



To boldly ride

Audax – Latin for bold – is the original non-competitive, long-distance cycling discipline. On Audax UK's 50th anniversary, **Liam FitzPatrick, Anne Young, Mark Moroney** and **Nadia Kerr** explain what it means to them

fare for many long-distance cycling fans, recent years have seen rising interest in rides of 50, 100 and 200km.

Audax UK's roots and routes

It's a far cry from when the organisation was first mooted in the CTC magazine 50 years ago. In 1976, 16 long-distance enthusiasts came together to put on events to enable people to qualify for the oldest cycling ride in the world: the 1,200km Paris Brest Paris (PBP), which dates back to 1891. Initially PBP was a race, but amateurs were later allowed in a separate time-limited event that was, and still is, governed by Audax Club Parisien.

The focus on PBP by these original Audax UK member resulted in longer-distance qualifying rides that crossed regions and almost always entailed riding through the night – as opposed to my summer daytime excursion into Kent. But the fiercely protected, non-competitive ethos has been a constant regardless of ride length. Whether it's a 60-mile tour of cake shops or a 600km battle up and down the length of Wales, there are set maximum and minimum times. With racing strictly banned, the format encourages collaboration. Long-lasting friendships are forged at café stops and at the roadside mending punctures.

Importantly, Audax UK provides challenges to match most tastes, without the need to publish finish

times or announce winners. Some riders aim to complete a Super Randonneur series of rides covering 200, 300, 400 and 600km in one year. Others are simply glad to test themselves over 50 or 100km, or to set out to sample a

fresh route or catch up with friends. Audax UK's Randonneur Round the Year programme has become a popular way to commit to completing 12 consecutive monthly 200km rides. For most people, though, the test is very often about mental

Liam FitzPatrick

IF I'M HONEST, the first few miles were fairly dull. We had to get out of London on suburban streets that were busy even in the early morning of a July Saturday. But then we hit Kent. Dropping down from Higham and heading towards the Isle of Grain, the countryside opened up. We found ourselves on unfamiliar, sun-dappled lanes. And when we reached our first check-in at the beach, we were met with the sight of the Essex coast across the water and home-baked cakes from the ride organiser.

That event was The Way to the Sea, a 200km audax that I rode in 2022. I'd been doing audaxes for nearly 20 years at that point, and it was typical of the events I had tackled before and since. It showcased a route I would never have found on my own. We looped around the remote Kentish marshlands, where Dickens's terrified

Main photo: Riders on the Bryan Chapman 600, which runs from Chepstow to Menai Bridge and back

Pip had met the escaped the convict Magwitch. We made it to the Isle of Sheppey and then headed home along shaded roads once trodden by pilgrims. Finally, we slipped into London for a beer by the riverside at the old Greenwich Naval College.

At a little over 120 miles, that ride was one of the shorter ones in the Audax UK calendar. But regardless of ride length, the opportunity for entrants to explore new terrain is probably one of the reasons why more than 17,500 individual rides (clocking up over 3.5 million miles) were validated last year by the governing body for the sport, Audax UK

It reflects both the growing popularity of audax and the range of challenges it offers. While rides of 300, 400 and 600km are the staple

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