

Track and Field



Donna Hartley



Track and Field



Donna Hartley

One-lap Prima Donna

In an age of controversy about the status of women in athletics, Donna Hartley remains a graceful reminder that it is possible to be very fast and remain distinctly feminine. Indeed the temptation to become a photographic model must have been strong, and the British team have reason to be grateful that she preferred the running track to the catwalk. The apt title 'prima donna' has nothing to do with stage temperament. In fact hard work and nothing less has enabled Donna to reach the top in the 400 metres, an event which was only introduced into the women's programme in major international championships 20 years ago. Coached by BBC commentator Mike Smith, Donna rose into the big league at the age of 17 taking the WAAA 200 metres title in 24.0 sec. In 1975 she added the WAAA 400 metres to her collection, defeating in the process her regular rival Verona Elder, reigning Commonwealth silver medallist.

The obvious soubriquet 'golden girl' had already been applied to her four years before her first Olympic appearance at Montreal, but she was not fully to earn it there, being eliminated in the semi-finals. The big breakthrough came in 1977 when she was placed third in the Euro-

pean Cup and then at Dusseldorf took a silver medal in the World Cup, running for Europe in the 4 x 400 metres relay. Building up for a great season in 1978 she struck what might have been a major setback when she dropped out of the Commonwealth Games trial 400 metres with a leg cramp. Only a week before she had broken the UK record for 200 metres with a spectacular 22.75 sec. Fortunately the leg came right for the Commonwealth Games in Edmonton where she not only defeated Verona Elder by 10 metres for the individual gold medal but also anchored the England team to victory in the relay. Donna's husband, Bill, has also won relay medals: a gold in the 1974 European Championship and silver in the Commonwealth Games. Winner of the 400-metres hurdles in the European Cup semi-final in 1975 he has a personal best time of 49.65 sec.

DONNA HARTLEY

(nee Murray)

Born May 1, 1955, in Southampton, England

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1978 CG: gold medal, 400 m, 51.69 sec, Edmonton
gold medal, 4 x 400-m relay,
3 min 27.2 sec, Edmonton

World record: 4 x 200-m relay, 1 min 31.6 sec,
1977

Donna on the last leg of a relay