

**Athletics
Australia**

Tassie puts on a ripper!

Words by RICHARD WELSH | Images by DALE CUMMING

Pre race rumours were that the course was predominately flat, but once he (Troop) had a look at it, the dual Olympian was seen hugging race organisers after sighting the toughness of the course.



Hay bails provided more of a cross country feel in the Open Men's race. Shelley (left), Troop (middle), Birmingham (obscured) and Dent (right) formed a strong lead group

A true cross country course greeted Australia's best distance athletes from 1500m, to the marathon at this year's Australian Cross Country Championships in Pontville, Tasmania.

The demanding course was set at the Pontville Equestrian Park and Sporting Complex, 25km north of Hobart. Starting and finishing on a supremely groomed football field, each 3km lap included 2 testing hills and 5 rows of hay bails to clear. The surface was rough in patches and sandy in others, yet all reports was that it was best national cross country course in recent years.

A CLASSY field of 79 men toed the line in perfect conditions to battle over 12km for the title of Australian Cross Country Champion. After the first 3km lap was passed in 9.01, there was a pack of ten athletes. This dropped to four at the halfway mark, and then in a superb display of tough distance running, Victorian Lee Troop and Canberra's Martin Dent pitted themselves against each other and it was only ever a race in two. Dent, the defending champion, made a move at the beginning of the final lap, opening up a 20m advantage. For many, that would have been enough to concede first place, but to his credit, Troop kept fighting. "I love cross country running and when the going gets tough, I can always find something."

Troop reclaimed the title he last held in 2000. Backing up from his victory at the Australian Marathon Championships on the Gold Coast in July, Troop made it two national titles in 2 months and proved he is back as a serious athlete. "Winning Gold Coast was great, but I think people will take more notice of me winning national cross."

"I liked the course, the hills were challenging and to my benefit, while the hay bails knocked the rhythm out of people." Pre race rumours were that

the course was predominately flat, but once he had a look at it, the dual Olympian was seen hugging race organisers after sighting the toughness of the course.

Another pleasing result was the return to form of Michael Shelley. After breaking 3.40 for the 1500m at Nationals in 2004, we haven't seen too many results that show what the talented Queenslander is capable of. It appears he has had a great winter and many of us will follow him with interest in the upcoming track season to see what he can produce.

Canberra based Erwin McRae ran brilliantly in the closing stages of the race to get up for fourth place and help the ACT team win the silver medal. Although disappointed with his personal result in placing fifth, Collis Birmingham helped Victoria to claim the Open Men's team title.

Anna Thompson continued her fantastic year, taking out the open women's title from local favourite Donna MacFarlane and Victoria's Lisa Jane Weightman.

This year has seen Thompson run fifth in the 10,000 at the Commonwealth Games and win a team bronze medal at the IAAF World Cross Country Championships in Fukuoka. She has also

RESULTS

MEN OPEN

1. Lee Troop	VIC	36.36
2. Martin Dent	ACT	36.52
3. Michael Shelley	QLD	37.15
4. Erwin McRae	ACT	37.27
5. Collis Birmingham	VIC	37.37
6. Liam Adams	VIC	37.44
7. Kim Gillard	TAS	37.53
8. Clint Perrett	VIC	37.57
9. Scott McTaggart	ACT	38.11
10. Anthony Haber	ACT	38.13

WOMEN OPEN

1. Anna Thompson	VIC	27.45
2. Donna Macfarlane	TAS	28.07
3. Lisa Jane Weightman	VIC	28.20
4. Emma Rilen	NSW	28.44
5. Lauren Shelley	WA	28.45
6. Clare Geraghty	QLD	28.49
7. Kristy Willis	SA	28.58
8. Eliza Stewart	NSW	29.08
9. Belinda Wilsher	NSW	29.11
10. Kate Smyth	VIC	29.23

MEN UNDER 20

1. Chris Hamer	VIC	25.31
2. Stephen Kelly	VIC	25.35
3. Mathew Mildenhall	NZL	25.37
4. Sam Crowther	VIC	25.44
5. Scott Vance	VIC	26.06
6. Courtney Carter	WA	26.22
7. Tim Hodge	NZL	26.32
8. Matt Daley	QLD	26.35
9. Tyson Popplestone	VIC	26.35
10. Aaron Patterson	WA	26.50

WOMEN UNDER 20

1. Lucy Starrat	NSW	21.55
2. Ashlea Gilfillan	QLD	22.25
3. Sarah Grahame	VIC	22.32
4. Holly Van Dalen	NZL	22.38
5. Katie Wright	NZL	22.47
6. Samantha Milton	NSW	22.53
7. Rebecca Lowe	NSW	23.07
8. Lucy Van Dalen	NZL	23.19
9. Ellie O'Kane	NSW	23.25
10. Katie Duncan	VIC	23.38



The racing was just as hot in some of the younger age groups

distance runners. "There was great support out there on the course, they made nearly as much noise as on the streets of Sydney two weeks ago. It really lifted me, especially on the last lap."

In 2006, there were essentially two Under 20 races in one event. Athletics Australia and School Sport Australia each had their own division, but it was only the finish line that counted, as both races started together.

Victoria continued its dominance in the 8km under 20 men's race. Chris Hamer and Stephen Kelly worked together, to give Victoria the top two places, in that order, ahead of New Zealand's Matthew Mildenhall. Hamer and Kelly were backed up

been selected to represent Australia at the 2006 World Mountain Running Championships and inaugural IAAF World Road Running Championships in Hungary in October.

Thompson dominated the race from the outset, to win by 22 seconds. "The plan was to go out hard and try to hold on at the end. I didn't want to leave it for a sprint with Donna, because I don't have the after burners she has."

After winning the 14km City 2 Surf in Sydney a fortnight earlier, Thompson had no problems in navigating her way around 8km of cross country. "Winning City 2 Surf gave me all the confidence I needed for today"

With brilliant conditions for cross country running, many locals turned out to get a glimpse of Australia's best



The Junior men going head to head

with great running by their team mates to take out the team's title in both categories.

The 6km under 20 women saw a different state walk away with the national title. Winning the race overall and taking the Athletics Australia under 20 title was Lucy Starrat in 21.55. She beat home Ashlea Gilfillan, who won the School Sport Australia title in 22.25.

The AA team event was won

by Victoria, from NSW. This was reversed in the SSA category with NSW stopping a clean sweep from the Victorians.

Congratulations to Simon Phillips on designing, what all agreed, was a great course. Well done also to the people of Tasmania, as Athletics Australia senior management declared it the best Australian Cross Country Championships in recent years.

Early stages in the Women's race

