



VENTOUX: WITHOUT FOLDING

The Giant of Provence... on Bromptons? Sue and David Birley did just that

MY HUSBAND AND I take Brompton trips to France each year. I thought: why not ride up Mont Ventoux on them? We decided to ride from Sault, a round trip of just 52km. The Tour de France tackles the Giant of Provence at speed at the end of a gruelling day, but then we are an elderly couple on elderly Bromptons.

Ignoring a 'route barrée' sign, like hordes of other cyclists and cars, we found the first part easy and the views stunning. The surface was smooth – just done for the Tour? The café sign we saw was dilapidated, yet the café was open and thronged with cars, cycles and people.

The terrain became bare. Tiny alpine flowers poked through the white slopes. There were signs for 'troupeaux'. What on earth could sheep or goats eat up here? We were walking and pushing more now. Luckily for me, David isn't proud. We stoically passed the pre-summit bar, and then we were at the top. It too swarmed with people – as well as lorries, still resurfacing.

We didn't hang around. We shot back down to the bar for a well-earned beer. A charming, elderly Dutch couple asked how old we were. We stopped again at the café for another beer, and a charming elderly Belgian couple asked how old we were. An Englishman asked to shake my hand when he saw my Brompton.

We continued gently down to Sault. Soon we were eating in the square and I didn't fall asleep in my soup. Six hours up and one and a half down!

Twenty-two hours

Ben Colman recalls his club's epic tandem trip from Manchester to Glasgow

To celebrate the 2014 Commonwealth Games, Bury Tandem Club for Visually Impaired People decided to cycle from Manchester to Glasgow. Seven visually-impaired stokers would ride with a changing group of 13 sighted pilots.

We met at the National Cycling Centre at 7.30pm on a Friday. By starting in the evening, we would ride the night stages when we were fresh. The weather couldn't have been better – warm, little wind, and dry. Friday evening Manchester was full of happy people cheering and waving us on.

As the traffic died down, we picked up the pace. We split into two groups, with the unused pilots riding their solo bikes and making sure that no one was dropped. But we were flying. Even the

slower group reached our first stop, just past Preston, having averaged 19mph. Cycling under the bright lights of Lancaster at 11.30pm, we received the last of our cheers from well-wishers. The roads got quieter, the street lights further apart, and we stretched out over three or four miles of the A6.

Despite the thickening cloud, it was still warm. We were in shirt sleeves at 2am! Cycling along the empty dual-carriageway as it curved through the woods was great fun. Our bright bike lights threw shadows on the trees. Then we began the long climb to Shap.

A grey dawn and drizzle greeted us at Penrith, and by Gretna Green we were soaked. We overwhelmed the service station there as we piled in for warmth and food. When there was a lull in the rain, we returned to the road.

Tiredness began to tell. Gaps between tandems opened up.

The scenery grew more remote and more Scottish as we continued north. Eventually we were riding through the streets of Glasgow, asking directions to the Emirates Arena. Then we were there: soaked, exhausted, but elated. We had done it – in 22 hours!





DOING IT WIGHT

Why rush an island randonnée when you can savour it, asks Janet Rogers

THEY SAY YOU step back in time when you visit the Isle of Wight. I think that we just lost track of it. There was a lack of urgency in our cycling group when we did the Isle of Wight 100km randonnée. We took the organisers at their word: a ride not a race.

It was easy to be lulled by the island's tranquil air, the rhythm of its undulations, the banks of wild garlic, and the shoulder-high cow parsley. It was perfect cycling weather. We planned an early start but lazed instead in plush, comfy beds and feasted on fried eggs and sausages.

Eventually we set off and cycled up and down hills for hours, stopping at Bembridge for lunch and at all the checkpoints. We admired the sea views at St Helen's and Ventnor. All day, cyclists sped past us.

We knew we were last in the non-race when, after 4pm, no one overtook us. Dave suggested we consider the last push as a gentle evening ride, blotting out the exertion of the early part of the day.

The final climb up the Military Road was hard, but freewheeling down to Freshwater Bay was wonderfully exhilarating. We made it by 7.30pm. The organisers had gone home and all but one of the local restaurants had finished serving.

The following day, we cycled towards the ferry at Cowes, arriving with three minutes to spare. 'No point in getting there too early,' Ray said.



Down the Rhine

Phil Merrin's boys, aged five and seven, loved their family tour through Germany

People were bemused when we told them how we were spending our summer holiday. 'You're doing what?' Months of preparation – working out accommodation, distances, luggage, ferries, trains – all came together at the end of July as we headed to Hull to catch the ferry to Europoort in Holland with four bikes and six panniers.

The holiday started with a 45km ride into central Rotterdam. The Dutch cycle network made this straightforward, but it was further than the boys are used to. We wondered if we'd bitten off more than we could chew.

After spending the night in Rotterdam, we took three trains to Mainz. German Youth Hostels comprised the majority of our accommodation. They had clean rooms and decent food, and were easy to book online from the UK. Most are close to the river, but in the Rhine Gorge this often meant a steep cycle or push up the hills at the end of the day.

The boys relished each day's adventure: meeting new people, practising their German, seeing all the trains and boats, and using the Rhine kilometre marker boards to track their journey north. Our eldest had his 8th



birthday in the Rhine Gorge. We stayed in a castle high above the river and he had balloons on his bike the whole day.

Travelling north, the scenery changed as we passed through Bonn and then entered the industrial heartland of Germany. We stayed at Köln and then finished our journey in Düsseldorf. We mixed up the distances, not having two consecutive long days, and this seemed to work. It allowed time to enjoy the scenery and culture.

We ended our two-week trip with a weekend in Rotterdam, plus some sightseeing in Delft. It was a real adventure and we are very proud of our boys: 350km in 10 days of cycling was a significant achievement.



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