

## *Rovers' Review*

Newsletter of the Colchester Rovers Cycling Club  
Founded by Alan Heales 1935-1996  
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### World Duathlon Age Group Championships Cornerbrook July 29<sup>th</sup> 2006

Qualifying to compete in the World Duathlon Championships (10k run, 40k bike, 5k run) had been tough on a freezing cold day in Ashbourne, but as the day drew nearer I realised that it was nothing in comparison to the thought of competing in Newfoundland.

It was going to be a family affair. Graeme was competing too, and was accompanied by Kate. Roly, my daughter Clare and grandson Joshua were enthusiastic supporters.

I ran 5 miles on Tuesday evening, then completed the 10 miles at Langham on Wednesday, before dashing home to pack my bike in a box for the flight on Thursday morning. Jim actually packed the bike with great care; I just hoped that it would be put on the plane along with approximately 50 others. The small print on the booking sheet, explaining that bikes would be carried only if there was space, had worried me a little, especially as there was the only one flight into Cornerbrook that week. I was taking no chance with my kit - helmet, gloves, glasses, GB strip, running and cycling shoes went into my hand luggage.

We arrived in humid heat and collected our luggage which was arranged around a baggage hall. Yes, the bikes were there. We piled two bike boxes, 5 of us and young Joshua, plus luggage into a 7 seater Dodge Caravan and set off to Humber Valley resort. Our chalet accommodation turned out to be a huge luxury house with three double bedrooms. Graeme put the bikes together and we kept them in the cupboard in the hallway – just to give some idea of the size of the place.

That night we were entertained by two Moose splashing in a pool in front of the decking.

Friday was registration day, and also a chance for us to ride on the cycle course. We had to complete 4 laps of a 10k course. Graeme and I set out, map in hand, riding on the right-hand side of the road. We negotiated the downhill stretch and after a few incorrect turns found our way alongside the river Humber. It was 5k out, turn around and then the 5k back and up the hill. The road surface was not too good, but according to Graeme would be alright if it stayed dry. We also discovered that we would be riding on the left side for the competition. Our bikes had to be racked that afternoon in preparation for the early morning start. I was slightly concerned that when my saddle was hooked on the bar, the front wheel didn't touch the ground. Graeme managed to procure some ties to keep it in place. The weather remained hot and humid.

The storm broke at about 2.00 a.m. In Newfoundland, we discovered everything is big, including the raindrops. The houses don't have gutters and drainpipes and the water just ran off the roof onto the decking. Sleep was not easy !! At 5 o'clock, I was eating porridge and becoming very nervous. The rain continued.

The family gradually appeared, kitted themselves out for the day and then we were off. The roads had been closed from 6.00 a.m. and so we walked the last half mile. Clare sat in the car with Joshua, as he had fallen asleep.

We were body marked on both arms and legs, before being allowed into our bikes. I put the drinks bottle and helmet on my bike, my cycle shoes on the right of the front wheel.

The ties on the saddle were removed.

Graeme and Kate stayed with me, whilst Roly went back to the car to collect Clare. The rain had eased, but we still needed waterproofs. My start was 8.05 a.m., but Graeme had to wait until 11.35 a.m. Athlete's numbers were taken as they entered the holding area. Graeme and Kate had to practically push me in, as nerves took over. I knew that once I started I would be OK, but waiting was difficult until I met two other British women. We marvelled at the fact that all of the group (approx 50) were all over 55. Then we were called to the start line. The first run of 10k was 4 laps of an undulating course. My plan was to run this first 10k comfortably, then catch up on the bike, and hang on for the last run. Roly, Clare and Joshua had positioned themselves halfway up the first hill. There was considerable amusement when the shouts of 'Come on Grandma' were heard. Local residents encouraged at the turn round of the route, and competitors at the start finish/ area, so support was good. Before the run had ended the rain had started again.

My transition was slow. I had forgotten that I had pushed my glasses on top of my head when the rain started – helmets don't fit on glasses. It's amazing how one small mistake can throw you out of your routine. I even put the glasses back on, knowing that I previously couldn't see through them because of the rain, duh ! But eventually I was on my way, with relief, as I had been looking forward to getting on my bike.

Out of transition was uphill to the turn round at a small roundabout, before heading back downhill. The hill was quite gradual, then it dropped steeply away to a sharp left turn, an uphill section led to another left turn past the paper mill to the river. The first time down the hill I was cold. I had hoped to see competitors in front of me on the river section and my aim was to haul them in. I didn't see anyone, except a lone supporter dinging away on a triangle, as I passed. My support group had appeared on the hill as I returned and lifted my spirits. I was now in counting mode, because although numbers were taken at either end of the course, it was up to the competitors to count their laps and to go back into transition at the correct time. It may sound ridiculous, but it is surprising how difficult this can be. The rain had now set in and on the third lap had become so heavy that it felt like hailstones. The roads were flooded, becoming like rivers on downhill stretches. The road alongside the Humber had just a few narrow strips poking out of flooded trenches. This was OK until you had to overtake. I did manage to catch some Canadian women but not as many competitors as I had hoped. My brakes didn't work at all and the warning to avoid the freshly painted zebra crossing was impossible.

I ascended the hill and went into transition for the last time. This is the hardest part of the competition – running after biking. I knew I could do it, as I had been practising on a weekly basis, but only after 10 miles! It took the first up hill section for my legs to start to work again, and then there were my supporters again, soaked to the skin but cheering me on. At the end of the last lap and just before the finish, I was given a Union Jack to carry over the finishing line.

A momentous occasion - one I will never forget.

11 <sup>th</sup>	Graeme Knott	35.04 (10k)	1.04.21 (40k with transitions)	23.36 (5k)	2.03.00
5 <sup>th</sup>	Elsbeth Knott	49.54 (10k)	1.20.08 (40k with transitions)	27.00 (5k)	2.37.01

## Polka Dot Challenge 2006

It was lovely to drive up north (very) early on Sunday morning – gradually seeing the landscape change from the flat lands of Cambridgeshire to the rolling hills of Cheshire – as I made my way to the start of the Polka Dot Challenge (a challenging event indeed; 100+ miles over some of the long and steep climbs of the Peak District).

Unlike European cyclo-sportives and road races we started in groups of 20 every 3 minutes or so to avoid bunching and upsetting traffic; something that actually worked very well.

The pace in my little group started agreeably as we headed into Macclesfield and onto the climb of Cat and Fiddle but as soon as the road began to rise it all changed. The size of the group immediately halved and my heart began to hammer against my chest. It almost seemed a little anti-social to be riding so hard so early in the morning but I was happy to go along with it for a while as a few others dropped off the back. Half-way up this long drag of a climb my mood changed to mild panic as I was having to dig deeper and deeper just to hold the wheels of the 3 guys in front. Physically, I could probably have stayed with them on this climb but my mind was conscious of the other 85 hilly miles still to go, fearful that I might burn myself out much too soon. Consequently, I let them go and rode at my own pace, hoping that the others would realise the folly of their ways later.

This is such a beautiful part of England that it was almost a shame to race through it anyway. My spirits soared as I rode higher into the Peak District “mountains” on my own.

After a few false summits the long descent into Buxton began. When I have ridden in Italy and France against more experienced descenders I have always considered myself a novice but today, on roads with few hairpin bends, I felt much more confident and barely touched my brakes. I knew I was going well when I caught sight of the trio who dropped me earlier on the climb.

By the time we climbed out of Buxton (on a road appropriately named Longhill) I had passed most (if not all) of those who had started in earlier groups and was beginning to get close to the guys who had dropped me.

I finally caught them at the first feed stop, by which time one of the three – a wiry little northerner – had ridden off the front. I knew we would not see him until the finish but it was confirmed that we were the next 3 on the road.

Despite the hot pace I rode with the other two guys up the next couple of climbs of Chinley Head and Chunal Head before we got to the long ascent of Snake Pass. What amazed me was that the guy who was pushing the pace looked like a rugby forward – I was so sure he would crack but he never did. When I remarked to him that he climbed well for a big bloke I think he must have misunderstood me. His aggressive

reaction encouraged me to keep my mouth shut for a while and I just remained focused on his back wheel.

Once again, however, the elastic stretched and I found myself off the back with my pulse racing. I dropped back to continue the climb at my own pace – once more finding that the pleasures of the scenery more than compensated for any physical discomfort I was experiencing.

After another fast descent the route took us along the dramatic Ladybower reservoir – remarkably full of water. We were now over the halfway point; a psychological boost that seemed to quicken my cadence. There was a tail wind between here and Castleton and my speed hovered around a very pleasing 28mph most of the way. Once more I caught sight of the two guys who had out-climbed me.

However, the next ascent was the fearful Winnats Pass – 1 mile at 25% gradient. I dropped into my lowest gear (34x25) immediately and tried to remain seated while I churned away at the pedals. The rugby forward was plainly under-gearred as I could see him above me out of the saddle and swaying from side to side. The traffic was quite busy on this narrow hill but the smell of burning brake pads and clutch plates demonstrated that it was hard for motor vehicles too.

The only problem with my seated position was that my weight was too far back and I keep lifting the front wheel off the ground. Considering it inappropriate to climb the hill pulling a wheely I got out of the saddle to bring my weight forward. The extra power this gave brought me to within about 20 feet of the big guy but I just could not pass him. We both struggled on upwards in our own separate worlds.

As we neared the top my forearm suddenly cramped, clamping my right hand around the bars. I had been gripping so hard on the bars to keep the bike in a straight line that my body objected. I was forced to sit back into the saddle, shake my hand loose and back off the pace for a few seconds – not that one can really call 6 mph a “pace”.

It was so tempting to stop and walk just here but I knew I would later regret it so I forced myself over the top of the climb with what little energy I could muster.

I rejoined my two companions on the subsequent descents – united in our relief at conquering Winnats – and stayed together until the 2<sup>nd</sup> and final feed stop. I must have been feeling good at this point as I pulled the other two along on the flat valley roads for a few miles.

However, the climb of Axe Edge finally sorted the men from the boys. With about 25 miles to go, the rugby forward rode away from me again at such rate that I just could not follow. The other little guy who had followed in his wake all morning crumpled too – so badly that he could not even stay with me.

And so it was that the 3 of us effectively time-trialled the last quarter of the course. The final climb, Gun Hill, was surprisingly nasty. Once more over 20% gradient but not as constant and vicious as Winnats even though it took a lot out of me.

Another fast descent followed as the route took us back towards Macclesfield. I had the bit between my teeth now and was giving it everything, hoping I would catch sight of the big bloke again. Unfortunately, traffic lights held me up several times but once out of Macclesfield I was flat out again, eating up the last rolling 8 miles to the finish. As I crossed the line I was pleased to see that the rugby forward looked as exhausted

as I felt, having arrived a minute before me. We both managed a respectful grin (or was it a grimace). Awfully impressive to have dragged his big bulk over all those hills so quickly, I thought. Something I dare not express out loud.

Please get copy for the October/November issue to the editor by September 25<sup>th</sup>. Contact address: Hugh Ward, 5 Clay Lane Grove, Colchester, Essex, CO4 0HH, 010206 843163, [hugh@essex.ac.uk](mailto:hugh@essex.ac.uk).