



Going the **DISTANCE**

Touring 18,000 miles around the world in record time is tough on both bike and equipment. **Rob Ainsley** asked **Mark Beaumont**, **James Bowthorpe** and **Julian Sayerer** what they used and how well it did

Like James Bowthorpe and Julian Sayerer, Mark Beaumont used a bike with 700C wheels and a Rohloff hub gear

James Bowthorpe's bike (far right) was unusual in that it had a belt drive instead of a chain

These days you can hardly check into a Kiwi hostel or camp by a Turkish roadside without bumping into a British cyclist trying to break the round-the-world record. Mark Beaumont set a record of 195 days in 2008, followed in 2009 by James Bowthorpe, who logged 176. Julian Sayerer then claimed a circuit of 165. Right now, two more Brits are racing the globe intent on faster times: Vin Cox, aiming for 150, and Alan Bates, said to be targeting 99. Yet others plan further attempts later this year (keep updated at <http://cycleseven.org/round-the-world-cycling-record>).

Why the sudden rush? Because Guinness World Records recently set new rules. Fancy it yourself? Simply do a round trip of at least 18,000 miles in a constant direction, on the same bike, riding through two antipodal points – which on our wet planet usually means Spain and New Zealand.

Few would contemplate that at audax pace, though many of us might relish the circumnavigation at a little more leisure. But would our kit be up to it? We asked Mark, James and Julian about their bikes, parts and equipment, and how their gear fared in the most intense reviewing regime imaginable. Here's what they told us...



1/ Mark Beaumont

SINCE SETTING HIS record in 2008, an odyssey that was featured in a BBC documentary, the 27-year-old Scot has been on more grand tours – and more TV. He’s now familiar to popular audiences thanks to his recent self-filmed BBC1 series covering his 13,000-mile trip down the length of the Americas.

His rig was essentially the same as for the world trip – a Koga Miyata with 24-inch alloy frame (Mark is 6’3”). ‘It’s a very forgiving ride’, he says as he chats on his mobile en route between speaking engagements, ‘incredibly rigid. Only on really rough surfaces did it not perform well – Patagonia on the Americas trip, for instance. But on roads it was fine.’

He used standard Shimano V-brakes on the world trip, but he’d use disc brakes now. ‘I went through four or five sets of pads on the world trip, and just one set of disc pads in the Americas – and that included descents in the Rockies and Andes. You do get rim wear on very long distances too, which probably contributed to my broken back wheels in Adelaide and Louisiana – my accident there probably wouldn’t have happened with discs.’

His rear wheel had 32 spokes, a limitation imposed by the Rohloff hub gear, ‘but actually 32 is enough for me. I think part of the reason for spoke problems was overtensioning’. (He had such problems in Poland, solved by a bike shop in the middle of nowhere, then no more broken spokes to Kolkata – just as well, as the 5,500 miles between there and Istanbul were devoid of bike shops.)

That Rohloff hub gear worked fine: ‘The cables seized slightly, and the shifter needs servicing. I wouldn’t use it on a long road ride – but for expedition riding I’d only use this.’ The 14 evenly spaced gears proved ideal for the trip: ‘I never needed more than the top gear, and the

granny was no problem even in Turkey, the most mountainous part of the trip.’

Mark preferred his Schwalbe Marathon Pluses to the XRs he tried on one stretch: ‘They had a higher rolling resistance, were wider, wore out quicker, and seemed not as puncture resistant’. From the Marathon Pluses he got about 2,000 miles from the back tyres and 4,000-5,000 from the front. ‘The worst roads were in Pakistan and northern India. For some reason, the Australian outback roads wore out the tyres much quicker than anywhere else, especially the Nullarbor.’

The Ortlieb panniers resisted pretty much everything, even south-east Asia in monsoon season. He prefers the Classic for their simpler fastening.

Mark’s tent was a Terra Nova Laser Competition, a single-pole model weighing two pounds. ‘It’s not four-season, though 99% of the time it was brilliant. It did blow down twice – once in south Australia, once in an Arizona winter storm. The double shell means you can get four panniers in the porch. A couple of times in windy conditions I had to guy it to the bike.’

Mark’s media activities require good video kit. He filmed the world trip on a Sony 300 mini-DVD camera, but technology has moved on since the old days of 2008. For his trips now he uses a Canon Legria HF200 that records TV-quality onto SD cards, which are more convenient and easier to back up. He adds a top-mounted mike, for broadcast-quality sound. For stills he uses a Panasonic Lumix, with its wide-angle and big optical zoom.

But if you’re thinking of shooting your own Big Trip, be advised: laid-back but switched-on Mark’s got the adventure-cycling TV documentary market sewn up for now!



2/ James Bowthorpe



THE 32-YEAR-OLD furniture maker from south London achieved his global ride on an experimental prototype: a Gates carbon-fibre belt drive, hitherto untested on such long distances. Dutch bike makers Santos approached him with the idea, and James was impressed by the simplicity: ‘no oil, you clean it with water, and the spare weighs only 100g.’

Many of us might only have seen belt drives on a Strida folder, an unlikely choice for a racing circumnavigation. It’s a misleading image: ‘Harley Davidsons and drag racers use belts, so it can handle the torque. The first belt lasted 6,000 miles – more than a chain, though not as much as hoped. It turned out to be an alignment problem, which we sorted on a rest day in Perth at Quantum Bikes. The replacement lasted all the way home.’

Only a hub gear is possible with a belt, which meant a 14-speed Rohloff. James had no problems all trip. ‘I changed the oil when you’re supposed to, every 5,000 miles, and it only takes 15 minutes. It’s expensive, but looking at the mileage I had without mishaps, it was worth it. And if it goes wrong, Rohloff will send you a replacement anywhere. It’s one less thing to worry about if you’re in a desert or rainforest.’ He

only needed the lowest gear for the most extreme climbs in one exotic part of the world – ‘the Surrey Hills, right near the end!’

The Gates belt drive also requires a very stiff frame for alignment. James’s was aluminium rather than steel. ‘I’d probably not have gone for steel anyway,’ he says. ‘The idea that steel is better because a remote village blacksmith can repair it is a bit of an armchair argument.’

The rigidity of the frame and fork served him well in Eden, South Australia, where he collided with a wombat – something that was not as funny at the time as it sounds while we chat agreeably over a Thai curry in a south London café. He crashed into a brick wall and ‘the handlebars moved so far round that the brake lever snapped, so I had to ride four days without a back brake!’ But the frame came through unscathed.

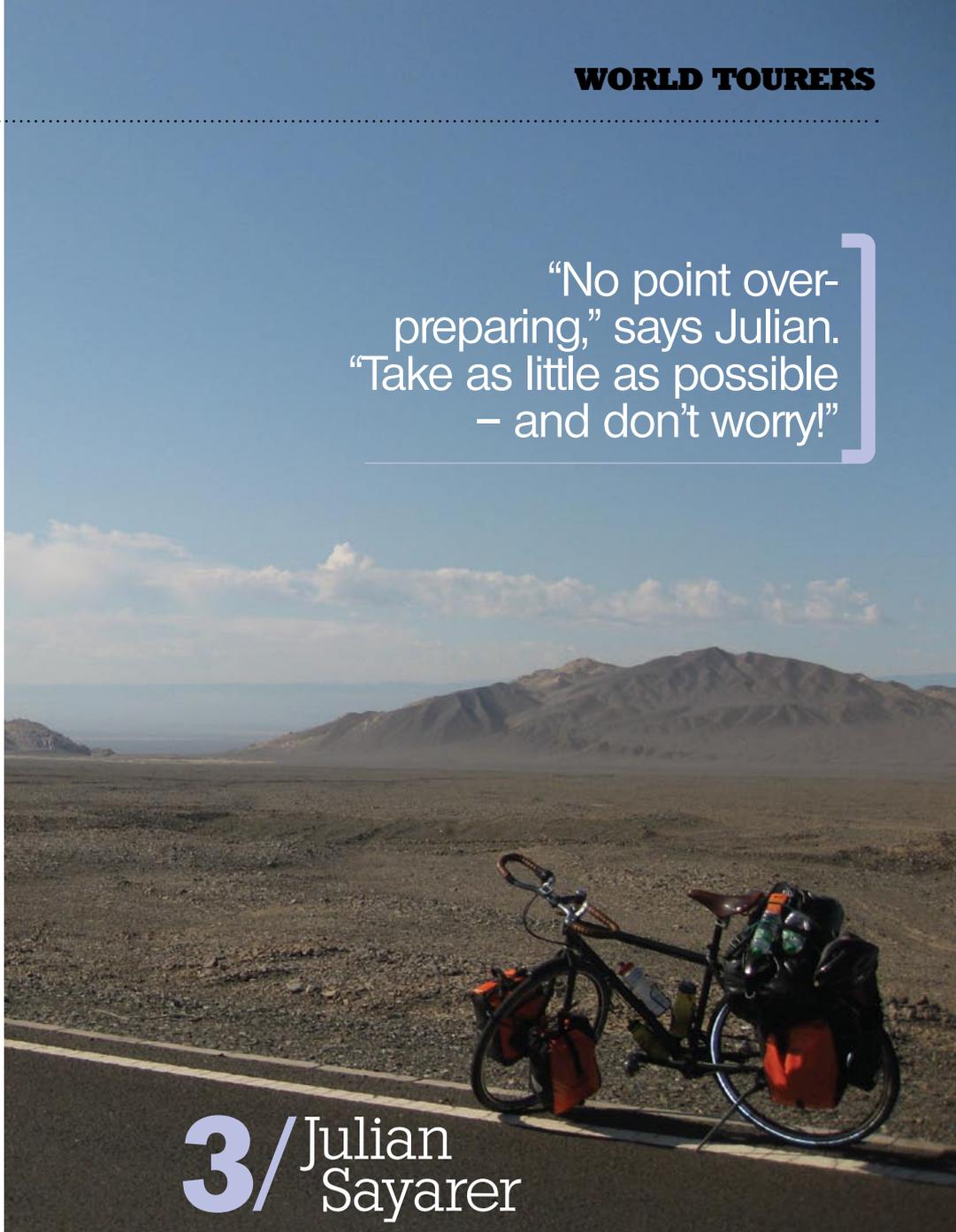
The same pair of wheels went through everything – even the worst road on his route, Highway 66 in Ukraine. A defining feature of the trip all over the world, to James’s surprise, was roadworks everywhere, usually the construction of new highways and bypasses. London’s water main chaos is not as unique as we think!

James used to work in an outdoor shop, and chose his tent and sleeping bag (both GoLites) with that experience in mind. ‘The bag is down but coated, and always dried out okay if it got damp. The tent worked fine in all continents, and a real advantage is that you don’t need to peg it down. In Australia I just used a pannier at each corner, except in one storm. It’s single-skin, easy to put up, and has a big vestibule that takes most of the bike. For security I put the main peg through a pedal.’

The gadgets – video, camera, iPhone – were powered by a Schmidt SON dynamo hub built into the front wheel. ‘No charging equipment needed, and the effort only adds a notional five feet per mile, so it doesn’t affect the ride.’

James had quite a lucky trip, with only minor mechanical problems and six punctures. And not everything was whizzy new prototype technology: his ten-year-old Brooks saddle, with ‘two hollows perfectly moulded to my sit bones’, went round the world with him.

“No point over-preparing,” says Julian. “Take as little as possible – and don’t worry!”



3/ Julian Sayerer

Spot the Ortlieb panniers! All three round-the-world cyclists used them

Julian Sayerer had problems with his Rohloff hub gear in the desert heat

THE 24-YEAR-OLD Londoner’s trip was the lowest-budget and arguably most adventurous of the three: no big sponsors or support team. Currently working as a delivery cyclist for a flower company, Julian chats amiably over a slow pint in a Soho pub, and his passion for the simple, straightforward and non-commercialised comes across.

Like the others he used a Rohloff, but was less impressed by it. ‘Mine ran incredibly dry after 6,000 miles, and in desert heat the oil leaked. The gaskets in it disintegrated. It’s excellent engineering but not necessary; you can get Shimano stuff in any city in the world.’

No such misgivings about the Schwalbe Marathon Plus tyres, though. ‘I had one set for the first 10,000 miles with only three or four punctures. I got the second set in North America, used them for

rest of way. South Arizona had the worst roads – lots of cactus thorns and truck debris at the roadside. I had a bike shop in a place called Alamogordo, New Mexico, put an extra plastic strip in the tyre. I could tell it was a good place, as it had a five-gallon drum of slime!’

Wheels proved a problem, and Julian wasn’t happy about the rear limitation of 32 spokes caused by the Rohloff (he had 36 on the front). ‘By California, after 13,000 miles, the rear wheel had pulled half the spokes through the eyelets. I don’t hold it against Mavic – I left home on over-light spokes.

‘So I got a replacement rim – it



WORLD TOURERS

was 15 years old – in California somewhere, which got me across the East Coast. That burst through three eyelets, so I had another wheel built in Georgia: Mavic rim, two years old, not top end, and all a bit make do – galvanised steel spokes when they should have been solid steel. So I got another wheel in New York. Going back through Europe it needed truing every day, which was hard work!

Julian's toolkit was standard and

It's not just bikes and equipment that need to be durable: 18,000 miles takes a heavy toll on the rider too

basic: what you can see, you can often fix. 'And anyway there are bike shops all over the world, and if a bike goes wrong you can often still ride it.' Though if you're busting a gut to break a record, that might be easier said than done: 'On the last day the cable seized on the Rohloff, and I had to do 110 miles all in one gear in the hills of Normandy!' (He selected tenth.)

He didn't like his Terra Nova Laser Competition tent. 'The titanium

pegs were like toothpicks, with no purchase at all, and they're easily lost. You need eight pegs to pitch, which is tricky in desert sand. And the zips broke.' Towards the end, 'I was sleeping in doorways and at bus stops because I needed the distance, but also I hated the tent so much!'

Julian's techie kit was straightforward too, including 'lots of paper and pens'. He took a mobile phone and used internet cafés to stay in touch en route. For location fixing, he used a SPOT GPS (as did Mark on his Americas tour). Intended for wilderness adventurers, it is a screenless box that simply sends out a GPS signal to some prearranged web destination, showing where you are. (There is an emergency mode too.) 'Waterproof, robust – it fell off the back of my bike a few times – only uses four AA batteries, and is easy to use: just press a button and it shows your relatives you're okay.'

Such simplicity characterised Julian's trip. Especially his parting advice: 'No point over-preparing. Take as little as possible – and don't worry!'



WORLD KIT COMPARED

	Mark Beaumont	James Bowthorpe	Julian Sayerer
Bike	Koga Miyata Signature Tubus racks	Santos Travelmaster 2.8 Alu Carbon belt drive Tubus racks, homemade rear platform	Tout Terrain Silk Road customised Tubus racks
Frame	aluminium alloy	aluminium alloy	steel
Gears	Rohloff hub gear (14)	Rohloff hub gear (14)	Rohloff hub gear (14)
Wheels	Koga Signature 700C	Rigida 700C	Mavic A319 700C
Tyres	Schwalbe Marathon Plus	Schwalbe Marathon XR	Schwalbe Marathon Plus
Brakes	standard Shimano V-brakes	Magura hydraulic rim brakes	Shimano disc brakes
Saddle	SMP Pro	Brooks	Brooks
Accessories	Ortlieb classic panniers Schmidt front hub dynamo	Ortlieb panniers Schmidt front hub dynamo	Ortlieb panniers
Tools	Alien II multi-tool penknife tyre levers, puncture repair stuff spoke tool, spare spokes	multi-tool, allen keys, screwdrivers 1 spare tyre, 2 inner tubes, Rohloff tool, puncture repair stuff, spare belt, spare rear cog, gaffer tape	adjustable spanner, B&Q pliers, Rohloff tool, allen keys, spoke key Park multi-tool
Camping gear	Terra Nova Laser Competition tent Peter Hutchinson Design sleeping bag (warm climates) Rab Quantum Endurance sleeping bag (cold climates)	GoLite Xanadu tent GoLite sleeping bag	Terra Nova Laser Competition tent Husky sleeping bag
Wardrobe	Assos bib-shorts Specialized mitts and MTB shoes	Endura shorts Merino wool top	£3 shorts from Sportsworld Swerve Merino wool top Madison jacket (all also used in London for couriering)
Extras	Panasonic Lumix TZ7 camera mini DVD camera Iridium GPS tracker		SPOT GPS pens, writing paper (lots)