

Special Feature

On the Verge of Despair

Never before. Never again? Never be asked again?

I have only recently joined the local cycling club so when I was asked to help at a time-trial I foresaw no problems. A warm and sunny July evening, the

company of fellow cyclists, the opportunity to give something back, what was there not to like? How easily such grand dreams can be dashed.

Die Hards and Optimists

For a start, the evening in question held all the allure of a bath of wet custard. It was cold, there were heavy showers and the wind was virtually a full blown gale; so much for summertime. Still, on such an evening, who in their right mind would want to do a ten mile time trial along the A40 dual carriageway that runs south of Witney in such conditions? Only die-hards or optimists, surely? Perhaps I could return home having shown willing but nobody having turned up.

The lay-by at Barnard Gate was full of die-hards and optimists, all slowly turning pedals or skulking inside cars, mindful of the rain. The air hummed with bonhomie, tales of derring-do, bananas, the odours of dubious body rubs, suppressed tension; a heady mixture. As a complete novice at the job in hand, I was assigned to a pair of experienced helpers, husband and wife team, Geoff and Liz. Armed with day-glow tops, clipboards and stopwatches,



we drove down to the starting lay-by, synchronised our watches with the starter and then stood as the first riders departed at one minute intervals. Those in the metaphorical starting gate were a little surprised to

see this novice bedecked in full length cape and sou'wester. Undeterred by their gazes, we drove to the finish on the other carriageway. It would be exactly ten miles from the start to the Burford roundabout and back up to where we were; except that we couldn't find the finishing line.

Anyone Seen the Finishing Line?

"Three hundred yards down from the lay-by," we had been told. Could we find the marker? Perhaps it was the rain, maybe it was my lack of glasses but whatever it was, we couldn't find it so we paced the three hundred yards, somewhat hastily, as the first finishers were due shortly. And then the stopwatches failed; yes, both of them. Suddenly, we were on the verge, behind the barrier, without the stopwatches and with only the vaguest ideas of where the finishing line was. Defiantly we erected the 'FINISH' board beside the carriageway and I dug out my wristwatch, the one I had never worn since retirement, peering at its sweeping second hand through unfocussed and rain-washed eyes. Liz stood over us and our soggy clipboards with a huge yellow umbrella as we sat on a couple of folding stools awaiting the arrival of the first

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drowned cyclist. Huge lorries rushed past but just out of spraying distance.

“Rider!” yelled Liz. Geoff leaned forward in anticipation. At that moment one of the legs of his stool disappeared down a rabbit hole. Geoff plummeted.

“Oh dear me, what a silly billy,” he muttered, or words vaguely along those lines. Retrieving his glasses along with both his decorum and his Queen’s English, he was just in time to record the time I called out, a time owing more to hope than to accuracy as my wristwatch wasn’t synchronised with the starter’s watch.

It was at this point that Liz looked mournfully down at the two of us with our damp results sheets and hunched shoulders.

“You’d never guess it was our anniversary today.”

Geoff had the good sense to look abashed but then a gentle smile lit his face.

“Ah well,” he replied, “I always knew how to give a girl a good time.”

And so it continued, rider after soggy rider, each one given an approximate time at an approximate finishing line. Once the last rider was past, we returned to Barnard Gate ready to face the music.

Wierder and Wierder

Die-hards and optimists may have their faults but that night they were in remarkably forgiving mood. They always knew their chances of getting that holy grail known as a PB (personal best) were remote in those conditions. However, I didn’t wait around to invite complaints. Driving home through the deserted village of East End, I was surprised to look ahead and see the unmistakable profile of the rear end of a cow heading into one of those immaculate front gardens. As I drew level, it was heading resolutely towards the nearest hanging basket; perhaps its name wasn’t Daisy but Petunia - a surreal ending to an unforgettable evening.

Bob Forster

Wychwood Surgery 2011 Flu Clinics

Will start from 3rd October You are eligible for a flu vaccination if:- you are 65 years or older, you have asthma and are on a steroid inhaler; if you have had COPD, diabetes, coronary heart disease or chronic kidney disease or you have a transplant. Also if you are a Carer, you are pregnant or you are a Health or Social Worker. The vaccination this year covers both seasonal and swine flu. Please phone to book your flu jab appointment on: 01993 831061.

St Mary’s Church, Shipton Coffee Morning

19th November 10.30am to 12 noon.

Cakes, books and gifts available to buy. All welcome, please support us.

The Wantage Silver Band

St.Simon & St.Jude, Milton-under-Wychwood presents The Wantage Silver Band with a programme of *Wartime Memories* and *Glenn Miller Style Swing* on **Saturday 29th October at 7.30pm**. Tickets £10 adults; £6 under-16’s (to include interval drinks) available from **James Burgis** on: 01993 830553.