Richard Abraham in Arkengarthdale

One man's ‘storm of the decade’ is another's autumn afternoon. As the south of England shut up shop and battened down the hatches, the National Hill-Climb Championships embraced the typical North Pennines weather and simply got on with it.

“You wouldn’t want to bring a cornet out in this weather,” said event secretary Howard Heighton, whose children trumpeted the riders’ efforts with homemade horns of which Blue Peter would be proud, crafted from a coiled ring of hosepipe with a plastic funnel attached at one end and a cornet mouthpiece at the other.

The rest of the fans out on the course had their work cut out leaning against the howling wind, although others chose to lean closer to the wood-burning stove in the country pub that made up the HO in the remote corner of North Yorkshire. The 2.33-mile climb of The Stang, however, closed to cars for the afternoon, seemed used to this kind of weather – there were few trees left around the climb to be blown over and the ditches alongside the road were used to dealing with the sheets of water that lashed down on and off all day.

That buffeting south-westerly wind made for uncomfortable conditions — particularly if you happened to be wearing a skinsuit — but it also made for fast times, lifting riders up the road that pointed northeast towards the edge of the Yorkshire Dales.

It meant that the event winner, Tejvan Pettinger (Scrutton CT), could clock over 17.5mph and get his hands on the national champion’s jersey four minutes quicker than he’d expected, having ridden a practice effort into a direct headwind two weeks earlier. But to be fair to Pettinger, he’s been waiting almost a decade for his first national title.

Organisers get down to the hard work.
"At least it didn’t snow and there was no ice"

"I knew this year was a really good chance because the hill suits me and I knew I was in good form," said Pettinger. "Fortunately, it came together for me today."

**Pregnant pause**

The women’s winner Maryke Sennema (Kingston Wheeler) had been waiting for her title too, but not quite as long as Pettinger. After riding her first Nationals in 2010 when two months pregnant, she had since gone through the ultimate weight-saving regime of giving birth to her daughter, and this year beat four-time winner Lynn Hanel by 17 seconds.

"I was really disappointed to win a couple of years ago because I was two months pregnant and my power just went right down," she said. "So I didn’t do very well at the Nationals that year, but I knew I could."

"Lynn [Hanel] is the real female hill-climbers, until we get Emma Pooley out here," she added. "It was good that she showed up and had a decent day so I could win on merit."

**Race perfect? Perhaps not**

The Stag lived up to its billing as a tactical course where the constant gradient changes and fast downhill sections meant that the majority of riders ditched their ultra-light hill-climb bikes in favour of their standards, unmodified road bikes.

"It was hard to pace," explained men’s runner-up James Gullen, who lost out to Pettinger by just two seconds. "Given how steep the bottom bit was, you set off and think, ‘I’m going alright.’ But then you think, ‘I’m not going hard enough.’ But you realise you’re probably going too hard."

Unusually, because the wind speed outpaced the riders on the steeper sections, one modification that might have helped was a baggy outfit. Presumably, however, COTT regulations on aerodynamic fairings apply equally to unfurling a spinnaker as one rider suggested doing, as they do to gagger-taping on a drag-reducing nose cone.

That said, there was one baggy outfit allowed during the event; to counter the wind and rain on the descent, marshals were giving finishing a free ‘gilet’ made from a black bink bag with three holes cut in it.

"The weather was a bit disappointing, but at least it didn’t snow and there was no fire," added Heighton. "But it’s gone really, really well. It’s mainly Ferndale Wheelers members who have put the show on today, so I’m really pleased."

**RESULT**

1. Tyler Pettinger (St Clithinnay CCI) 7:09.7
2. James Gullen (Hope Factory) 7:09.9
3. Matt Conlan (Mike Vaughan Cycles) 7:09.9
4. Hugh Carthy (Rapha-Condor-LT) 7:12.3
5. Richard Handley (Rapha-Condor-LT) 7:12.3
6. Dan Evans (VC Melvyl) 7:12.7
7. Josh Teasdale (In Gear-Quicksilt Trainship RTD) 7:12.7
8. James Knox (Champion System-Maxgear) 7:12.7
9. Pete Todd (In Gear-Quicksilt Trainship RTD) 7:12.7
10. Charles Coleman (VC Walsall) 7:12.7

**WOMEN**

1. Maryka Sennema (Kingston Wheeler) 7:12.7
2. Lynn Hanel (Herbitage Leisure-Lakes Bikes) 7:12.7
3. Angela Hobbs (Tyne Valley Yoga Band) 7:12.7
4. Joanna Buley (Champion System-Maxgear) 7:12.7
5. Helen Eborall (Barn to Bike-Briggington Cycles) 7:12.7
6. Nicola Sedon (Champion System-Maxgear) 7:12.7
7. Les Collins (Bingley RC) 7:11.7
8. Eve Dixon (Champion System-Maxgear) 7:11.7
9. Karen Postle (Cycling Cycles) 7:11.7
10. Anabel Sill (Clay Cross RT) 7:11.7

**JUNIOR MEN**

1. James Knox (Champion System-Maxgear) 7:11.7
2. Josh Jardine (Kent Valley RC) 7:11.7
3. Max Spender (Birkenhead North End CC) 7:11.7

**JUNIOR WOMEN**

1. Alice Crab (Weston-super-Mare) 14:06.1
2. Isla Rost (Bromley) 14:06.6
3. Eve Lyon (Nutzacker Racing) 14:06.6

**VETERAN A**

1. Pete Treadon (In Gear-Quicksilt Trainship RTD) 14:30.1
2. Chris Myhill (Peak Ridge) 14:30.1
3. William Becher (Clayton Valley) 14:30.1
4. Dan Hutcheson (Cleveland West) 14:30.1
5. Peter Greenwood (Clayton Valley) 14:30.1
6. Mike Westmorland (Border City Wheelers) 14:30.1
7. Women’s C. Sharon Clifford (Croydon RC) 14:30.1

**RACING | National Hill-Climb**

**Each to their own**

**Junior cool**

James Knox (Champion System-Maxgear) made it two junior titles on the trot and even managed to muscle into the top ten overall, finishing eighth. Scott Consett’s Epic’s Alice Cobb took the honours in the junior women’s event having been driven down the climb after blacking out from her effort.

**Terrific twos**

It wasn’t unusual to hear women’s winner Maryka Sennema put her victory down to her training partner. But when her training partner is her two-year-old daughter, she has to get creative.

"I tow her around in the trailer in Richmond Park all the time," she said. "It’s really, really good training; she sleeps in the back and I do all the intervals. She doesn’t mind because she knows we stop at the playground afterwards."

**Rapha rivalry**

With three riders entered, there was always going to be some intra-team rivalry between the Rapha-Condor-LT trio.

"I was aiming to be top Rapha, so I’m pretty pleased," said Hugh Carthy, best placed in fourth, three seconds ahead of pre-race favourite Richard Handley (fifth) and Mike Cuming (14th). "Am I going to let them forget it? No, not at all."

"Ah yeah," said Handley wryly. "I think he’ll bring it up a couple of times next year!"

**Podium perennial**

With another third place, Matt Clinton, the National Hill-Climb Champ’s Mr Consistent, made it seven podiums on the trot.

"I was very, very surprised that I managed to make it onto the podium," said the 2008 winner. "I nearly got blown off the bike twice up there, and I nearly rode over [CW snapper] Andy Jones!"

**Well, blow me!**

Some would say brave, others would say mad. Despite the high winds and steep gradients there was one man who chose to ride with a rear disc wheel: Nottingham Clarion’s Richard Birkin.

"I thought it would be a cross-tailwind and it would blow me up," he said. "But it turned out to be a direct tailwind. It was fast coming down, though!"

**Bear necessities**

Not content with team kit, members of the Buxton CC rode the climb with small teddy bears attached to their saddle rails with key chains.

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Tejvan takes it to a higher plane

Richard Abraham

After nearly an entire decade of trying, Tejvan Pettenger finally won his first national hill-climb title last weekend in gale-force gusts and torrential rain in North Yorkshire.

The 2.33-mile climb of The Stang was almost perfectly suited to the tall 36-year-old economics teacher from Oxford. But he came out against fellow time trialist James Wullen (Hope Factory) as just two seconds separated the pair at the summit.

"I was fairly confident, but I was confident in 2011 and it didn't quite work out," Pettenger told CW.

"Fortunately, it came together today. I knew this year was a really good chance because the hill suits me and I knew I was in good form." Pettenger is the name given to Pettenger by his spiritual leader Sri Chinmoy, an Indian guru who taught meditation techniques as the path to inner peace. According to Pettenger, whose Christian name is Richard, it represents dynamism, enthusiasm and self-giving.

Pettenger was one of the favourites in 2011 when the championships used the four-mile drag of Long Hill in Derbyshire. However, he finished a disappointing fifth. After another season of taking open victories and topping course records, he was billed as 'one to watch' last Sunday. This time he didn't let the pressure get to him.

"I felt surprisingly calm," he said. "I thought I might have been nervous, but I wasn't. As soon as I got on the start line and got cycling I felt good."

Having finally seized his chance on his kind of climb, Pettenger's title will be one he will undoubtedly treasure.

"I may not get too many more chances to win," he added. "I'm 36 and a lot of the competitors are 10, 12 or 13 years younger than me."

Maryka Semenza (Kingston Wheelers) won the women's title. For a full report and results from the National Hill Climb Championships, turn to page 54.
Terrible conditions made the race as much a test of determination as physical ability.