

BAZANCOURT INTERNATIONAL 200KM

The 200Km at Bazancourt on 20-21st April marked a significant stage in the development of British racewalking. For the first time an official GB team of 5 men (Richard Brown, Ed Schilabeer, Tony Collins, Geoff Tranter and, at 58, the oldest person to be awarded a GB vest, Don Thompson) plus 2 ladies (Sandra Brown and Kathy Crilley) was recognised by the British Board to compete against a formidable French team of Paris-Colmar finishers (Govenaux, Malthiery, Bruno and Letessier) plus Dufay, the star of the future. French walkers such as Henri Legrand (3rd at our Hendon 100 miles two years ago) was not good enough to be selected!

Dufay, with his pacers, moved into the lead at about 50Km and maintained a tremendous pace with Brown advancing into 2nd place and trying not to let the Frenchman get too far ahead. Dufay went through 160Km (nearly 100 miles) in an incredible 16 hours 25 minutes (surely a new world best) with Brown in 16 hours 52 minutes (the second fastest recorded by a Briton). Dufay stormed on to 200Km in 21 hours 03 minutes (probably a French record) with Brown improving his personal best by 45 minutes to set a new British record of 21 hours 45 minutes beating that previously set by Harrison at Rouen in the early 1970s.

With everyone being pulled along and the French fighting for positions, no less than 13 walkers reached 200Km within the 24 hours. Shilabeer showed great determination against a background of only limited training over such distances to complete his 200Km in just under the 24 hours. But the sheer class of the French ensured them a men's team victory by 14 points to 8.

In the ladies' event Sandra Brown had wretched stomach problems but her style and determination carried her through to win with 188Km. Kathy Crilley had severe blisters but completed nearly 100 miles and ensured by finishing a British victory over the French by 6 points to 5.

Superb support was provided by an 8 strong crew and I hope the British Board will be encouraged to continue their support for ultra racewalking. However unless the UK revives or inaugurates more long distance events around 50 miles/100Km, we will have great difficulty in competing on equal terms with the rest of Europe. Not everyone can expend time and finances like Sandra and I competing abroad gaining experience and I hope genuine recognition for British distance walking. It cost us several thousand pounds last year to compete in the various events (including Paris-Colmar). This year it has taken a French company to relieve the financial pressures by offering sponsorship - no British company we contacted was interested!

1.	Dufay	21 hour 03	22.	Tranter	180KM
2.	Brown	21 hour 45	17.	Brown (F)	188KM
3.	Szalas (Czech)	21 hour 55		Crilley (F)	156KM
4.	Vandendaul(Belg)	22 hour 10			
13.	Shilabeer	23 hour 50			
19.	Collins	188KM			
21.	Thompson	188KM			