



The club rider

Jill Kieran rides every week with her CTC member group and reckons there's an untapped demand for sociable cycling

Group riding is brilliant,' says Jill Kieran, who enjoys weekly rides with Blackmore Vale CTC in Dorset. Previously an active member of South Bucks CTC, she relocated with her partner three years ago. Some people would struggle to name their neighbours this soon after moving house, but Jill is already surrounded by a network of cyclists.

'The friendship and sociability is important,' she says. 'Having an interest and experience in common with like-minded people is why many join clubs, and CTC local groups offer that immediately, almost wherever you live.'

Group cycling helps you get to know not just people but places. 'Sharing the ride enhances observations of wildlife, views, and places of interest,' says Jill, 'so you gain new information.'

Blackmore Vale is a vibrant CTC member group. That's because it's not cliquy or inward looking. In fact, members go out of their way to welcome non-club cyclists – and then to provide rides that will be suitable. 'We meet lone cyclists or small groups out riding who ask who we are, so we always carry CTC details to give them,' Jill says.

'We introduce newcomers to cycling too, both beginners and returnees. Initial questions are always about road safety, capability for any distance, or fear of hills. By explaining the planned route (which is deliberately short – under five miles), choosing a quiet ride, and walking any hills together, the newcomers quickly learn to trust the leader.'

That's not to say that faster, longer and harder club rides aren't a mainstay of Blackmore Vale and of other groups. And Jill dismisses any suggestion that the typical CTC club ride will be a slow potter for older cyclists. 'That is a CTC cycling myth that damages local groups. Try telling Cheam and Morden's Friday Night to the Coast riders that! You might find some cyclists 20 years older than you in age, but not in spirit or fitness! And you can start your own group if age is an issue – recent changes in



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CTC's organisation of groups has offered more opportunity to create clubs.'

Jill is keen to see this opportunity for growth backed up with more support for member groups from CTC National Office – and not only through the provision of extra funds for groups, a motion that was passed at the 2010 AGM. 'Proactive, positive interest in club riding by CTC would help local groups, and be valued by them, to further their own efforts to interest and retain their new cyclists.'

Blackmore Vale itself does a good job of keeping its club runs popular by taking a more flexible approach to ride promotion. 'The key is to listen to the people out on the rides with you and offer what they would like to do. We have a weekly ride alternating

Saturdays and Sundays, so family life on a Sunday is not marginalised if one parent or partner wants to go out all day and the other doesn't cycle,' says Jill. 'You can also opt for part of the ride, go back early, or join at lunchtime. We have an evening ride in the summer months, offer two beginner/returnee rides every month, and a weekly rota of nominated morning destinations for those who aren't working.'

Each ride will vary, but Jill was happy to provide a thumbnail description of the latest ride she'd been on. 'The start of the ride was Stourhead, 12 miles away, where we met for coffee. It was a cold, late autumn morning so the colours were stunning. We set off through Stourhead House grounds on a designated cycle path, then on lanes through farmland towards Longleat. We looked down on Longleat House from "Heavens Gate", then cycled to Sherewater Lake and saw the last of the season's dinghy sailing. After lunch we joined an off-road route overlooking the edge of Salisbury Plain, then rode uphill again through farms before freewheeling down into the picturesque Deverill villages. The ride then climbed back up onto a ridge on narrow green lanes to Maiden Bradley, and returned to a café at Stourhead for tea and cake. Finally we rode home, with people peeling off en route shouting "See you next week!"'