

Winter MacTuff

Race review by Wendy Brothers

The cold one! Taking place at the start of January, it's always the first OCR race of the year in the UK, held at Knockhill Racing Circuit, Fife, Scotland.



It's cold, it's wet, it's SO muddy, and it's great fun.

The course is set up both on the racing circuit itself and over the surrounding muddy fields and hills. It features plenty of water sections and wades through the streams, with a very long tyre carry through a beautiful burn quite early on in the race. The event also has some interesting twists; it is unlike any other and has to be experienced. Personally, I love it and will be back again.



The race itself is unique and very proud to be Scottish, with a highland band parade through the starting area before the race begins to the sound and sight of the bagpipes.

There are three race distances: 7k, 15k, and 21k, all with a mass start. They separate and re-join at points on the course, which could seem confusing, but this year the course markings were excellent, so it was very hard to get lost.

I ran in the 15k distance, where some runners had a wrist band to demonstrate they were competitive. Four obstacles had additional bands for competitive runners to collect on successful completion, with the winner being the one with the most bands at the end and not just the fastest.

Obviously, those with the same number of bands were ranked in finishing order. I really liked this, as giving bands rather than cutting them off for non-completion feels better and is easier to administer for the Technical Officials. It also meant that successful obstacle completion outweighed running, although both are needed for top results.

The competitive 15k race is part of the Scottish OCR Race Series, run by Scottish OCR with the support of British Obstacle Sports.

The first obstacle of the race was a variation on hurdles, ten times up and down the racetrack grandstands, leaping over 11 seats each time. This was truly energy-sapping! So simple to set up and yet so effective.

This was followed by a good run out to the burn and a long (1 km) tyre carry through water and then across rough ground. Again, a demanding yet simple obstacle. Water safety marshals were present, as the water was cold and deep in some places.

After this, there was lots more mud and plenty of traditional OCR obstacles of varying difficulty.

The first two banded obstacles were fairly early on: a high rig with challenging holds and attachments and a barrel rig where the hanging barrels' handholds are used to swing from one barrel to the next. These were very challenging, with only a handful of men completing both and no women completing either.

A varied section across some beautiful countryside, with spectacular views over the Firth of Forth in places and deep streams and thick mud in other parts, came next. One obstacle in this section required competitors to pass through waterlogged pipes and tunnels and an insane amount of mud! It was imperative to keep moving to stay warm after water obstacles.

The third banded obstacle was a test of mental strength rather than physical, full immersion four times to pass under 'The Lollipops'. This was harder this year as the cold 'water' was actually almost liquid mud (at least for later runners), so the mud particles got into my eyes and made the remainder of the race much harder. It took a few days to completely clear. The completion was worth it to be given a band after the fourth immersion!

The final banded obstacle, just before the finish, was a rope climb. It was exceptionally hard, as the rope ended some distance above the ground, so it required a big jump up. The rope itself was wet, muddy, and thick, making it hard to get a foot lock. Only three men and no women succeeded at gaining a band here, even though the rope was not especially high. It was just so hard to get up there when cold, wet, and exhausted.

This event can be regarded as a challenge as much as a race. The camaraderie is fabulous, with great support from marshals, TOs, supporters, and other athletes. It's one of those races with a great sense of achievement at the finish. It's a hard race, partly because it's January in Scotland, partly because the terrain is challenging, and partly because there are a lot of obstacles.

Personally, I really enjoyed the race and had a nice feeling of satisfaction, finishing with a band.

Thoroughly recommended, and I definitely see why people consider it a bucket list event!

See you there in January!

Follow Wendy on Instagram: [@wendybrothers](https://www.instagram.com/wendybrothers)



Have a story that you would like to share? then email:

sharethemud@britishobstacle.org