

Chris Neale ...

the gentle giant

If you used the shuttle bus that MAWA provided last Easter to ferry athletes back and forth to the stadium for the Nationals, you no doubt exchanged some cheery words with the driver, David Neale. Well, that very friendly and obliging man was our gentle giant's father. And Chris has obviously inherited many of his father's genes. David is also a MAWA member (M71) and will be competing in about five events, including the short hurdles, in the upcoming State Championships.

Chris was born in England in 1969 and the family came to Australia when he was three years old. At eight he started in Phoenix Park Little Athletics Club (now known as Cockburn LAC) and competed for them in many state championships. At thirteen he joined Melville Athletic Club Juniors and competed at Perry Lakes for four years, specialising in the long and triple jumps. He made the State under-16 team for triple jump but by the time it came to travelling to Brisbane he was beset by knee injuries and was forced to pull out – he was not happy!

With knees in better condition he eventually got back to athletics and joined MAWA in 2006. He is still doing the horizontal jumps but has added sprints to his repertoire and also tackles the long hurdles and some throws. As mind and body come into conflict he says he has to keep reminding himself that he is not 16 anymore. Since 2007 he has competed in all the State

Championships, most of the Nationals, the World Masters Games in Sydney in 2009 and the World Championships in Riccione, Italy in 2007. He found this a very "eye opening"

experience, saying that "Living in sheltered Perth, you don't realise how many excellent 'Old Runners' there are out there. Standing on the blocks next to a 'Usain Bolt look-alike' is quite intimidating."

Chris made a good start to the State Championships with a points score of 2778 in the pentathlon and, at the time of writing, only has a couple of jumps, a few sprints and the 400m hurdles to go! He also hopes to compete in the Nationals in Brisbane.

He uses PBs as a motivating force, always trying to improve times and distances in each of his disciplines. But he finds that "this is getting harder to do, the older I get." In the next 12 months he hopes to go under 24secs for 200m, under 54secs for 400m and over 3000 points in the Pentathlon.... "If only I could throw a javelin....."

Chris has to juggle his time between work (ex banker, now mortgage broker), family (wife and two children) and athletics. But he still finds time for a second job as a taxi driver for kids' sports/activities (sadly "they don't tip very well!") and for assisting coaching staff at his son's Little Athletics club each week. In addition, he serves on our own MAWA committee as the Track and Field member and will be taking over the organisation of the National Postal Relays next season.

He describes himself as a mad North Melbourne supporter – but we won't hold that against him!

Photo: GRAEME DAHL