

Mark Moroney

I FIRST CAME TO audax riding in 1989 with the Toronto Randonneurs when I was looking for a way to expand my riding capabilities. The randonneurs were an eager bunch who regularly rode 150, 200 and 300km from the heart of the Toronto metropolis into the surrounding Ontario countryside. They weren't racers but they enjoyed riding their bikes at pace and for long distances. Their enthusiasm for the open road made for great company and, although I was helping to bring up a young family, I managed to fit in several audax adventures with them.

Our family decided to move back to my native Ireland in early 1991. Despite being occupied with settling in, the allure of the 1991 edition of the jewel of the audaxing crown, Paris Brest Paris, was too much to pass up. I got the all clear to attempt this massive challenge and, with qualifying rides of 200, 300, 400 and 600km under my belt, headed to France with a small group of Audax Ireland riders. That first PBP was a real test, but the tremendous support of the French people, the superb scenery and the camaraderie of the riders made for a marvellous adventure. I was sold.

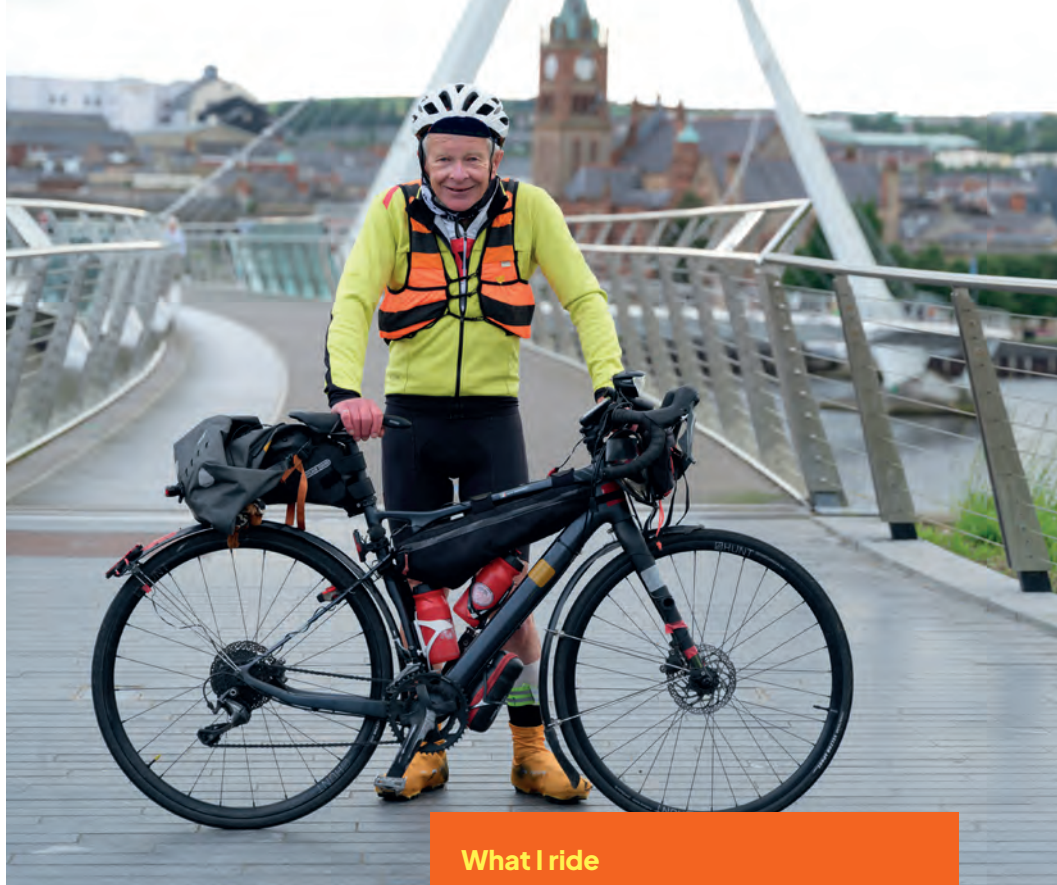
After I retired in 2015, I decided that to celebrate I would again tackle PBP. I stepped up my training, although my qualification rides were completed at a slower pace than in my earlier years. My fitness wasn't helped by a leg wound I had received from a vicious dog during a 2014 bike race. However, I made it to the start. Despite finishing outside the allocated time, I had some marvellous adventures. I rode with a non-English-speaking Brazilian for two

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days, slept on a village park bench, and got hopelessly lost.

Audax is addictive. Every ride is an adventure, a challenge both mentally and physically. It's satisfying to 'make the time', but more often it is who you meet, the beauty of the countryside and simply finishing that makes everything worthwhile.

Time failure in events, although frustrating, has given me great memories. In 2017 I completed the UK flagship event, London Edinburgh London (LEL) despite beating into gale-force winds in the Fens of Lincolnshire. In 2022 I abandoned LEL after suffering painful



What I ride

Bike: GT Grade gravel with 46–30 10–speed chainset and 11–34 cassette. Equipped with SON dynamo hub and lights, Ortlieb seatpack, Restrap frame bag and a front bar roll.

Long-ride essentials

- Aluminium-foil space blanket
- GPS system and a spare
- Power bank
- Head torch
- Rubber gloves (for warmth and for breakdowns)
- 10–speed chain link
- Little Canuck doll for support on a cold night!

Clockwise from top: Mark at the Peace Bridge, Derry/Londonderry. On the Solstice Spring audax in Warwickshire. Mark's GT Grade, audax ready

saddle sores outside Malton but was rescued by a generous English couple who transferred my bike on top of their tent box to the nearest train station.

I am now well into my 70s, but my love for long-distance cycling hasn't diminished. My speed has dipped and my targets are more realistic now, but the allure of the open road, a new challenge and a desire to explore with like-minded people keeps me well motivated.

Last year I completed the TransAtlanticWay from Cork to Derry, enjoying beautiful countryside, quiet roads, and enthusiastic, friendly fellow riders from all over the world. I was the oldest finisher. I didn't set any records, but I had a lot of fun and overcame some personal challenges.

Mark blogs about his adventures at: markslevel2coachingadventure.co.uk

