQuaid of Falkirk stuck doggedly to his task however, fin-

ishing the leg only four seconds down on the Hawks.

Caledon Park were now a further 43 seconds behind and were being caught by ESPC for whom Mike Fallows had an excellent run. The scene was now set for a thrilling battle through the streets of Glasgow.

Fastest legs: 1eq, M Fallows (ESPC) / B Paterson (Dund HH) 27:15; 3, M McQuaid (FVH) 27:19; 4, J Evans (Shett) 28:02; 5, F Boyne (A'dean) 28:05

Stage Eight

DUNDEE'S Richie Barrie and Falkirk's John Pentecost fought out a no holds barred duel over the closing six miles, disputing the lead all the way into the city. Not since 1970 had the race been so closely fought. On that occasion Shettleston edged out Edinburgh Southern Harriers by 13 seconds.

This time it was to be even closer with Pentecost eventually just getting ahead in the final few hundred metres into George Square. It was only Falkirk's second win in the history of the race.

Fastest legs: 1, J Pentecost (FVH) 28:34; 2, R Barrie (Dund HH) 28:42; 3, G Brown (ESPC) 29:17; 4, B Scally (Shett) 29:38; 5, B Emmerson (Tev) 30:42

RESULTS

- 1, Falkirk Victoria Harriers 3:58:19 (R Cameron 28:12, J Sherban 31:18, P Faulds 25:45, I Johnston 28:55, D Bain 31:33, G Grindley 36:43, M McQuade 27:19, J Pentecost 28:34)
- 2, Dundee Hawkhill Harriers 3:58:23 (I Campbell Jnr 28:00, P McCavanna 31:48, B Cook 27:04, C Hall 29:32, C Haskett 36:02, I Campbell Snr 36:00, B Paterson 27:15, R Barrie 28:42)
- 3, Caledon Park Harriers 4:01:03 (T Hanlon 27:49, K Lyall 32:54, A Puckrin 25:23, G Mathison 30:23, D Ross 29:55, A Robson 35:45, J Harter 28:19, P Duffy 30:35)
- 4, ESPC AC 4:01:17 (A Weatherhead 28:03, I Hamer 31:52, B Kirkwood 25:47, G Crawford 29:45, C McLennan 32:01, S Cohen 37:39, M Fallows 27:15, G Brown 29:17)
- 5, Teviotdale Harriers 4:04:55 (M Bryson 28:34, R Walker 32:46, I Elliot 27:19, K Logan 30:04, R Hall 31:26, D Cavers 35:56, A Fair 28:08, B Emmerson 30:42)
- 6, Cambuslang Harriers 4:06:14 (M Gormley 27:53, A Beattie 31:54, A Mair 27:47, G Croll 30:03, G Getty 31:45, C Thomson 37:11, J Robertson 28:16, I Rodger 31:25)
- 7, Shettleston Harriers 4:07:52 (A Coyne 27:54, J Mackay 33:21, D Cameron 26:35, J Hendry 30:46, C Ross 34:21, W Coyle 37:15, J Evans 28:02, B Scally 29:38)
- 8, Hunters Bog Trotters 4:08:14 (S Gibson 28:06, A Eye-Walker 32:43, C Farquharson 27:10, P O'Kane 30:31, C Hunter 32:07, S Aron 39:39, R Elliot 28:25, A Jenkins 31:27)
- 9, Kilbarchan AC 4:08:37 (T Nearle 27:51, G Tenney 34:16, D McDougall 28:24, D Christie 31:42, R McCulloch 31:57, R Quinn 36:23, R Hawkins 28:13, G Fairley 29:51)
- 10, Aberdeen AC 4:09:06 (S Wright 28:24, D Daguid 33:07, C Youngson 29:29, I Williamson 30:48, J Musgrave 30:52, G Laing 37:48, F Boyne 28:05, M Murray 32:35)
- 11, Victoria Park 4:12:46; 12, Clydesdale Harriers 4:13:17; 13, Bellahouston Harriers 4:14:30; 14, North Dist Sel 4:15:01; 15, AC Moir Ayr Seaforth 4:15:46; 16, Haddington ELP 4:16:57; 17, Livingston and District 4:21:56; 18, Annan and District 4:23:12; 19, Greenock Glenpark 4:24:29; 20, Springburn Harriers 4:33:14; 21, John Walker Kilmarnock Harriers 4:33:32