

David Eaton's Blog – Tour of Suffolk 2017

I had really enjoyed the Ipswich to Amsterdam and back ride of 2016, where I met a lot of really interesting and fun people. When I heard about the plans for TeamITFC's Tour of Suffolk 2018 challenge, I contacted to my cycling buddy Adam, we both quickly agreed to ride the Tour of Suffolk 2017.



I could not make the meeting at the Dove but my roomie picked up my kit for me so I was able to try it on, standing in front of the mirror and looking rather fetching in my new TeamITFC cycling kit, I could not wait to get started. When I found out that Lee was to be our team leader, I knew it was going to be anything but a quiet ride.

I was taken to Portman Road by my girlfriend who had kindly forgone her usual Sunday morning lay in. The rain held up the Grand Depart for a little bit and prevented a Team photo in the stand which was a bit of a disappointment, but it gave me

time to fuel myself for the journey ahead with a yummy bacon roll washed down with two cups of coffee, then the clouds cleared a little and we were off. It was not long before we hit the first snag of the day, a puncture at Westerfield, but it was swiftly sorted and we set off as a team again, after a few more miles our team had started to thin out. Cycling through my home village of Debenham was a treat and I even managed to stop for a quick kiss and a word of encouragement from my girlfriend.

I met up with Adam again at the Eye Co-op water stop he had stopped to help Corrine who had been having pneumatic air retention issues, after some minor re-grouping we set off again. After more peddling and a couple of unplanned dismounts we reached the Black Swan at Hommersfield for the lunch stop. Refuelled by pasta bolognaise we were preparing to carry on, but Mr Milton was concerned for some of his riders, he was trying to persuade one female rider who was struggling at that point that maybe it would be best to miss a stage, only for him to be told to go forth and multiply in no uncertain terms. Our inspirational leader was somewhat taken aback by her forthright candour and was for the first time to my knowledge he was lost for words. A little adjustment to her bike by Adam and some encouragement along the way from our newly formed team with Ian at the helm helped Emma and Corrine along the next stage.

Enemy territory was entered when we reached the Swan Hotel at Lodden, where for once blue and white were the predominant colours found at this establishment. Under normal circumstances a beer or two would have been taken here, but there were other things to focus on and other people to consider, as a team we wanted to make sure everyone made it to the overnight stop at Hopton.

We all made it to Potters, each of us covering every one of the 72 miles, no short cuts or stages missed, a job well done. A welcome beer was consumed with relish, it was good to see so many smiling faces, something that had been a rarity for those supporting Ipswich Town of late.

Our lycra discarded for a while, a quick shower to freshen up and it was time to slip into something more casual for the celebratory evening meal. The meal was attacked gusto, 72 miles on a bike

certainly brings on an appetite. It was nice that our little team got a mention in dispatches during Simon's after meal speech, nice to be appreciated.

After dinner we had the Illegal Eagles to enjoy, if that is the right word, it was fun and good for us to be out as a team, a few more beers were consumed as a few male cyclists entertained lusty thoughts over Miss Gold Skirt and her friends who occupied the dance floor for a while, though I doubted if the energy required could be raised after the exertions of the day, then it was time for bed and some well earned shut eye.

Day 2

After barely enough sleep and a hearty breakfast, our team assembled for day two, Ian had been busy and had drafted in more support, our numbers were swelled with the new additions of Gary & Edwige (I hope I got that right). Getting through Lowestoft was tricky but was accomplished with no mishaps, light drizzle started to come down and the head wind seemed to strengthen. The new improved TeamITFC wind top proved to be very effective keeping my warm, we made it to the water stop at Southwold Pier with no problems, everyone was feeling positive despite the inclement weather.

We were getting cold and wet and it was not much fun as we carried on southwards, the coastal section was pretty hard, we were battling against the wind, taking it in turns to try and protect the fairer sex in our team. By the time we reached The White Lion at Aldeburgh, we knew were over halfway, a friend of mine stopped by for a little chat and offered a few words of encouragement, he did consider riding with us for a little while but decided it was too wet and too cold. TeamITFC were made of sterner stuff, the short stage to the Ship Inn, Blaxhall, was the next target, another pneumatic air retention issue threatened our progress, but it was swiftly dealt with by Marcus. We greedily consumed the pasta lunch provided by the friendly staff at the Ship Inn before resuming our journey.



The water stop at Woodbridge was missed as we enjoyed an impromptu stop at Gary's house in Shottisham, we were swiftly refuelled with energy drinks, cups of tea and snacks kindly provided by his wife and children and their friends. Suitably refreshed we carried on with a steely determination to reach our destination together, bringing home everyone as a team to Portman road. Adam's bike had started to make noises that did not sound particularly healthy, probably bearings, we pressed on with fingers crossed that it would hold up for the last few miles.

The last stage was tough, the long climb out of Martlesham was challenging, but we were spurred on by the thought that we were getting ever closer to the finish, gradually clocking down the miles. Then we on the outskirts of Ipswich, the finish line was getting nearer and nearer, we made it through the busy rush hour traffic and we reached Portman Road. We had caught up Shaun in his hand bike, as we turned into Portman Walk we were asked to let Shaun lead us in, we were more than happy to comply and provide him with a guard of honour.

The cheers as we rode across the practice pitch sent shivers down my spine, my own effort in completing the 150 miles was one thing, Shaun's achievement was another level entirely.

At the end of the ride like so many other riders I felt so many emotions, relief that I had made it, a real sense of achievement, delight as seeing my girlfriend waiting for me, delight at seeing the look of pleasure on so many other people's faces, the sense of euphoria and the undoubted Lycra love between all of TeamITFC was tinged with the sadness that the ride had come to an end.

My memories of the ride are many and varied:

I felt sad that five people I rode with over the two days endured unscheduled dismounts, none of which were my fault I hasten to add, maybe I was just a jinx!

My own sense of achievement was enhanced by the knowledge that I had helped other people complete the ride and seeing the looks of pride and pleasure on Corrine and Emma's gave me more pleasure than my own feeling accomplishment.

Having Russell Osman came over to shake our hands and congratulate us, I could not resist informing him that we were both born on exactly the same day way back in 1959, something I never thought I would ever get the chance to do.

So what will Mr Milton and Mr Reader come up with for next year? Whatever it is I know I want to be part of it, TeamITFC ride 2018, bring it on!!

David Eaton