

Ups and downs. Smiles and frowns. Lorna Blackmore.

The how come I signed up bit

Two years ago, my brother declared he was going to ride to Amsterdam to support ITFC Academy and Prostate Cancer. This was received with shock and disbelief by most – as many of you will know he wasn't a cyclist at all! But he was determined, and, at the time I too was looking for a new challenge and focus, so said I would support him by training with him.

We each purchased a bike and set about learning this new craft. The first few rides were hilarious; literally felt like we were wading through treacle as we naively kept with high gears on hills, clipping in and out issues, and a general lack of confidence on main roads and going down steep hills.

I soon became familiar with it all. Familiar, yes, but certainly not expert at it.

He went on not only to accomplish that ride but the following year signed himself up again. Foolhardy indeed! The amount of pride I had for him was untold – he only bloody did it!

Fast forward another year and he managed to convince me to join him on the 150-mile challenge. Without much thought I agreed. Besides it was three months away – plenty of time to get used to the idea.

The thing about time – it passes and the date fast approached – and with that the panic and doubt set in. What was I thinking – how can I transfer my weekend 40-mile cycles to 150 miles, how will I even keep up. My brother allayed my fears – had no doubt that I'd be okay and reinforced it was about the team challenge and not a competition.

Arduously I trained, read each email that came through and researched cycling tips almost every day!

The ride – day one

The day came – my kit was laid out before me, my bike prepared, my mind in shock, my stomach full of butterflies.

I arrived at Portman Road – this was real now. I got my top, ate an egg roll had a cup of tea and milled around – at least I looked like I knew what I was doing.

Rain stopped play for a while and Simon kept everyone motivated and upbeat as he talked through the route including what would be our first mile... an uphill climb to Westerfield. Thanks! And then we were called to take our place as the first group off.

It was all so surreal. Here I was. In my group. About to embark on my longest ride to date. Honestly, I felt slightly sick but it was all too late now. However, I was heartened knowing the team leaders were accomplished cyclists and I also had my brother by my side.



We cycled through the countryside on some familiar and some not so familiar roads and as a group the support and camaraderie quickly built. Steve (Elmy Cycles) assured me that even if I was at the back of this group I could consider myself at the front of the next group.

The sun came out and as we cycled along we soon found our pace. We were not far from approaching our first stop when groups 4 and 5 cycled past – they looked like flying machines out there. This was a good time not to compare ability or speed!

On setting off for the second leg we were still all together, witnessing some amazing parts of our county that I'm sure only cyclists get to see. Then at some point my brother and I found that we had our own pace – the Blackmore pace! There was no-one in front or behind us – all our chatter had isolated us from our group. It was then that we saw what would become a welcome number plate 'MILTS' and received shouts of encouragement before turning the corner and arriving at our lunch stop to the sound of applause. I felt triumphant... and hungry.

Shaun Whiter, the hand cyclist, came in not long after us – what a brilliant support he was to us all. The focus and spirit that he carried around with him was simply awe-inspiring.

The rest of the ride was the same – the Blackmore pace – steady. We never really knew what would be around the corner but the exhilaration of knowing we were on our way to the half way point kept us moving. We managed to hook up with some of the group in the last 10 miles including a couple of team leaders – their support for getting us over busy roads, out of junctions and across roundabouts gave a reassurance that was very much appreciated and gave me an insight into the benefits of group cycling.

With a mile to go we thought we were there but alas it was just houses. That last mile seemed the longest. But the oasis that was Potters (who knew I'd call Potters an oasis!) finally came into sight. Cycling in, over gravel - oops, towards the groups that had already arrived. Seeing them, being welcomed by everyone and a beer in sight was certainly a great end to the ride.

We made it.

The ride – day two

In total contrast to the weather on the previous day the sky was grey, the temperature noticeably lower and rain was forecast – and my 'sit bones' were far from pleased to be getting on a bike again.

But the only way to get home was on my bike.

We set off – through the town of Lowestoft towards Southwold. I pedalled and pedalled yet did not seem to get far and trailed behind the group for the first 10 miles. The wind had started to get stronger and the rain fell, and it fell hard. Hills were becoming even more of a struggle. It was at this point that one of our team leaders, Jo (Elmy Cycles), came to my rescue – literally pushing me to catch up with the group, giving me tips on my gears and where to best position myself in the group, plus words of encouragement to keep me going – the second day was always going to be harder.

But that wasn't the toughest bit. Leaving Southwold we were met with an unrelenting headwind, merciless rain and hills. At one stage, I'd even lost sight of my brother and it was here that Richard came to my rescue – riding in front of me – bearing the brunt of the wind and rain as we turned left towards Dunwich. It was, in Richard's words, "grim".

As we headed out of Dunwich I saw my brother waiting, so Richard stopped to rest – hardly surprisingly seeing as he had shielded me for the last few miles, and me and my bro carried on to Aldeburgh.

But that wasn't even the toughest bit! We powered through what seemed like a never-ending section of the ride... being more familiar with the area made it worse, knowing where you were going and how far away the next stop was really tested my mettle.

With Aldeburgh in sight we kept pushing ourselves – but it was hard going. Arriving at the snack stop I really could have burst into tears, relief perhaps that I had made it this far? Everyone was so kind and

supportive – but that kindness nearly tipped me over the edge and when Milts asked how I found it I could barely hold back the tears and mumbled inaudibly “fine”. I was far from fine!

What kept me at it at that point was my brother. His humour and support, his resolve, his grit to keep going... in any situation. Giving up was not even a consideration, so I picked my bike up and got back on. We left with the group to head towards Blaxhall. There is nothing like cycling against the wind and the rain that leaves you quite so vulnerable and reliant on your group.

We all stuck together the rest of the way, cussing the wind and the route, knowing there were much quicker ways to Woodbridge! Team leaders, James and John kept the momentum going, pretending that this was all so normal and telling us ‘nearly there’.

Milts greeted the group at Woodbridge and gave us an honest account of what was to come – yes it was only 10 miles to the finish – yes we had cycled 69 miles already and yes there was a bugger of a hill to get up. But knowing 10 miles was all we had left I thought how bad could it be. Well that was misjudged!

I set off to tackle the last leg with gusto but alas I noticed my bro was nowhere to be seen – he had been left behind. The thought of coming this far and not doing the last 10 miles and more importantly not crossing the finish line with him was unthinkable. I stopped – stupidly half way up the first hill out of Woodbridge until he caught up. My delight on seeing the rest of the Group waiting at the top for us was, what I thought at that time, titanic.

That was before ‘that hill’. John gave us tips – create momentum – low gears all the way. “Attack the hill” from my bro – yes easy enough for you to say! I focused, dropped my gears and just pedalled. For the most part I felt I was not getting far at all and with everyone else soon out of sight the temptation to get off and walk was huge! But pedal I did. And at the top there stood the group – what a mighty fine sight. My heart filled with gratitude as they all stated we started together and we’ll finish together.

Our last stint after ‘that hill’ was not as easy as I suspected, but knowing with each pedal we were one pedal closer made it bearable. As we headed down on to Berners Street I couldn’t believe we’d nearly done it. We parked up and waited there a bit for John and then it was downhill all the way!



The joy of crossing the finish line with my brother, being greeted by my daughter, being congratulated and congratulating others was as surreal as the start. We only bloody did it!

Day two was by far the hardest day but the sense of accomplishment, the bond built between strangers, the support from the crew – on and off the road, encouragement from the team leaders, Milts and fellow cyclists, plus the sheer determination and spirit of Shaun Whiter was all so immense it certainly outweighed the struggles.

Safe to say, that night I slept soundly, with the echoes of ‘clear’, ‘car rear’ and ‘pothole’ ringing in my ears.

Dedicated to my bro! Love you, Vern.