

Karen Harewood's rapid rise to the top goes a step further when she competes for the Norwich Union Great Britain and Northern Ireland team in the World Indoor Championships which start in Moscow on Friday.

Her achievement in securing her first British vest at a major games is one of sheer amazement as she only started track running two and a half years ago when she moved to Corby.

She was born in east London but moved about on a regular basis as her father, a pastor, was based in several cities around the country including Leeds, Birmingham and Nottingham. She then went to Luton University to study for a degree in law and women's health before moving to the United States to work as an au pair in Washington. It was while in the States and having a lot of spare time that she began to run with her aim to run 5km in 21 minutes and 10km in 46 minutes on the local road running scene.

When her year was up in the States she moved back to England and joined the Suffolk Police basing herself in Bury St Edmunds. She carried on running but had little time for training although she did run the London Marathon in 4 hours 12 minutes and competed for the Police in 10km races.

Dramatic changes then happened for the very likeable 30-year-old in 2003 when she met her partner Kevin in the April. They decided to buy a house together and because the house prices locally were out of their price range they planned a move to another area. After searching on the internet they decided on Corby and so in the August they moved to Northamptonshire. Kevin got a transfer with his job and Karen started working at Corby Borough Council as a Community and Safety Officer. Another session on the internet put her in touch with Corby AC and so another piece in the jigsaw on her road to fame fell into place.

The second eldest of four sisters who at school dabbled in sprinting, she always had a gut feeling that track running could be something she could be good at. When she arrived at the Rockingham Triangle she was pointed in the direction of coach Charley McConnell, whose vast knowledge of the sport was about to be tested with a gifted person such as Karen. Since their time working together Karen has had nothing but praise for him, saying 'His enthusiasm and dedication to the sport has been a major influence on me.'

Her first race soon followed when she competed in the Club Championships over 3000m but it soon became apparent that 800m was her best distance. After a full winter's training she came out the following year and ran an astonishing time of 2.03.32 to rank her seventh fastest in Britain that year. The following year she had her sights set firmly on the Commonwealth qualifying standard of 2.02.0 but sadly she fell short of her target although she still improved to 2.02.68 to move one place up the National Rankings.

After the disappointment of missing out on the Commonwealths she decided, along with her coach, to tackle a proper indoor season throughout the winter. The remainder of 2005 was spent building up her endurance with cross country while the early part of this year she went indoors.

Then came another deciding factor in her life when at the turn of the year she gave up her regular job with the council in order to train more. She now works from home for a nutritional and weight loss company.

At Manchester in early January she ran 2.45.59 for 1000m indoors but half an hour later she clocked a much more pleasing run when she recorded 54.91 over 400m.

Later that month her running career was transformed when she went to Budapest and ran the third fastest ever indoor 800m by a Briton behind Jo Fenn and double Olympic

champion Kelly Holmes. She clocked 2.00.53 and less than 48 hours later ran 2.01.44 in Bratislava. Both times were well inside the qualifying standard for the World Indoors and now all she needed to do was win the AAA title to clinch a place in the squad. Unfortunately, she was just pipped by one hundredth of a second by Wigan's Jenny Meadows but with both athletes well inside the standard the pair were both selected.

That defeat was the only blip on the indoor circuit this year, for a week later she returned to winning ways when she clocked 2.01.98 to win at the Norwich Union Grand Prix in Birmingham.

Karen's main concern as she prepared to travel down to London to meet up with the rest of the team on Tuesday night was the arrival of her passport as it was only returned to her on the morning of the day she was to travel by UK Athletics who needed it in order to obtain a visa for her.

Her campaign in Russia begins on Friday afternoon when she lines up in her heat. Talking about her forthcoming race, she said: 'I feel in good form although a bit tired from a couple of tough sessions. The only thing I feel apprehensive about is that it will be my first time on the starting line with all the runners being world class. However, I am really looking forward to it and hope I run to the best of my ability.' Since moving to the area Karen has been quoted as saying: 'For me Corby has definitely been the land of opportunity and moving here has totally changed my life. I'm a firm believer that everything happens for a reason and not qualifying for the Commonwealth Games has given me the opportunity to compete at the World Championships.'