

Rulers of the road

IN the late 1800s long-distance footraces were enormously popular. Indoor and outdoor arenas were packed with thousands of spectators and huge sums of money were gambled on professional pedestrians – or “peds” as they were affectionately known – who competed in gruelling events that often lasted several days and saw them cover hundreds of miles.

The “peds” had flamboyant nicknames such as Black Dan, the Brooklyn Cobbler, Harlequin and the Willy Wobbler. But this was a serious sport and the best peds

were the 19th century equivalents of Tiger Woods, Lance Armstrong and Roger Federer when it came to popularity, fame and fortune.

A new book by Paul Marshall explores this fascinating era and invites the readers to pick “the

best of the peds”. Among the author’s nine candidates, four were British-based athletes – “Blower” Brown of Fulham, George Hazael of London, George Littlewood, the “Sheffield Flyer” and Charlie Rowell, the “Cambridge Wonder”. Their feats were incredible too. Hazael, for

example, was the first man to make 600 miles in 142 hours in 1882.

A word of warning, though. For while this book is superbly and painstakingly put together, it is athletics’ equivalent of *War and Peace* – a gigantic

effort with 60 chapters and 700-odd pages of heavy text and broken up with 126 illustrations or images.

Due to this, however, it is a pretty definitive account of the period and will delight hardcore athletics enthusiasts who have a strong interest in the history of the sport.

■ ***King of the Peds*, by Paul Marshall, published by AuthorHouse. £18.99**

