

THE RUNNER WITH THE LIQUIDISED BRAIN The Sod Jobber

“SHOWERS, which may be heavy and prolonged, will cross the region”. So what? It would take more than Michael Fish’s warnings to put me off. Today was the day - “run 20 miles and (hopefully) live”. Such epic endurance feats are rare, but they help to convince this geriatric brain that there is life after 40. The morning’s showers didn’t distract my intent. This was it - the struggle between fitness and antiquity, speed and moral flaccidness, vanity and sanity. Changing into some yesteryear dandy kit - black on orange vest plus orange on black shorts., I chugged up the hill out of Shipton. The cool dude was off.

Spots of rain were no problem. Three miles gone and I heard a rumble. Lunchtime’s banana sandwich was not to blame. The air thickened, darkened, and as I climbed the hill to the church, the heavens opened (appropriate timing, I suppose). Rain hammered earthwards.

Within moments my thinning hair was plastered down, water dripped jerkily from my eyebrows and my feet swam up against the tide of water which poured down towards the valley. Distant rumbles were replaced by violent claps, each preceded by a flicker of lightning. It was when the flicker and the clap virtually coincided that I remembered how lightning had gouged a hole in Brize Norton’s runway; what would it do to my pate?

Into Kingham and it was decision time - left for home, hot buttered toast and common sense, or right for Daylesford, a late bath and possible brain damage from waterlogging. Common sense lost. I was running well and I wasn’t cold. Those modern peek-a-boo running vests have the

panache of a fluorescent tea bag, and once they are wet, they flap against you like a massage from a wet mackerel. This old Milton Keynes vest had the feel of reinforced worsted, but in the rain it’s warm, damp, clinging and infinitely comforting. Ignoring the incredulous stares from behind wind-screens, I splashed onwards before being immersed in the automobile version of the Trevi Fountains. I was happy as a sand boy.

Paddling past Daylesford church it seemed less than a week ago I’d been inside, enjoying a gentle Cotswold evensong. Now I resembled some latter day John the Baptist, fresh from an unscheduled dip in the Jordan. The road was, in effect, underwater, with verge - to - verge puddles. There was no point in avoiding them - I just aimed for the shallow end.

Up the hill through the idyllic cottage land of Oddington, my liquidised brain began to speculate upon some of the flowers on display - the purple tassels of wetsteria, the wild splendour of soakwort and rainsbill and everywhere marsh you-name-it, it’s there. Suddenly the weather eased and it merely rained hard. Then, as suddenly as it had arrived, it had gone, replaced by incessant dripping from the trees. Skylarks folded their umbrellas and twittered high above the fields.

Only eight miles to go, still feeling strong (not difficult at the lethargic eight or so miles per hour pace which I’d settled into). It would soon be time to wind up the pace for the last five miles. But there was still time to admire the cocoon-like ducks beside the stream in Bledington - they’d got more sense than to stick their heads

up, plus the stream's fringe of yellow irises. It just goes to show that us runners aren't all pumped-up Philistines who don't appreciate creation; if it's there, we'll enjoy it.

So this was it - Kingham Station, with just five miles to go to that foaming tankard of lager. Girding up my loins I began to put in some effort. Trouble is, girded loins do not support wet shorts. The offending garments slithered down almost as fast as I could pull them up. The elastic was giving up the fight against the accumulated water and if I wasn't careful, my knobbly knees would soon have a new support role to perform. My socks had long since headed downstream, seeking shelter inside those rain-washed trainers.

Picking up speed after 15 miles, with pint-laden wellies (or so it felt) is not easy. Declining shorts meant unshackled vest which now flapped above my vitals like a Dayglo kipper. The smartest and fleetest runner on two legs was a vision of the past.

The final run in. Past Bruern Woods where steam on the road matched various bodily sources of steam. Thunder started up again, giving wings to my legs. Gentle mockery from village youths was, in every sense, water off a duck's back. The battle was over, victory won. 2 hours and 16 minutes of watery but undimmed enjoyment. Now it's time to return to the land of common sense -there's nothing better than a quick shower!

Bob Forster.

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