

## RUNAROUND PROFILE

– where you find out more about a club member than you might want to know!



### For Steve Thomasson running is much more than just an Arctic Roll – from Spitsbergen to Smithills



Steve at Trotter 5 in 2020 – photo by Henry Lisowski

**What did you want to be when you were growing up?**

A doctor, as my mother was disabled. Then I realised I was not very good at biology so that idea died out.

**Where did you grow up?**

Bolton, for my sins.

**Is your career panning out as you wanted?**

It panned out somewhat differently than expected, but no-one would really have expected a diagnosis of high functioning autism which I was given just before my 26<sup>th</sup> birthday. Having used that information about myself I've moved into a field that suits me far better and to be honest, I don't want to retire now.

**Stiff drink or herbal tea?**

Neither. Tetley tea for me, please.

**What got you interested in running/athletics in the first place?**

I was always a keen football player, although my enthusiasm always far outweighed my ability. Then I became a referee so always tried to be reasonably fit, and indeed was fortunate enough to referee county finals in junior football. Eventually I ended up coming over to the idea of running for the sake of running, and not chasing after a ball or opponent.

**What is your worst habit/trait?**

I'll let others decide on that. I like myself, warts and all. And whilst some people find my communication brutal, others prize the honesty and lack of guile or ulterior motives. I do swear like a trooper when frustrated though – and often in more than one language.

**What irritates you in others?**

Thinking in stereotypes.

### **Some stats?**

My 5K and half-marathon PBs are from 2019, being 21:33 and 1:43:33 respectively. All other distances are from 2012 or earlier before I sorted my tendon problem (IT band). I've also completed half-marathons in 15 different countries and am aiming to push this further. At the time of this interview, those countries are England, Scotland, Wales, Greenland, Faroe Islands, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Germany, Austria, Croatia, Greece, Poland, Estonia, and Spain.

### **How do you fit training in to your daily schedule?**

Not always, I don't train every day, I train when I can fit it in. Sometimes I can train almost every day, sometimes it's once a week.

### **Training tips?**

Go either slow or fast. I run everything that's not an interval session at my recovery pace and this helped me to my two PBs last year. Far less pain afterwards, and from my experience I have had far fewer injuries from doing such. If I want speed, that's the point of an interval session or a short race. Otherwise, slow, slow, slow! For me, that's around 2 minutes per mile slower than my 5K PB time, around a seven-minute mile pace. As a result, I do a lot of my mileage in the high eights to low nines per mile on equivalent terrain. If it's hillier, then I'll take more pace off.

### **Other interests?**

Football, the German language, online games, European history. And I have spent many enjoyable evenings reading Wikipedia articles and references.

### **What has been your proudest moment?**

If we're talking running, then winning the Fielden Cup in 2014, or completing the Polar Bear Challenge (Polar Circle Marathon and Half-Marathon on consecutive days) in Greenland in 2016.

### **Best advice you've ever been given?**

My father told me, as far as is possible, never to promise anything. Failing that, promise something you can easily deliver. Whatever you do, ensure your word is your bond.

### **What is your ultimate running/athletics challenge?**

I think it'll be difficult to beat the Polar Bear Challenge, but if I get lucky and win a lottery, you can bet I'd sign up for the North Pole Marathon in a heartbeat. I do want to get under 3h 45 for a marathon though, having missed out by 100 seconds back in Frankfurt in 2012, and the aim is to do it in Lisbon this October.

### **What was your most embarrassing and/or scary moment?**

Having to pull out of the Spreewald Marathon in 2014. I'd come back from the dreaded IT band which wrecked 2013 for me, and felt it going again. For a few days I thought that was going to be it regarding running, but fortunately I'd caught it in time.

### **What makes you most unhappy?**

Wanton ignorance.

### **When are you happiest?**

Freedom/autonomy and happiness are pretty much equivalents in my mind. I'm at my happiest when I feel at my freest. Which is why I love mixing up running and travel so much.

### **Favourite Book/Reading?**

I don't do much reading for pleasure nowadays as I do so much for my work as a translator. However, this would be a toss-up between *Independent People* (Halldor Laxness), *Sophie's World* (Jostein Gaarder), *Kon-Tiki* (Thor Heyerdahl) and *Singled Out* (Bella DePaulo).

### **Most rewarding running/athletics challenge?**

Polar Bear Challenge. Although I can't imagine the conditions for Spitsbergen Marathon ever being anything but incredibly windy considering it's the most northerly half-marathon and 10K in the world (the North Pole Marathon is obviously located further north, but only has a marathon).

Steve at Spitsbergen (number 382) in 2019 – photo by Eivind Bye for Runners World



### **Which four people would you invite to your dream dinner-party?**

If it's not with good old friends, then I'd like tales, humour, and something to think about at my dinner table. And if you asked me this question tomorrow, I'd come up with four different names.

Possibly the closest I have to an idol would be explorer Thor Heyerdahl, then add Arthur Schopenhauer, Christian Morgenstern (a German Dadaist poet whose verse was the subject of my Masters dissertation), and would it be too risqué to ask for Britt Ekland at the height of her fame?

### **If you could change one thing in the world what would it be?**

The notion that you can change one thing in the world and improve matters.

### **If you could edit your past, what would you change?**

I wouldn't. I lost both my parents before I reached the age of 21 and have lived on my own since then, but I don't regret this. Regret strikes me as a very negative and selfish emotion that gets in the way of properly analysing what's happening and how to improve yourself. So, to quote Edith Piaf, "non, je ne regrette rien!"

### **If you could turn back the clock, what would you change?**

No, no, no. I can't change that, so let's focus on what I can change.

### **What's your favourite music?**

I couldn't answer with one specific type. If you put my MP3 player on random you can switch from

Faroese pagan metal to the Portsmouth Sinfonia to the Polish national anthem in three songs. And my favourite song is in a language I don't understand (namely Scottish Gaelic, the song is An Toll Dubh, by Runrig).

**What would you want to achieve/do in running/athletics?**

I'm playing with the idea of clocking up half-marathons in every European country. Still about 40 countries to go at the time of answering. I want to crack 3h 45 for the marathon, and if I'm fortunate enough to succeed in that attempt in Lisbon, that's it re. the marathon for me and I'll go back to 10ks to half-marathons.

**What is your favourite race/athletics event?**

Polmaraton Praski, in Warsaw, Poland. It's a very flat half-marathon starting and finishing outside the National Stadium. Every time I've been there, it has been hosted at night and it lends a special something running amongst the street lights – and from my experience of six races in Warsaw the Poles are spirited spectators and great hosts. I love going back to race there when I can – Warsaw wears her scars with pride and her history well.

Obviously, the Polar Circle Marathon was the event of a lifetime, and Spitsbergen was memorable just for the sheer novelty of having armed polar bear guards around the course.

**Any ideas about how Horwich RMI Harriers could improve?**

It never hurts to focus on youth, although we do well in this field already. We have some wonderfully talented youngsters, which I found out the hard way during the Fielden in 2017 when Robert and Lewis, two of the most promising, got past me before the half-way mark. Even funnier, I ran a faster time that year than the year I won it.

**What are your hopes for the club?**

That we can continue to thrive and encourage anyone who fancies taking part to take positive steps about their health regardless of age.