



Setting the **PACE**

A NATIONWIDE SEARCH IS ON TO FIND OUT WHICH CLUBS' RUNNERS ARE BEST AT JUDGING THEIR SPEED

WORDS/PICTURES: DAVID CASTLE

IT'S an unseasonably warm March evening at the Julie Rose Stadium in Ashford, Kent. A group of chattering 11 and 12-year-olds are milling about the start-line: you can almost smell the frisson of excitement about the challenge they are about to undertake.

A call from trackside counts the first competitor down: "Three, two, one, go". The youngster hits the start button on his Soleus watch, checks it's up and running, and then heads off round the track for a timed lap.

This is the Perfect Pace Challenge, a promotional initiative from Soleus Running watches, a relative newcomer to the market, in partnership with Brooks and Powerade. The brainchild of Fit Brands managing director Jon Dennis, a former English Schools champion and UK age-best record holder, Perfect Pace is currently touring tracks around the south of England with its unique challenge, designed to make individuals aware of their own pace judgment – and, obviously, why wearing a watch can make all the difference!

The idea of the challenge is simple. Each competitor uses a Soleus 10K watch and some Brooks spikes of their choice to time a lap for themselves. After a short recovery, they then complete a second lap without a watch (this lap is timed by the Soleus team), trying to get as close to their first-lap split as possible.

The winner on the night – who receives a Soleus watch,



pair of Brooks spikes and a six-month subscription to *Athletics Weekly*, the Challenge's media partner – is the person whose differential between the first and second lap is the smallest. This is known as your "Pace Judgment Miss" time (PJM).

The beauty of the Perfect Pace Challenge is that it is open to everyone. It doesn't matter how fast or fit you are – the event is measuring pace judgment not ability. That means it's as accessible to 11-year-olds as it is to 60-year-olds (and there have been a few of them trying it out already). Every entrant gets a copy of *AW* and a bottle of Powerade ION4 for their trouble.

There is a national ranking for individuals. The current leader is 12-year-old Harry Tosen from Winchester AC with a remarkable PJM of 0.04secs – and there is also a club ranking, based on the average differential on the night. The leading club so far is Bracknell AC with an average PJM of 3.62secs.

The Challenge will move to the north of the country in early May, starting with Hawkhill Harriers in Dundee. Clubs to have successfully completed the Challenge so far include Brighton & Hove AC, Winchester AC, Basildon AC and Crawley AC.

The event has certainly caught people's imagination. At Ashford, in the spotlight of sports retailer and injury clinic Podplus, there was a genuine sense of enthusiasm and a real determination to beat the current best PJM on the night. In fact, the very first competitor posted a PJM of 0.08, which was always going to prove hard to beat. And yet everyone wanted to prove that their pace judgment was the best!

Competitors employed a range of different tactics. Some individuals ambled round in times well outside their usual pace in the hope that, by going slower, they'd be able to match their first lap time. This often proved ill-advised, as their second laps were significantly faster as the longer you take, the more chance there is for error. Others tried to run at something closer to fast training pace and these individuals were often more successful. One girl even race-walked her way around the challenge, but even her metronomic style wasn't enough to dislodge the early leader. The sense of disappointment was palpable!

And while not everyone could be a winner, it certainly seemed like everyone had fun trying. "The idea behind Perfect Pace was not to single out individuals on the basis of their athletic potential but to create a unique,

fun challenge that was suitable for all," said Dennis. "The reaction from competitors at the tracks we've visited so far has been excellent, with as many as 60 individuals taking part on any one night."

It can prove something of a logistical nightmare. With so many competitors needing to be timed, you require a lot of Soleus watches – and keen eyes on the track to make sure each individual is given the right time. "It can get a bit hectic," admits Dennis, just as five youngsters arrive excitedly to tell them their second-lap time.

The results of the Challenge are hosted on the *AW* website (www.athleticsweekly.com/stats/soleus), while there's a strong social media campaign to support the event through Facebook and Twitter (search for SoleusUK). "What we are trying to do through the social media is generate excitement about the event," says Dennis. "We want to encourage people to sign up and discuss the Challenge, whether that's debating the best tactics for pace judgment or predicting the winning time or the overall winning club. We will also be rolling out competitions that will be exclusive to these online sites."

As the evening draws to a close and the sun has long-since set, a few hardy individuals are still attempting the Challenge.

Their looks of concentration say it all: this is one Challenge that is fun to try but very difficult to master. "We're hoping that someone will get their splits exactly identical," says Dennis, "although, to be fair, that's going to be pretty tricky to achieve."

» **SOLEUS RUNNING watches are distributed in the UK through Fit Brands (www.fitbrands.co.uk)**

ABOVE LEFT: athletes start their first lap of the Perfect Pace Challenge with a watch

ABOVE CENTRE: participants run a second lap, trying to match their first-lap pace without the aid of a watch

ABOVE RIGHT: Brooks are present at all events to offer spikes for testing

The remaining nights are:

Tuesday May 10	Dundee	Hawkhill Harriers
Wednesday May 11	Aberdeen	Aberdeen AAC
Thursday May 12	Glasgow	Glasgow Victoria AC
Tuesday May 17	Liverpool	Liverpool Harriers
Wednesday May 18	Manchester	Sale Harriers
Thursday May 19	Halifax	Halifax Harriers*
Tuesday May 24	Leeds	Leeds AC
Thursday May 26	Wakefield	Wakefield Harriers*
Tuesday May 31	Sterling	Central AC*
Tuesday June 7	Doncaster	Doncaster Harriers

* These events do not include the Soleus Challenge but athletes will have a chance to try out Brooks spikes.