

Cycling to Le Tour

Last July, **Pat Owen** cycled into a small town to watch the Tour de France pass by

When we cycled into the small town of Bénévent L'Abbaye on the day the Tour de France was due to pass through on its 10th stage from Limoges to Issoudun, spirits were high: the bar, with its tables spilling out onto the main street, was full; trestle tables had been set up in the road; and the temporary kitchen was already preparing lunch, to the accompaniment of live music.

After the *caravane* had flung its goodies into the crowd and we had lunched on beer and baguettes, we took up our positions to await the arrival of the peloton at 2.30pm. We stood a little way round a bend in the road on a slight incline, in the hope that the riders would go a little slower at this point. But I doubted the small 'hill' would make any impression at all on cyclists who were averaging between 45 and 50 kilometres an hour on the straight!

Onlookers cheerfully fidgeted and

jostled. Police motorbikes, official cars and photographers were all cheered enthusiastically as they sped through the town. It went quiet. You knew they were near when two helicopters hovered overhead. Suddenly, shouts of 'Allez, allez!' and the riders appeared round the bend slowing (very) slightly as they came towards us. Impossible to make out individual riders, it was all over so quickly, but the mass of colourful Lycra, the shouts of the crowd and swish of tyres in that usually quiet, dull street was unforgettable.

The riders eventually reached Issoudun at about 5pm and the stage was won by Mark Cavendish. We jumped on our bikes, taking the Tour route out of the town. With shouts of 'Allez, allez!' ringing in our ears, we headed back to our holiday home.



Chasing the sun

At sunset on midsummer's day, **Martin Lloyd** rode west from Canterbury

21.22: sunset. My seven lights and ten reflectors make the cars pass wide. There are scents of damp trees and conifers, honeysuckle, roses, whiffs of barbecues, and the sharp acid tang of catalysed exhaust. Sounds of Saturday night revelry came from village halls. On the A20 at Charing the cars pass fast but still wide. Into Lenham village: a cloying smell of fish and chips and the murmur of three youngsters chatting in the square. Back onto the A20, the motorway junction is busy at midnight.

Maidstone at 00.45 is the Wild West. Girls in high heels and not much else shriek and

totter in threes; blokes in tee-shirts and jeans slump against shop fronts; ambulances line up like taxis. I survive the racetrack over the bridges and climb the London Road. Traffic is now taxis, stretch limos and ambulances.

I am past, smelling fragrances of garden and new wooden fence. I try to adjust the spot beam on my halogens and lose the bulb. I am feeling the distance now and dread the long climb to Sevenoaks. Then I realise that I have just cycled up it. Roadworks at the Bat and Ball look horrific: good job it is three in the morning. I cross the A21 and as I leave the streetlights I notice that I can see the sky.

At 04.45 the sun rises on me at Westerham. I sit in the bus shelter whilst the birds sing to me, then I phone home. The telephone kiosk gives me £3.37 in change. I have cycled all night and am £2.97 in profit.

Homeward bound and Tonbridge station is awash with cyclists starting a charity ride. One of them wanders up.

'A London to Brighton chappie?'

'Not me,' says I, 'I've done 66 miles this morning.' He opens his mouth to argue, notices my array of lights, and just nods.



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