

# Rising to the Challenge

CTC's Phil Liggett Challenge is a century ride through imposing Peak District hills. **Carlton Reid** rode it with his son **Josh**





**H**olme Moss isn't for the fainthearted. It's a monster of a climb, 524 metres (1,719ft) of grinding ascent up to a TV and radio transmitting station in the Peak District National Park. It's not the steepest of the climbs on the Phil Liggett Challenge but it's the first big 'un. And, on the 2010 event, it was the one that had me worried. Not for me, for my son. Twelve-year-old Josh was hyperventilating and I was doing my best to calm him down, and get him to the top.

I hadn't noticed the start of his hyperventilation. I was riding further down the hill, chatting with Phil Liggett. Josh was with Pat, Phil's wife. With Phil starting to struggle (he was ill that day, his groans had nothing to do with the incline), I wanted to see how Josh was getting on. I bridged the gap and was shocked to find Pat nursing Josh up the hill. I took over the ministrations.

I was shocked because Josh is normally such a good climber. But Holme Moss was his toughest ever ascent. I wasn't overly worried by the distance we were to tackle because Josh has done big rides before. He did his first century when he was ten years old. He does at least two sportives a year. This was his first Phil Liggett Challenge. Maybe

the Challenge was too tough for a 12-year-old? Was I wrong to have allowed him to take part?

### **Too much too young?**

Once over Holme Moss, Josh recovered well and, with energy gels and encouragement, finished the whole ride in better condition than me. One of the benefits of youth: elastic resilience.

A quick recovery had been the case on Josh's first century, too. We had ridden back-roads from Newcastle to Berwick. Proud of my son's achievement, I blogged about it. Comments came in, praising Josh's athleticism and fortitude.

Karen Rizzo, the managing director of Kryptonite locks in the US, wrote: 'Having completed my first (and only) century at an older age, I stand in amazement at a young man so driven to succeed.'

Jacob Heilbron, founder and

(Opposite) Josh and Carlton on Holme Moss  
(Above left) Phil says he often suffers on his own ride because it follows right after the Tour de France, when he's presenting for weeks and not cycling  
(Above right) Whatever your pace, chances are you'll find a group to ride with on the road

Holme Moss is a monster of a climb, 524 metres of grinding ascent up to a TV and radio transmitter

owner of Kona of Canada, wrote: 'Congratulations on completing your first century – a real one, in miles no less!' (Josh rides a Kona cyclo-cross bike, specced with road tyres.)

But not everybody was so enamoured. The editor of a US cycling publication emailed me with his fears of what his readers would think: 'Some people would look at putting a ten-year-old through the stress of a 100-mile ride inappropriate for the kid's level of physical development, and would see it as irresponsible by the parent.'

This threw me. I don't consider myself a cruel parent. I didn't force Josh to ride. You couldn't get a kid to do a 100-mile ride unless the child was self-motivated. Had I been irresponsible? I really don't think so.

### **The kids are all right**

Kids don't get stretched enough these days. They're wrapped in cotton wool, mollycoddled. There's a phrase for this: helicopter parenting. Worried mums and dads hover over their kids, not letting them do anything too taxing.

When he was younger, Josh started on 20-mile rides, and did fine. His mileage then increased incrementally until he got to 70 miles and he really wasn't taxed, despite doing two major climbs on



Photos courtesy of Phil O'Connor except left & above, by Carlton Field

the 60-mile charity ride (which was a day's mileage of 70 by the time we rode home). Josh then wanted to do 100 miles, just him and me, no charity excuse. I kept putting this off, and then finally relented.

But what about the poor boy's physical development? My wife is a hospital paediatrician and she knows a fit child of his age can cope fine with this amount of 'stress'. She gave the century ride her blessing, her main concern being calorific: I had to make sure Josh ate lots.

I plied him with energy-dense foods and we stopped for warming soup too. The ride wasn't done on in perfect conditions: it was a cold, wet November day.

### Freedom to ride

The day after the ride, my father revealed he'd also ridden from Newcastle to Berwick as a child. It was the late 1940s and he was 11 at the time. He rode back to Newcastle the following day. Unlike us, he had camping gear on his bike. He didn't classify himself as a 'cyclist'; it was necessary and normal back then to ride everywhere. Kids just did.

Today's sedentary society doesn't realise what kids are actually capable of. Too many children are kept muffled up at home. I believe such enforced inactivity is the real parental irresponsibility.

Society's fixation on Health and Safety has dulled our sensibilities. We're risk averse, afraid to tax ourselves, and especially afraid to tax our children. Cycling long distances – perhaps even in less than clement weather – is an antidote to this. Within reason, of course, but I am a fierce advocate for getting kids to do stuff that will physically – and mentally – challenge them. It's not a case of sink or swim but, with due care and attention, a little bit of stretching can do no harm.

Naturally, this can be taken to extremes and there are no doubt legions of cases where children have been forced to endure conditions way out of their comfort zones, with the risk these children reject future 'abuse' of this sort, putting them off an outdoor life, for life. But if a child willingly and knowingly accepts to undertake a challenging experience, I reckon this should be encouraged.

### Holme truths

Josh might have suffered up Holme Moss but that was no reason to pull him from the ride and into the support car (my wife and other two kids were close by most of the way round the ride). He soldiered on. He wanted to soldier on. The going got tough but Josh knows that's when the tough get going.

And Josh is tough. Not rough and

Today's sedentary society doesn't realise what kids are capable of... Enforced inactivity is the real problem

(Above right) Carlton and Josh spent the first part of the ride with Phil and Pat Liggett – and bumped into them later

tough (he's little for his age and not at all into fist fighting with anyone other than his younger sister) but tough in the way he can keep going when other kids might be sobbing by the roadside. Clearly, he's built for long-distance cycling. I should imagine he has lots of sportives ahead of him. He thrives on the euphoria of keeping going. Mentally, miles don't phase him.

But these Peak District hills were something else. The distance he could cope with; the addition of the elevation was making this particular Challenge, well, challenging.

Having to get myself around the ride, and keep Josh's spirits up too, was mentally exhausting for me. I couldn't flake out. I couldn't be tired. I've done the Phil Liggett Challenge since the very first ride so I knew what was coming. I knew how steep the hills were going to get. Holme Moss was just the beginning.

At the top of a mist-shrouded

Holme Moss summit we talked with Phil and Pat and decided it would be fruitless to try and ride together. Josh could never keep up on the descents. Phil is a demon descender and Pat is no slouch. We would ride the ride at our own pace. I suspect Josh had struggled on Holme Moss because he was trying to keep up with Phil and Pat. Relieved of that self-imposed burden, he coped better.

We let Phil and Pat ride off, thinking we'd not see them again until the end. However, this is Phil's signature ride and at the rest stops he spends extra time chatting to Challenge riders. At the lunch stop in Edale we caught up with the Liggetts, and stopped for a drink. We were such tail-enders there were no meals left at the 'official' lunch spot so we rode on to the next open cafe, in Hope. At this point in the ride it's just a few miles back to the finish, always a fillip.

But there's one last climb, the ascent from Ladybower Reservoir on the wonderfully named but awfully traffic-snarled Snake Road. By now my older bones were starting to creak. Naturally, Josh was able to fly up the hills, safe in the knowledge the ride was nearly over. I finished a nervous wreck; Josh was his bouncy, full-of-energy self within moments of climbing off his bike.

### The next Challenge

I'd like to think I'll be the one shepherded around future sportives but it's more likely that Josh will soon leave me behind and do the sort of Phil Liggett Challenge time I can only now dream about. He may have found parts of the 2010 event to be tougher than he expected but that didn't stop him requesting we do another long ride ASAP.

Josh wasn't put off cycling by such a tough ride, he was spurred on by it. Children are stronger than they look, able to push themselves harder than most parents imagine. Kids in cars, parents in helicopters, that's the greater danger. Got children? Let them do some big rides. Train together to tackle a sportive.

If it's the Phil Liggett Challenge you plump for, watch out for the wheezing creak on Holme Moss being egged on a wiry kid called Josh: 'Come on, dad, you're nearly at the top, you can do it!'

## CTC's sportive series [www.ctcchallengerides.co.uk](http://www.ctcchallengerides.co.uk)

There are five events in the 2011 CTC Challenge Ride and Sportive series, including the well-established Phil Liggett and Ron Kitching rides. The three new rides will be based in Dorset, Surrey, and Worcestershire.

Each event will have a choice of 100km or 150km routes, apart from the shorter Dorset event, and will have sportive-level organisation and infrastructure. Feed stops and electronic timing will be available as well as motorbike outriders, cycle mechanics, even a broom wagon.

CTC have appointed sportive organisers Wheels in Wheels Events,

who orchestrate the Forest of Dean Spring Classic, the Mark Webber Ride to the Horns, and four other UK sportives. Local CTC groups will be encouraged to advise on routing and there will be a prize for the best suggested café stop of the series.

All events will be shot by pro photographer Phil O'Connor, whose pictures illustrate this article, and the pictures will be available to buy online.

You will be able to enter online at [ctcchallengerides.co.uk](http://ctcchallengerides.co.uk) or by post. Entry costs £17 for CTC members and £27 for non-members. Any four riders can enter as a team for £60.

### 1. Dorset CTC Challenge Ride and Sportive Blandford Forum, Dorset, 27th February

A new event this year, offering 50- and 75-mile options, this ride will take in the Jurassic coast and plenty of countryside and climbs. Showers and hot food are available for this early season starter.

### 3. Ron Kitching CTC Challenge Ride and Sportive York, 25th June

Ron Kitching was a star racing man, the founder of a cycling equipment empire, and a key supporter of the CTC York Rally. The route sets off from the York Cycle Show, heading out across the Howardian Hills and the North

York Moors, and includes some killer climbs – including an option to ride the 33% slope of Rosedale Chimney.

### 4. Phil Liggett CTC Challenge Ride and Sportive Sheffield, South Yorkshire, 7th August

Cycling commentator and ex-CTC President

Phil Liggett invites you to tackle the Peak District roads he used to send racers over when he was the race director for the Milk Race. The route includes the climbs of Holme Moss, Winnats Pass and Monsal Head, and a larger start and finish point has been added for 2011. All finishers will receive a special edition Phil Liggett cycling cap.

### 2. Guildford CTC Challenge Ride and Sportive Guildford, Surrey, 29th May

This new Bank Holiday event will take riders from CTC's Guildford office southwest through Surrey's rolling countryside. It will take in popular cycling areas like Farnham, Alton, and the Devil's Punch Bowl.

### 5. Worcester CTC Challenge Ride and Sportive Worcester, Worcestershire, 16th October

Starting and finishing at Worcester racecourse, the route takes in Stanhope Bank and Tenbury Wells, and then makes a short excursion into Shropshire before returning to Worcestershire for the optional climb of Wynnatt's Way (a 25% monster).

