

Favourites in close-run win

By Doug Gillon

Edinburgh Southern Harriers, the short-odds favourites, lived up to their status in winning the 42nd running of the Edinburgh to Glasgow 8-Stage Road Relay yesterday, beating Edinburgh Athletic Club by 65 seconds to win in a time of 3 hours 42 minutes 32 seconds.

But the Barr-sponsored event was a far closer-run thing than expected. A hip injury forced the late withdrawal of Commonwealth 1500 metres man John Robson. Southern's team was consequently reshuffled and there were sub-par performances from some of their runners to the extent that dark horses Bellahouston had taken a 100 yard lead by the end of the fifth leg.

It was Southern's remarkable depth of talent, evidenced by major four-man relay successes in recent weeks using eight different athletes, that won them the day. Bellahouston simply ran out of class performers.

They increased their lead to 47 seconds with two stages – just ten and a half of the 44 miles left to cover – but eventually finished fourth, 3 minutes one second behind the winners.

Steeplechaser Nigel Jones got EAC off to the best of starts over the opening five and a half miles, finishing first in 26 minutes 54 seconds, just eight seconds clear of Fife veteran Donald Macgregor.

It was on the second leg that Southern really got into the race, Allister Hutton, fifth in the Commonwealth 10,000m, hauling his team from ninth to first with the fastest time, 28.08, on the six-mile stage.

Southern held the lead until the fifth stage. Dave Logue, eighth choice for Southern's team, produced the third-fastest time on the leg but was caught and nailed to the undulating road by Bellahouston's Neil Black, whose 26.25 was the day's best, taking his team to the front.

Victoria Park moved two places through the field to fourth when Jack Macfie passed veteran Willie Marshall of injury-decimated Clyde Valley – they finished twelfth – and Donald Ritchie (Aberdeen). Macfie's passing of the Northern runner came controversially when, after closing a 70-yard gap, he accidentally caught the world ultra-distance record holder, sending him sprawling and cutting both his knees and an elbow. Gamely, Ritchie got up to finish 26 seconds behind Macfie.

Southern got back in the driving seat on the penultimate stage when Craig Hunter passed EAC.

Aberdeen ultimately lost nothing through Ritchie's fall. A marvellous run on the last leg by Graham Laing caught flagging Bellahouston to give his team third place.

Southern's Ian Elliot set the only stage record of the day, 24.06 on leg three.

Transcribed by Colin Youngson