

Great Rides

CHARGING AROUND THE WORLD

Veteran adventurer **Nick Sanders** has become the first person to cycle around the world on an e-bike. Here's how his 19,000-mile journey unfolded

There are two basic mistakes you can make with any cycling adventure: not starting and not going all the way. Everything else – the planning, any trepidation, the reason for going – quickly falls into place.

Pedalling away from the familiar daily tumult, I left behind schedules, social clamour, my dear wife and the whole damn business of regular living. I escaped along bridleways that skirted fields, passing hidden castles in forests, riding on pencil-thin backroads and remote gravel tracks. I was two stone overweight, 66 years old and cycling around the world on an electric bike.

The beautiful thing about cycling is its simplicity and flexibility. Hardly any tools other than a spanner, innertubes and glue. Hard-wearing tyres. A small camera. A map app on my mobile phone. And, on this journey, a spare battery for my e-bike.

EUROPEAN CYCLE PATHS AND PASSES

In an attempt to get fitter, I'd ridden 7,000km from Nordkapp to Tarifa. But age makes you leaky and built-up stamina rapidly drains away. As a young man I would literally race across each continent. Now, heaving up the Bwlch y Groes in mountainous Welsh countryside, en route to Athens, my mind was focused on the simple details in front of me, such as the tiny colonising plants pimpling through stones and dirt. The destination seemed less important; the tableaux of nature more so.

The start of any journey matters in that small things set the tempo. I was alone with the sound from my tyres,



NICK SANDERS

In 1981 Nick cycled around the world in a then record time of 138 days. In 1985 he did it again – in 79 days, averaging 171 miles a day. He holds the record for cycling around the coast of Britain in 22 days. Nick was the first person to cycle to the source of the Nile and the length of South America, and he's cycled across the Sahara and through Asia.

my own heartbeat, the sweat and ache of my body, patterns of breath, small noises from the landscape.

I rode onward across the polders of Holland, pushing through the flatlands and onto the Flanders Fields of Belgium. I cycled along canal towpaths and river banks; there were shiny fruits on trees and many flowers along the Rivers Main and Danube. I traversed old motoring passes through Switzerland, then climbed easily up the Grossglockner mountain road to emerge in a Tyrolean landscape plucked from a fairytale.

Cycling in the sunshine feeling free, the world was rich with possibility. I was riding all day, stamping on the pedals to ride a distance that could be covered in an hour or two by car. But it was equally important to phone home regularly and send notices from the deep interior of the journey. I wanted to return home as easily as I'd left. "I was surprised, as always," wrote Jack Kerouac in his seminal beat book *On the Road*, "by how easy the act of leaving was, and how good it felt."

I didn't have much of a plan but an imperative in everyone's life begins when the dead people you know outnumber the living. That is when I had decided to go.

I rode down the Alps and onto the plains of Lombardy in the dead of night, contrasting the serenity of a castle I'd seen in the dark with the thrusting din of the highway – a highway I was soon able to escape. Old railway routes have been converted to cycleways such as the Via Verde della Costa dei Trabocchi down Italy's Adriatic Coast, where every few

