



## Preparation and training

While fun rides of this nature are designed for those of average fitness, they are a challenge and we therefore recommend that all riders undertake some training beforehand. This doesn't mean overexerting yourself. The best course is regular and gentle training, keeping within your ability range and gradually building up both your fitness, and your confidence. This will help you to get the most out of the ride.

Below you'll find some suggestions to assist you in preparing for this cycle ride. Remember, everyone is different and you should feel free to adapt these suggestions to fit your individual needs and capacities. Don't attempt too much too soon and if you have an existing medical condition you should always seek advice from your doctor before embarking on any program of exercise.

Any kind of cycle ride requires a degree of endurance, leg strength and aerobic fitness (not to mention the ability to sit on a bicycle saddle for a long time, ouch!). All of these can be improved over time with continued exercise. But, first things first, it's best to check over your bike and make sure that it's up to the job before you start...

## How to prepare your bike

- The chain should be clean and lubricated (not over-greased) and definitely not rusty.
- Brake cables should be in good condition and moving smoothly through the cable-sheaths.
- The brake-shoes should neither be worn nor rubbing on the rim of the wheel as it turns.
- Your gears should be set up so that you can change gear smoothly without the chain slipping or jumping off the cogs of the cassette (on the back wheel) or chain set (where the pedals are).
- Tyres should be correctly inflated and the tread not worn or bald. Also, knobbly mountain tyres on road surfaces creates more rolling resistance – fitting road or intermediate tyres will make riding easier.
- Saddle height is the most important consideration in ensuring comfort over the duration of a ride: too low and you'll wear yourself out quicker and get a lot of knee pain, too high and you'll be overextending your leg muscles. To set the height of your saddle correctly: when stationary, position the heel of your foot on the pedal with your leg fully extended – this will ensure that when pedalling you'll always have a slight bend in your knee at the furthest extension. (You should be on tiptoes when seated stationary in the saddle).
- The correct handlebar height is also important in ensuring your comfort over an extended period, and preventing both lower back and neck pain. Setting the correct position depends

on the type of bike and personal preference, back flexibility, and arm length. Don't be afraid to try different positions to find what's best for you, but as a rule of thumb:

- For hybrid and mountain bikes a more upright position is best, with the handlebars positioned above the level of the saddle (e.g. 2" - 4")
- Road ('racing') bikes are generally set up with their handlebars positioned a standard 2" below the saddle but may be anything up to 4" below the saddle. However there has been a recent move toward setting the handlebar level with the saddle, which is more comfortable for most riders.

## How to train

- Start your training by keeping it simple. If you can, try cycling to work one or two days a week. Perhaps leave the house a little earlier than usual and take a longer route.
- Always start cycling slowly to warm up your muscles. Vary your route to keep things interesting and look for some hills to get experience of gear changing, and to develop endurance.
- Learn to choose the right gears. For example, too low on the flat and you'll find yourself pedalling frantically and wasting energy. Try to change gear going too slowly up a steep hill and the chain can come off.
- As your endurance and confidence grows, plan longer rides at weekends, increasing the distance as you get nearer the date of the ride itself.
- Ride with friends to give each other moral support. It also helps to pace yourself against others.
- Stretches and warm-ups prior to and after riding stretch muscles and help prevent cramp and stiffness. If you use a gym where there's a personal trainer, ask for some advice about suitable stretches.
- Training for a ride doesn't have to be just about cycling. Swimming, running, yoga, etc. all develop muscle strength, cardio-vascular capacity, suppleness and all-round fitness.
- Remember, cycling uses energy. Take 'energy foods' (bananas, nuts, fruit etc.), and plenty of fluid with you.
- Following this kind of training program should be sufficient for riders taking part in low to intermediate distance (up to 70 mile) rides. If you can cycle for a full hour without getting out of breath, you're pretty much there.
- As your cycling gets easier, pick up your speed for stretches of the route or look for greater climbs, which leave you a bit out of breath at the top.
- Try a longer ride of two hours at the weekend, if you can. Or cycle two hours at a time every other day, resting on the intervening days. Step up your training in this way but be careful not to push yourself too hard, and make sure you warm up properly and stretch afterwards.
- Be prepared. Remember to carry a puncture repair kit and pump with you (having learnt how to use them), along with a small medical kit, cycling helmet, sun cream, waterproofs, mobile and some money.
- And lastly, remember to enjoy it!