

ANNE KEENAN BUCKLEY

By MARY B. RYAN

Having represented Ireland in cross-country on numerous occasions during the past eleven years, Anne Keenan Buckley earned her first senior international on the track this year when she ran the 1,500m in the Europa Cup.

This was followed by the 1,500m in the Ireland v. Scotland v. Wales triangular match and her track season was crowned by victory in the 3,000m National Senior Championships.

She is one of the few girls who having started running at an early age, survived the endless competitions of Community Games, schools and B.L.O.E. under-age to emerge into senior competition. The majority of girls who begin running early, improve year by year as they get older and stronger up to about the age of 17 or 18, then suffer a gradual decline in performance until finally they cannot even produce the performances that came so easily to them at 14 or 15. Only a lucky few escape this slump.

When it happened to Anne she took a break from athletics for about a year and a half and when she came back with a renewed appetite and enthusiasm the performances and rewards followed. Anne runs for pure enjoyment, winning is just an added bonus and it's probably this attitude that kept Anne in the sport when a great many of her contemporaries gave up.

Anne comes from a very sporting family. The Community Games was her introduction to athletics and having liked the experience she joined the local Ballyfin club of which her brother was already a member. Here she was coached by Jimmy Finn until she went to Dublin to work. She is now back blossoming under Jimmy's guidance.

Anne's forte is cross-country. At the tender age of 12 she won the Laois senior cross-country title. This was followed by many more successes over the country. In 1976 she gained her first international at intermediate level. She was still eligible for this category for the following two years and duly gained representative honours. 1977 was the year of her hat-trick of national titles. She won the national Intermediate Cross-country, the U-17 Cross-country and the Junior 3,000m on the track.

In 1980 she went to Dublin to work but it wasn't until 1983 that she joined Clonliffe Harriers, her present club. Here



Ann on her way to victory in National 3000m.

she had the advantage of training with girls of around her own standard. Katherine Davis was steadily building up a team of middle-distance runners at Clonliffe and they are the only team in the country capable of challenging the supremacy of the D.C.H. girls over the country.

When Anne was selected for the Europa Cup this year, there were some objections from those who thought they should have been selected on the basis of last year's performances, but Anne is scathing of those who expected to be selected without racing. She had the fastest times this year and had certainly earned her selection.

Anne, however, silenced her critics with her emphatic victory in the National 3,000m. When she went to check in for the 1,500m at the National Championships she found that she had missed the check-in time by five minutes and so was prevented from going for the double.

Anne's training at the moment, consisting of a hard week followed by an

easy week, is dictated by necessity. Since her marriage last year, every second week she commutes from Baltinglass to Dublin each day, a round trip of 80 miles. This entails getting up at 6.30 a.m. and sometimes not returning home until 7.00 p.m., by which time there is little enthusiasm or energy left for training, but this is compensated for by a hard week on her week off. Anne is not a high mileage addict, her longest training run is 10 miles, but she does plenty of quality work.

Anne is now looking forward to the cross-country season and hopes to make the Irish team for the world championships in New Zealand. She has represented her country twice already in this event. After that, the Olympics? Yes, she hopes to qualify for either the 3,000m or 10,000m. Judging by her great performance in the Evening Press 10K, when running in one of her rare appearances on the road, she finished a magnificent second to Sue Collier of England, she has a great future ahead in the longer distance.