

Ruth's barefoot start



The current holder of the Anne Shaw trophy for Performance of the Meet (2021 State Championships), Ruth Johnson was born in Narrogin in 1941. She was educated there and became a secretary/switchboard operator for the WA government railways. In 1964, following her marriage to Alan, they moved to a farm east of Wagin near the famous Dumbleyung Lake (site of the world water speed record set by Donald Campbell, also in 1964). In 1985 they moved to Bunbury and have lived there ever since. Ruth and Alan have four daughters and a son, and nine grandchildren.



In focus

With Carmel Meyer

Not having done any sport since her school days, Ruth's first venture into athletics was in 1991 when she saw a local paper advertisement regarding Senior Athletics. Ruth says, "I decided to go and see what went on. I enjoyed it so I returned the following week and have continued my involvement in Bunbury athletics for 30 years." Ruth paints a great picture of her 'new adventure.'

"The track was grass, so I ran barefoot. The high jump had mats to land on and not just sand like at high school. Also, the long jump had a proper run-up lane. My husband was watching me jump and reminded me not to slow down at the take-off mat. It has taken me many years to break the habit and I still do slow down sometimes. Up until my start with Bunbury athletics, I had never run more than 200m, but I soon learned to participate in all events. I had never thrown so I learned that too, and while I don't consider myself a good thrower, I do enjoy the hammer throw. I can still recall my first 400m. I took off and got about halfway when the legs decided they weren't going any further...so I walked! At the end of the season, I was rewarded for my efforts with a box of chocolates."

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Ruth says it is never about just showing up and taking part. Everyone works as a team getting the equipment ready, marking and timing.

Ruth joined MAWA in the 1992/93 season, taking part in the State Championships for the first time and receiving the first of her many certificates. She intended to run barefoot but was advised against it as her feet would suffer so she put her shoes back on! Her knowledge and skill level have gone a long way since then and as she has no real health problems she hopes to continue for as long as possible.

Participating at a State level encouraged Ruth to try and improve her times, so she joined the Bunbury Runners club and began regularly running 5km on a Thursday. As her fitness developed, Ruth started running 5km most days around the Bunbury estuary – her training regime for many years. “I am a bit of a loner so running on my own was what I did. When we got a synthetic track, I would go down by myself, especially before States or the Nationals. Now Luella Jenkin, Sharon Moloney and I train together, each doing our own thing. When we ran on the grass track it was always lovely to go to the State Championships and run on the synthetic surface and our times were usually better too.”

Ruth has tried most athletic events, except for Pole Vault and Steeplechase. She would have loved to try her hand at Steeple but says the idea of hurdling or jumping over the water put her off. “Jumping into water and running in wet shoes wasn't my idea of a race!” Ruth also comments that

while she hasn't run a track 10,000m she has done many on the road and has finished no less than twelve half-marathons in Bunbury.

“The Perth World Masters in 2016 was a great event, particularly running with women

from other nations. I received two gold, one silver and three bronze. Those games pushed me to achieve better results. Sometimes one does and at other times you go backwards but that makes it more interesting, and you want to achieve more.”

Despite her outstanding performance at the World's in Perth and the many trophies won in Bunbury, Ruth describes the 2021 State Championships as the highlight of her athletics career. She came away with ten State records and two Australian records. “At the end of the meet to win the Anne Shaw trophy was a great surprise. That made my weekend.”

The camaraderie and team spirit of Bunbury Athletics is well known, and Ruth has certainly done her best to foster that, having been on the committee and treasurer for many years. Being a small club, everyone learns to step up and help and the old hands encourage and teach younger members.

Ruth says she has had her share of injuries (hamstrings, knees, shoulders) but accepts that injuries are to be expected when taking part in sport.

“People often ask me, ‘do you still run?’. One doesn't stop because you reach a certain age. Athletics has been part of my life for thirty years and the friendships with other athletes, whether younger or older, keep one going. Sometimes I feel tired and can't be bothered going for a run but once I get motivated, I come back feeling I have achieved something. A big thank you to those who have been with me over the years.”

W80 Ruth signs off with “...to be continued.” There is certainly no doubt about that!

