

Club Run to ~~Fletching Stores~~ National Cat Adoption Centre, Chelwood Gate
Sunday 29th January 2017 by Paget Cohen

After a highly enjoyable, but all too short, 90 minutes slip-sliding around Bedgebury Pinetum with Pip Jones in the Saturday morning sunshine, I decided to pay heed to the meteorologists and pass on the opportunity to do the same under race conditions up at Gravesend Cyclopark on the Sunday in order to rejoin the club 'A' ride and get some quality miles in my legs. I had intended to leave half an hour early in order to squeeze an extra 7-8 miles in before Boots, but a poor night's sleep reduced that to 5 minutes and a detour across the valley to Hadlow Down in order to approach Uckfield from the north, where I caught up with 'B' ride leader Graham Jeffs running way ahead of schedule.



There had been concerns beforehand that a normal sized club run (whatever that is these days) wouldn't squeeze into Fletching Stores. Well despite the mucky roads and the threat of rain 15 riders attempted to latch onto Mr McG's rear wheel as he set off up the High Street with the latest unwelcome conundrum. In comparison the riding was comparatively straightforward if meandering. Back through the Ringles Cross roadworks we snuck before the usual back lanes to Fairwarp, with local lad Micky T showing the way. Rather than head up on to the forest we cut across the Duddleswell Road only to meet the first of many horse riders out for their own brand of exercise.

Entering Nutley from the south and at a moderate tempo Ian surprised me once more by having us turn down Bell Lane and towards our intended tea stop with still an hour-and-a half to go. Indeed Micky and I both expected our leader to indicate we take the next right towards Sheffield Green, but on we pressed in the direction of our notional tea stop. All became clear as our road captain called for a halt outside said cafe and popped in to chat with the proprietor while some of us who shall remain nameless inadvertently blocked the road to a motorist so patient they thought she had parked.

While I wasn't a party to the conversation I got the distinct impression that our representative emerged from the premises mulling over an alternative destination, but it was still too early to be certain as we skirted round the back of Newick with the guesting Pete Morris nipping off the front for the first of a worrying number of comfort breaks. After cutting across the A275 on the first real climb of the Circuit of Danehill, where we encountered an extremely brave equestrianist, it was off past The Sloop where dogs took the place of horses in the potential hazard stakes.

At Freshfield Crossways we took a left and gradually wended our way up Plummerden Lane before plummeting beneath the Bluebell Railway (due to host The Flying Scotsman in a matter of months) and back up into Horsted Keynes for a regroup once we'd allowed the motorised traffic to get past. Another left took us back in the direction of the aforementioned heritage line, but, as he is apt, Ian let those keen to forge the pace go the wrong way before letting on that we faced a warming drag up Chilling Street punctuated by yet more horse-riders; thus far outnumbering the roadside pit-stops, not that I was keeping count.

By now word had circulated that we were bound for the cat protection centre at Chelwood Gate, but not how we intended to get there. Thus after a brief blast along Plawhatch Lane Mr McG hung another small group of ersatz leaders out to dry by signalling for the rest of us to face the plunge through the ford at Twyford, scene of many a reliability trial. If the river-crossing weren't a peril in itself none of the prospective routes out of this valley are a particular joy to ride, the one we were dealt featuring a badly broken surface on top of a stiff gradient.

Once back on the relative level there was need for a brief regroup before the short dash to the cafe, albeit Micky wouldn't be joining us as he had an appointment with some more roads if he were to keep up his LEL training. I feared we may lose The Dom also as he was scheduled to meet his good lady wife at our original destination, but a short phone call elicited that rain in Lewes meant that to his relief Christine hadn't left the house. It was all our good fortune that we beat the rush of other cyclists to the cafe as it too was somewhat crowded by the time we donned layers ready to venture back out.



Our numbers immediately dwindled however as mountain goats Morris and McConville headed off on to the forest for some self-inflicted punishment and Julian peeled right when the rest of us went left for Chelwood village. Heading down Tanyard Lane our ranks shrunk further as, for some reason, Dom took the left turn for Brookhouse Bottom, with Bob Evans dutifully following and Nick Dwyer doing so apparently blindly lest he be separated from those others headed towards Lewes. Thus then there were nine of us pouring down the A275 to the Trading Boundaries crossroads where we hung the usual left in order to hold up some cars and greet a well wrapped up Gina Boakes, presumably making her way home from the 'B' ride.

Back down Fletching High Street for a second time this morning except this time we followed the road round to the left to make for the A272, provided we could avoid being wiped out by a ludicrous overtake from an SUV driver threatening to involve us in their next accident. Into Uckfield and we gradually shed yet more of our quota as the strong riding Alan Lester bade farewell, as did our leader, who almost took Lisa with him to his mother's so reluctant was she to leave his wheel.

Neil Gearing, nice Martyn and Darren Brockhurst waved goodbye come the High Street which left just me, Lord Geldart and the Davises to wend our way back to Blackboys, although we did see the last remnant of the 'B' ride – Pip Jones – packing her bike into her car and then zipping back past with a friendly toot on the road through Framfield. Speaking of horns our ride had been accompanied by what Mr Gearing likened to the honk of geese and I compared to the warning emitted by a clown's car, although in our case it was provided by the disc brakes on Brett's Merida, each imperfectly tuned to a different note and negating any need for a handlebar-mounted bell. Still at least he has finally invested in a new skid lid, so I guess we'll have to find a new target for any caption competitions.

Much as it would have been easier for all of us to make a bee-line for home, especially as my companions were all reporting fatigue most doubt due to lack of January miles, we instead followed James down Possingworth Lane only to meet an oncoming phalanx of Wealden Cycles riders hauling themselves up to the main road. We eventually parted ways in downtown Waldron, with the men all turning for home, but Lisa determined to meet the demands of her coach by spinning her ride out to 4 hours. With Mr Davis also in warm-down mode I had little choice other than to change up a rear sprocket or two or to be antisocial on my way to a slow, but social 57 miles.