
WHERE: London and Surrey
START/FINISH: Olympic Park, Stratford/The Mall, London
DISTANCE: 100 miles (shortened to 86 miles)
PICTURES: Alamy and CTC



GREAT RIDES

TAKING LONDON BY STORM

*Expecting August sunshine, CTC's **Matt Mallinder** joined 21,000 fellow cyclists to ride the Prudential RideLondon Surrey 100 sportive*

Epic is a word that tabloids and MAMILs love, and one I wouldn't normally use to describe a leisurely sportive. We weren't breaking new trails in the Urals. This was cycling at its most pampered: closed roads, marshals, and refreshment stops. We were chaperoned past London landmarks and through the quaint lanes of the Surrey Hills before returning to finish outside Buckingham Palace. Yet it was epic – because of Hurricane Bertha.

Now in its second year, the RideLondon weekend celebrates cycling and cycle sport. There's a range of events. The FreeCycle ride on the Saturday sees Central London closed to motor traffic from Green Park to Tower Hill. Sixty thousand cyclists become kings of the road. On the Saturday evening, there's the London Grand Prix criterium for Europe's best female professionals. On the Sunday afternoon, it's the men's elite road race: the Surrey Classic.

The RideLondon Surrey 100 sportive, meanwhile, takes place on the Sunday morning. Wannabe racers logging their rides on Strava can compare themselves to the pros in the afternoon. But it's not all MAMILs and carbon bling. Like the London Marathon, organised by the same people, it allows ordinary cyclists like you and me to set a personal or fundraising challenge.

Downpours and punctures

After Saturday's FreeCyclers enjoyed record temperatures, I awoke to pre-dawn drizzle on Sunday. My scheduled start was 6:40am.

By 6am, drizzle had become a monsoon. Fellow Team CTC riders were unidentifiable beneath rain capes and emergency gilets made from bin bags. Somewhere out there in the curtains of water were CTC's CEO Paul Tuohy and Chair David Cox, along with 50 other CTC riders.

On the start line, the annoyingly cheerful announcer (no doubt dry in some Portakabin) let us know that the scheduled 100 mile route had been cut to 86 miles. Leith Hill and Box Hill had been removed for our safety. Whilst initially disappointing, the prospect of an hour's less riding in the rain became a source of succour as I forded streams and flooded roads later on.

The hooter sounded. Our starting group rolled out on time during a brief respite in the rain. The dual carriageway of the A12 whizzed us towards Canary Wharf and under the Blackwall Tunnel.

The rifle-shot sound of punctures began early: victims lined the route, frantically pumping up spare tubes. Later, I passed one guy with puncture repair kit in hand, vainly applying glue while the rain came down in stair rods. I felt sorry for him – but not sorry enough to give him my spare innertubes.

Thinking in the rain

The route flowed well on fast roads. Soon the Tower of London came into sight. Riders whistled past: faster cyclists with later start times. I settled in, riding at my own pace. The first 20 miles – via Trafalgar Square, past Harrods and out towards the Fuller's



CTC volunteers ALL FOR ONE, ONE FOR ALL

› CTC cyclists worked hard to assist and encourage more people to take up cycling during RideLondon.

● Not only did Team CTC ride the Surrey 100 on the Sunday, 100 CTC volunteers braved the weather to marshal the route and man food stops.

● £12,500 was raised by Team CTC for CTC.

● As part of the FreeCycle event, CTC was the official Dr Bike provider, manning five maintenance stations along the route. Over 150 CTC volunteers fixed a record 2,000 bikes.

● CTC's Big Lottery All Inclusive cycling project welcomed hundreds of able and disabled cyclists to try out modified cycles – hand cranked, side-by-side tandems and recumbents in a special try-out area in Green Park.

Many thanks to everyone who helped. To donate, ride, or to get involved next, visit ctc.org.uk/RideLondon.

- **Near right** Saturday saw hundreds of test rides on the inclusive cycling bikes in Green Park
- **Far right** After almost six soggy hours, CTC's Matt Mallinder crosses the finish line



Fact File: RIDELONDON SURREY 100 SPORTIVE

ROUTE: Stratford to the Mall via Central London, Kingston, Weybridge, Guildford, Dorking, Esher, Kingston, Wimbledon, Putney, The Mall

WHEN: 10 August 2014

HOW MUCH: £100, including CTC cycling jersey

DISTANCE: 100 miles (shortened to 86 miles)

TERRAIN: 40% flattish, 30% climbing, 30% rolling hills

CONDITIONS: Abysmal.

START/FINISH: Olympic Park, Stratford/
The Mall, London

MATT'S RIDE BY NUMBERS: 3.30am alarm call; 86 miles covered; 3 bananas consumed; 4 bits of Soreen enjoyed; 1 packet of Haribos scoffed; 1 tonne of water dropped on me; 5 hr 45 min of cycling; £315 raised; and zero punctures.

I'M GLAD I HAD: New tyres, Soreen fruit loaf, mudguards

I WISH I'D HAD: Helmet cam, clear glasses, sense of humour

FURTHER INFO: ctc.org.uk/RideLondon, prudentialRideLondon.co.uk

ROUTE MAP: bit.ly/1iiiWhE

SURREY 100 ROUTE



“THE RIFLE-SHOT SOUND OF PUNCTURES BEGAN EARLY: VICTIMS LINED THE ROUTE, FRANTICALLY PUMPING UP SPARE TUBES”

» Brewery towards Richmond Park – were ticked off at a good pace. At the first food stop in Bushy Park, I took on board fig rolls and bananas for later. I was struck by how little time it took – less than an hour – to get from the congestion of Central London to the tranquillity of Richmond Park. No wonder Saturday mornings see hundreds of cyclists here. As we passed through Kingston, the crowds had already started to mass. They slapped advertising boards and whooped encouragement. It was welcome motivation as we trudged onwards to Walton and Weybridge. The roads were waterlogged. Crossing the M25 in Byfleet, the wind almost knocked me sideways. But it shook off my short-lived malaise. I was wet through, but once you're soaked you can't get any wetter.

Splashing through Surrey

Riding through Ripley – home to the famous Ripley cycle jumble and referenced in HG Wells's cycling odyssey, *Wheels of Chance* – I felt revived. I stopped to eat some malt loaf and to check that my car key and phone were still wrapped in their waterproof bag. At the roadside, I was amazed at the constant

stream of cyclists. When you're riding, you travel in a bubble with just a few others.

Climbing up to Newlands Corner, the halfway point, I passed the place I'd got married. It gave me a warm glow as I cycled up a road that had become a stream. The amount of water was biblical. Hundreds of cyclists were trying to take shelter under a tiny awning. It made me chuckle. I bumped into Stuart Orr, a fellow Team CTC rider, and we swapped war stories before going our separate ways.

Ordinarily the view from Newlands Corner is great, with vistas over the South Downs. There's a decent tea shop too, and the place is a Mecca for Sunday cyclists. The next few villages – Shere, Gomshall, and Abinger Hammer – are also well worth visiting. At this point, the original route would have taken off via Holmbury St Mary to Leith Hill. Leith Hill from the south is a tough, bottom gear climb with many false summits. Given the weather, I wasn't sorry to miss it.

Past Dorking, our second shortcut took us towards Leatherhead instead of up Box Hill. Box Hill is like a little Alpine pass, complete with zig-zag corners. It was a key obstacle in the 2012 Olympic road race. To



the ire of the locals, it has become iconic and attracts club cyclists from miles around.

Steaming home

Descending the hills, we entered the stockbroker belt closer to London. Fords across roads were swollen with rain. Riders were puncturing all over the place. At least 50 lined the route in Esher, innertubes in hand. I was counting my lucky stars that I had fitted new tyres the previous evening.

I was buoyed by vocal crowds in Kingston and the fact that, after Wimbledon Hill, it was just ten miles to the finish. Soon the Thames was in sight. I felt like a Tour de France rider spotting the Eiffel Tower after three weeks of racing. I paused at the Houses of Parliament a mile from the end to take off my rain jacket, determined that my finishing photo would show my CTC jersey. I even mustered a charge for the line. As I rolled up outside Buckingham Palace to collect my finisher's medal, the sun came out – either in celebration, or in mockery perhaps. ●

● **Top**
Cyclists on The Embankment approaching Big Ben as they take part in Saturday's FreeCycle event

● **Below**
Box Hill is a nice ride on a dry day. It was cut from the RideLondon Surrey 100 due to the weather and the wet roads

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