

Am I doing better relatively than my peers?

Analysis of the times at VAC's 5 Mile Road Race Championships, May 2025

By Tim Grose



Do you find yourself, as a masters runner, doing a race these days and wondering how long your fellow runners have been running and whether you might have beaten somebody in the past that has your measure now. I certainly do!

On 13th May, I was one of 93 running finishers in the annual Vets AC 5 Mile Championships in Battersea Park. My time was 32:13 which I was pleased with, but it was literally a mile off my PB of 25:44 from way back in 1991. I did at least have a slight inner smile knowing my PB was faster than the race winner this time!

My age graded score (2015 tables) this time of 79.91% wasn't too far off the 82.81% I did as a 25 year old in that 1991 race but I have always tended to think I was relatively "better" as a senior athlete than I am now and this statistic seems to bear this out.

So, in this article, I thought I would look at some overall trends in the times recorded in this 2025 race to what the athletes did at the peak of their powers and see what of interest pops out.

Rule of thumb

One commonly quoted "rule of thumb" is that most runners will see up to **9 years of improvement** from when they start training relatively seriously and largely regardless of the age they start.

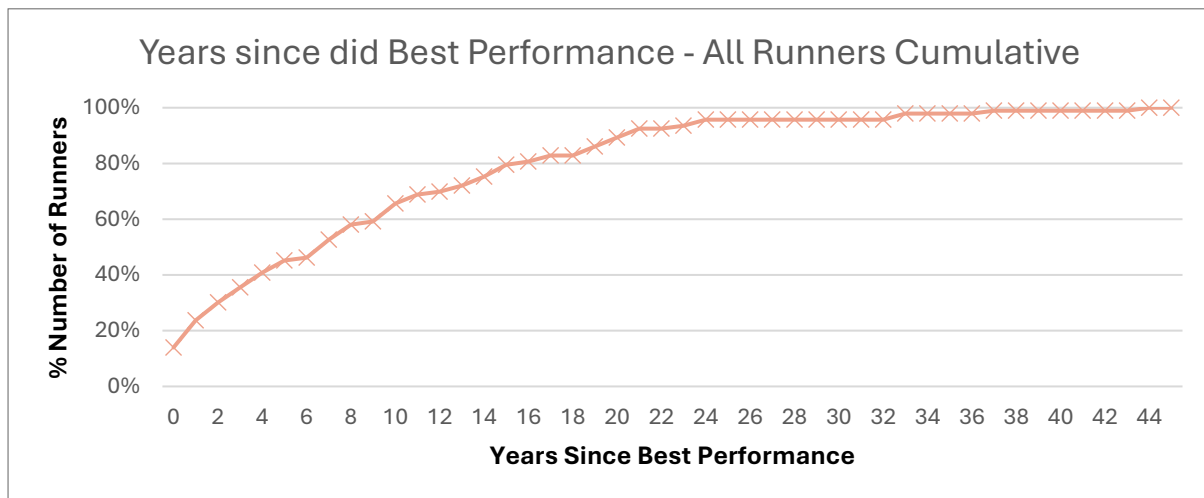
To try and test this, I looked at all the runners in the 2025 race and using the data on Power of 10 and runbritainrankings.com, worked out both the year each runner did the best performance which I could find for them, and in which event.

How long since the runners achieved their best performance?

Firstly, let us look at an overall view of how long ago the runners did their best performance.

To my somewhat surprise, this ranges from 0 years for 13 of the 93 runners (i.e. those who have done their best performance this year) to **Pam Whitter** now an W65 who ran an amazing 2:04.78 800 in 1981 some 44 years ago. Other notable "longevity" periods are **Lynn Wilson** at 37 years (39:54 10K) and both **Mark Tennyson** (15:26 5K) and myself (3:55.5 1500) who did their best performance 33 years ago in 1992. **Mark** won the M60 category this time so we could argue his decline has been better than mine and we always joke I seem to be getting further behind him since my last "win" over him in 2016.

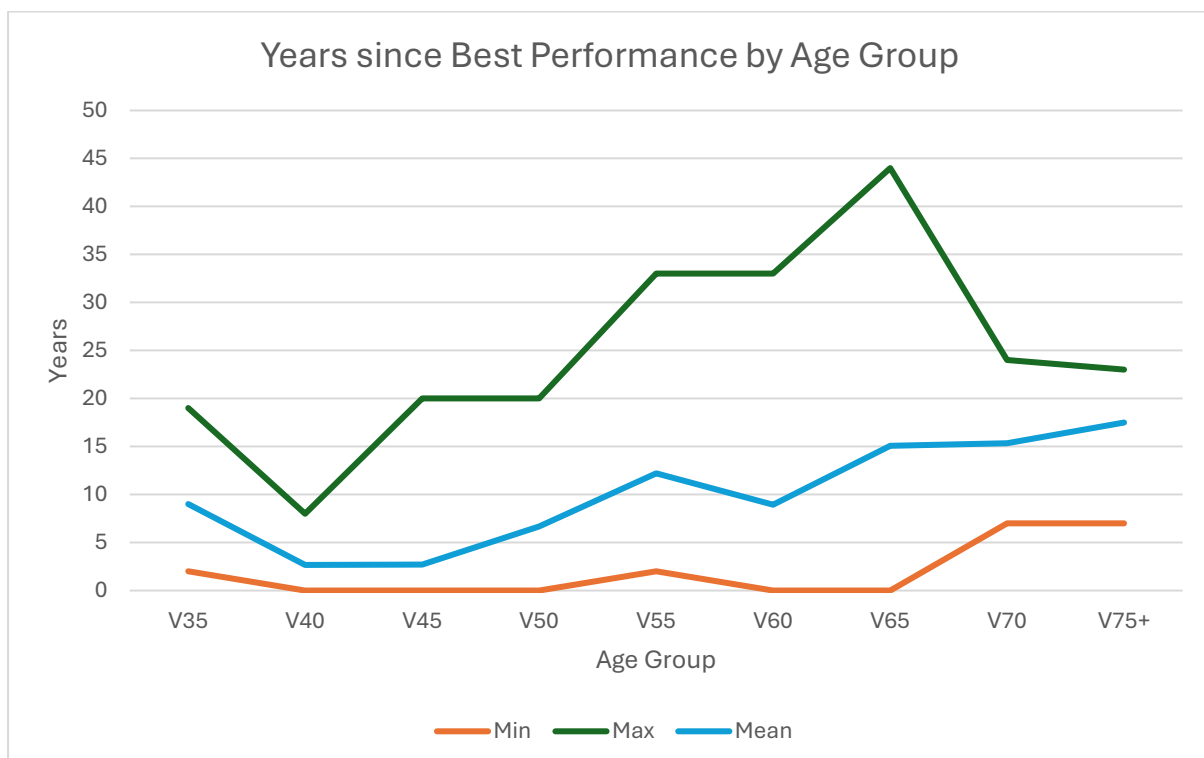
The graph also shows that **about 50% of the runners have done their best performance in the last 6 years**. Perhaps those runners have taken things more seriously since lockdown. Indeed, of those runners, more than half of them have been racing 10 or more years so clearly, they are not all “new” runners.



Although not a direct comparison to the “9 years rule” it does illustrate that some masters athletes can and still are running their best ever times as they get older. It also shows that we have some runners still competing way after their “peak”.

Any correlation with age since they did their best performance?

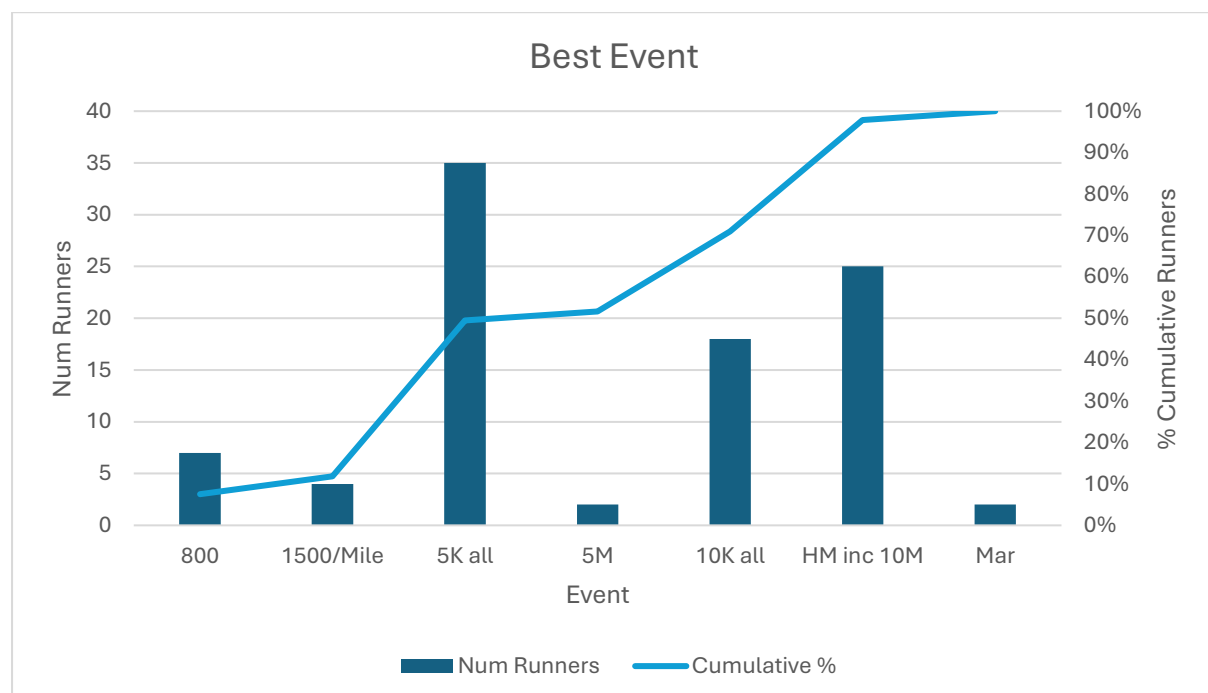
Now you might think this does not illustrate any potential differences as the age groups get older. So, in the graph below, I looked at this in more detail. For each age group (male and female combined) the three lines represent the minimum, average and maximum number of years since athletes in each age group did their best performance.



The bottom “Min” line in orange shows, at least up until V65, there are some athletes in each age group who are running their best ever times essentially “now”. The “Max” green line further shows we have some VAC competitors who are still racing way after their best. The “Mean” blue line reasonably well illustrates the disparate spread of longevity we have. Not surprisingly the stats change a bit from V70 but the same general trends are seen of some closer to their best than others.

Distribution of best race distance

Now 5 miles always feels like a good “fair” race distance as it seemingly allows middle distance track runners to meet longer distance road runners “half way” as it were. The next graph shows the breakdown of best distance of the runners by their best event.



The bar chart columns shows the number of runners whose historical best performance was at each event. For this “5K all” includes 5K road, 5000 track and parkrun and similar for “10K all”. I included 10M with HM as there was only one runner best at 10M but kept 5M on its own to better see the spread.

The blue line is the cumulative % of runners as the event distance goes up.

The most notable statistic here is the even spread of runners whose best performance was under 5 miles to those who seem to prefer to race for longer. Perhaps it also illustrates that runners often underperform at the marathon or maybe that marathon focused runners don’t like to race shorter distances - at least in our races!

Reality check!

Of course, there is also a certain reality as we get older.

Although it is not always the case, the fastest runners at Battersea in May were clearly those generally who were better of late than in the past and not “too old”. Every runner in the first 16 overall places has done their best performance in the last five years and are V50 or younger.



That said they are not all “new” runners.

One of these – **Steve Winder** (pictured) – the M50 winner at the Battersea Park 5 Miles ran a faster half marathon this year than he did back in 2004.

He is generally running as well as he was 21 years ago.

The last time I beat him was back in 2014.

I live in hope of further “glory”! I’m sure we all do...

Tim Grose

June 2025