

Cycling For Sophie



Written by
Russell Claydon

Sports editor Russell Claydon gives his final update on his 150-mile charity cycle ride

£7,000 set to be raised — thank you!

Our chef de mission, Simon Milton, summed it up about as good as you can in his post-Tour of Suffolk email: "WOW!!! Just WOW!!!"

Almost 100 cyclists all pulling together to get TEAM ITFC to the finish line after a contrasting second day on Monday, which the most experienced riders among us said was one of the toughest days they have had on two wheels.

The howling coastal wind and largely wet 78 miles didn't see many people moaning though, which tells you what the spirit of the event was like.

And with my sister Sophie, who has aggressive cancer, well enough to be at Portman Road waving us off and then back again 32 hours later (I knew there was a good reason I opted for 32 on my kit - other than Sheffield United and my age!) it was even more special for our 'Cycling for Sophie' quartet.

So, what were the funny stories then? I know some of you have told me you've enjoyed the banter directed at my team-mates in this column (James Mould's mum cackling more than most).

Well, my money was on Pete or myself to topple over first, but despite a couple of near misses on my part, Mouldy took the biscuit with falls.

Luckily, we can now laugh about it, but when we had to

cross a busy dual carriageway north of Beccles on our way to Potters Leisure Resort, and he fell head first into a dual carriageway with a car coming, our hearts were in our mouths!

Fortunately the vehicle was already hurtling in the fast lane, thus avoiding any horror story.

Mouldy was also next to unexpectedly depart his bike the next day, through Lowestoft, just as a kind senior citizen

had been asking us how we were. Suddenly it became a bit embarrassing!

Going into the ride we had been a tad worried about placing ourselves in the second fastest group, at 14-15mph average speed.

But we were truly flying in the sunshine on that first day, clocking a 17.2mph average, incredibly. It still wasn't enough to make it to

Hop-ton-on-Sea first though, with Titus Bramble's Ipswich Academy staff registering close to 18. And if we hadn't indulged in a few pints in the sunshine at the Loddon stop, 10 miles from our overnight stay, who knows?

It was all about taking part though and riding with the ex-player's including Russell Osman (still a fighting fit machine), Bramble, James Scowcroft and Academy supremo Bryan Klug, made it a great experience.

But equally, if not more special was meeting and riding alongside former Newmarket Town player Shaun Whiter. What he achieved by



TEAM SOPHIE: With our main inspiration, Sophie Clayton, (from left) James King, Peter Hart, myself and James Mould

Not too late to donate:

Going online at <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/cyclingforsophie>

doing that ride on a hand cycle he received two months before the ride, having lost both his legs in a terrible hit-and-run crash under a year ago, was phenomenal. And it still gives me goosebumps even writing about it.

I posted a video of him finishing on Twitter (@russellclay-

don) that has had almost 2,800 views in 36 hours alone.

Riding tucked in behind Bramble (to avoid the wind!) and a head of him, despite too much red wine on Sunday (Mouldy's constant topping up to blame!) was a personal highlight.

The whole experience was

unforgettable though and the main mission was achieved: making my little sis proud and giving her a boost!

I must say a massive thank you to everyone who has donated. They are still coming in but we have raised an incredible £6,908.63 (£5,738.80 in donations before gift aid) for

Cancer Research UK and The Friends of Ipswich Town (the club's charity arm) which will be split 50/50. When you consider our target was £2,000, it shows how much support there has been, and I think it says a lot about my positive, bubbly sister.

There were some tough parts, particularly on the second day, but thinking what she has smiled her way through saw me find reserves I never thought I had.

The downside to it all? Getting back onto that saddle to make my way to the BFP offices on Tuesday morning!

If in case you missed it in the paper the other week, there will be a 'Sing for Sophie' evening of entertainment at her old school, Thurston Community College, a week today (May 26) at 7pm. Tickets have sold very well, but there are still a few left. If interested, tickets are £5pp with all proceeds going to the Teenage Cancer Trust and Adenbrooke's Charitable Trust. Call 01473 823700 to book and ask for Yvette or Annela.



ELATION: The relief on my face is evident as we came into a big crowd at Portman Road on Monday at around 5pm, while Pete (behind me) and Kinr also look glad to be back



INSPIRATIONAL: Shaun Whiter being interviewed by Tour of Suffolk organiser Simon Milton, at the post-ride reception