

Caren Hartley

Thousands of cyclists join CTC each year. Dan Joyce asked one of them, **Caren Hartley**, for her views on cycling and CTC

Caren's reasons for joining CTC recently were straightforward. 'I had an accident last year on my bike,' she says, 'and it got me thinking about insurance. A friend of mine is a CTC member and she told me about it. It wasn't too expensive to join and it meant I'd be doing something to support an organisation that's working to make cycling better in the UK.'

CTC's heritage appealed to her as well, she says. 'I love the fact that I belong to a club with such a history. I really enjoyed being in my vintage CTC jersey at L'Eroica Britannia this summer [see p10], where the history of cycling was such a strong theme. Having "Since 1878" on my sleeve was a great talking point.

'It was the first time I've done any cycling in the Peak District. It was a great route, and such stunning scenery I had to keep reminding myself I was in the UK. I was surprised to be one of the few female riders on the day, and it seemed to shock people that I was riding the 50-mile event.'

Caren is a keen road cyclist, however, and had no problem with the Peak District hills. The month before L'Eroica, she'd spent a week in Provence. 'The highlight was climbing Mont Ventoux. I was nervous as the closest I'd been to cycling up a mountain was Swains Lane in London! But the ascent was amazing. We enjoyed it so much we rode up it again in the afternoon!'

It was commuting in London that originally turned her into a cyclist, she says. 'I was a student and had no money for a bus pass. It



● Caren (centre) at L'Eroica Britannia with friends Jeani Gwiazdowski (left) and Kelly Miller (right)

"I love working with metal. Making jewellery and framebuilding uses a lot of the same skills – it's just that the scale is different!"

wasn't long before I got the bug.'

Caren ranks her Mercian as her favourite bike. That could soon change as she's building a bike of her own. When the Hartley Cycle is finished, it will be adorned with one of Caren's own head badges. She's been making them for a while and even runs courses in how to do it.

'I was chatting with Andrew from The Bicycle Academy and he was telling me how hard it is to find anyone who makes bespoke head badges. I thought "I could do that". It's basically jewellery for bikes – and I'm a jeweller and silversmith.

'I love working with metal. Making jewellery and framebuilding uses a lot of the same skills – it's just that the scale is different!'

'I've realised how challenging it is as a woman to find the type of bike I want to ride



● Caren getting ready for L'Eroica's 50-mile route through the Peak District

in a geometry that fits – unless you want it in pink. Most road bikes are made for men and then shoe-horned to fit a woman. I think this is fundamentally wrong. Building bespoke frames gives you a chance to start with a near perfect fit and tweak from there.'

In terms of attracting new members to CTC, Caren reckons that it's important to have a shop window at events like L'Eroica Britannia. But she also has a message about image: 'I think that CTC's branding can be off-putting to younger members; it feels quite dated and dry, and doesn't give any insight into the fantastic history of the organisation. When I saw the original 1878 winged wheel logo, I thought: "Why aren't CTC using this? It's perfect!"' ●

For details about Caren's head badge courses, see madebyore.com

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