

Inverclyde hit rivals for six with win in Scally

• DOUG GILLON

INVERCLYDE continued their relentless season with a sixth relay victory in successive weeks when they claimed the 38th Allan Scally Memorial race at Baillieston on Saturday.

They had more than a minute to spare from Shettleston, with Strathclyde taking the Scottish Universities' title in third place.

Fourth after the opening leg of the 4x4.48-mile classic, Inverclyde were still 25 seconds adrift at half distance, but AC Muir brought them home at the end of the third leg with a 57-second lead over Ron Hill of Cambuslang. The Greenock

club had still their strongest card to play, Mark Pollard, and despite being unchallenged, the physical education teacher logged the day's fastest time, 23min 28sec, delivering Inverclyde's first victory in the event.

Behind was frantic activity. Hill-running internationalist Jethro Lennox was just five seconds slower than Pollard, bringing Shettleston from fourth to second. Cambuslang, the defending champions who had been second at the final changeover, drifted to sixth.

Pollard's performance had the merit of consistency. He ran the quickest stage as his club won the national relay title the previous weekend, and was

fastest in the McAndrew event, his county cross-country championships, and the Scottish District championships. In the global sphere of things, however, he has some way to go.

The race commemorates Allan Scally of Broomhouse, who was precluded from running for Shettleston because he was a professional. As a coach he had a huge impact on the club and the local community during the Depression.

World 10-mile champion, he won significant money, and some went to fund local soup kitchens. But now it is the sport which has fallen on hard times.

The Shettleston race is one of very few which has managed

to retain the same course, and thus provides data for comparison. It makes depressing analysis: a total of 38 athletes on 83 occasions have run 22.30 or better for the 4.48 miles, the time regarded as the benchmark of class. Only three years in 38 has the fastest man failed to break 23 minutes, and in 14 of those years the best time has been inside 22. The 24-year-old Pollard is a decent athlete, and may yet become a great one, but for now, 23.28 in benign conditions does not kindle heather.

More encouraging was the turnout of 21 university teams, and the return of a woman who was an outstanding student

athlete. It seemed as if Gillian Palmer might be lost to the sport. She logged the second-fastest women's time ever on this course while running for Edinburgh University in 2001, and the following year finished eighth in the Commonwealth Games 10,000m final.

She is seventh on the Scottish all-time list at 5k and 10k, but has not featured in the sport since 2003, because of injuries. Now graduated as a vet, and returned from Oxford, she has joined Hunters' Bog Trotters.

She was fastest woman of the day, and helped her new club to third, behind City of Glasgow.

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Allan Scally 4x4.8-mile road relay, Baillieston

Men 1 Inverclyde (G Hyett 24.25, G Ruddy 24.02, AC Muir 23.57, M Pollard 23.28) 1hr 35min 52sec, 2 Shettleston (K McKay 24.13, P Sorrie 24.38, A Little 24.44, J Lennox 23.33) 1:37.08, 3 Strathclyde Uni (K Kane 24.30, R Toole 23.35, D Phee 25.30, C McNulty 25.01) 1:38.36, 4 Corstorphine 1:39.49, 5 Central 1:40.51, 6 Ronhill Cambuslag 1:41.52.
Fastest laps: 1 Pollard 23.28, 2 Lennox 23.33, 3 Toole 23.35, 4 Muir 23.57, 5 Ruddy 24.02

Women (3x4.48 miles): 1 City of Glasgow (S Branney 27.48, J Knowles 29.26, L MacNeill 28.03) 1:25.17, 2 Bellahouston Road Runners (E Birnie 30.26, J Jeffries 30.12, H Stuart 27.33) 1:28.11, 3 Hunters Bog Trotters (G Palmer 26.40, I Knowles 31.09, D Macdonald 33.01) 1:30.50.
Fastest laps: 1 Palmer 26.40, 2 Stuart 27.33, 3 Branney (veteran) 27.48

Scottish Universities Ch'ships. Men 1 Strathclyde 1:38.36, 2 Aberdeen (10th overall) 1:46.44, 3 Glasgow 1:46.44

Women 1 Glasgow 1:32.59, 2 Strathclyde 1:34.56, 3 Stirling 1:35.06