

## 2009 - A novice year in Audax for Pete Hutchinson

It all started with the Windrush Winter Warm up from South Cerney where I received a warm welcome from our president and bemused looks from the organiser. Apparently there are two of me! The ride was a gentle 100k if one took the right route. I rode early on with Neville but youthful enthusiasm took me up the road ahead. My next mistake was to get to a turning only to find the road closed. Obediently I continued on the open road only to end up doing an extra 15k and a very big hill. About two thirds of the way around there was a pub stop with a pasta lunch. This was another error as it set like concrete in my legs. So in the end I only just beat Neville home!

In February, I walked up Bushcombe Lane with a few other souls for the pleasures of the Cotswold Corker. There was still snow on the ground and nearer Far Oakridge one had to stick to the one or other car tyre track! The culinary delights of the pub there were avoided and somehow I made it back to HQ to be welcomed by Mark & Anne Brazier looking remarkably fresh.

The Cheltenham Flyer was my first 200k. We had a fine day and I took it steadily to make sure I didn't get lost and end up doing even more. Several other Wheelers took part and, I think, worked as a group and were miles ahead of me. I got back just in time to make it to the Club Presentation night.

After a trip to Cornwall to do the North Cornwall Tor Sportive my next audax was a 300k from Droitwich to Box near Bath. Only four of us did this ride and I entered it blissfully ignorant of the fact that it was considered one of the toughest 300k rides around. The route starts pleasantly taking the lanes out of the back of Droitwich around Bredon Hill and over to Winchcombe. Then the fun started with Corndean Lane. By now I had teamed up with a very helpful and experienced audaxer, Roy Bishop, without whose help I would not have made it round in time, if at all. Initially I was way ahead of him up the hills as he dropped into a "micro" gear and span up. However by the time we left Dursley and had to ascend a 25% climb he was still riding and I was walking. The 100k from Winchcombe to Castle Coombe earned us 2 Audax Altitude Award points and overall there were 4240m of climbing.

It was a hard ride but took us through some stunning country and fortunately we had good weather to enjoy it. I learned a lot and soon after had my bike rebuilt going from a compact 50/34 to a 48/36/24 chain set. This has been a good investment as I am able to stay in the 36 most of the time, reserving the 24 those desperate moments! Before on club runs I was switching between the 34 and 50 rings frequently. I have now invested in a Lumicycle LED3 light so late finishes will be much easier as it is like having a car headlight.

I did several more audax rides later in the season. The Heart of England 200k from Hampton in Arden rides all around Birmingham and highlights the variety on the countryside surrounding our second city. The Elan & Ystwyth 200k was a tough 3.75 AAA point ride from Gladestry nr Kington to Aberystwyth. The first 80k was mostly into a strong head wind and rain that I found really tiring

but even so the scenery was worth it. Just one problem with the rain, it made my brakes less than best for the 25% descent to a level crossing with no barriers ... scary.

Ray Hemming and I did the Winchcombe 100k, which as far as I am concerned included a section of "off-road", not a problem for Ray though. I did the Bix Hilly 100k through the Chiltern Hills, which I did not realise were so beautiful. The Red Kites were as common as crows!

Finally to finish my season and get over my target of 12 Audax Altitude Award points I undertook the Cotswold Corker again as a permanent ride. This meant starting in Cheltenham at a bank ATM machine and finishing there so it was a bit longer and in places the route was slightly different but I still had all the "fun" bits. It took a little longer as I had to stop more often to obtain ATM vouchers or shop receipts to prove passage. Bushcombe Lane still defeated me, though I rode much further up it than in February, but I managed Sudeley (or Round Hill I think it should be called) without getting off.

So I finished the season having done 10 Audax UK rides, covering 1,628k and climbing 17,950 metres and that doesn't include the Heart of England and Cider with Rosie rides for which the climbing is not recorded. How high is Everest?

Unfortunately, I am possibly going to have to work more weekends this year so I don't know if I will be able to do so much but I would like to try a 400k if I think I am fit enough and can get my head around riding right through the night.

Pete Hutchinson  
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