

Crackpot 1000, a hill too far - Ivo Meisen

Until the Crackpot I had finished all the audax rides I participated in. So I set out towards Poole not even considering packing. After all, I had followed my traditional preparation, and prepared my bike for some hills. I installed a ultra-low gear of 30x23, about unusable over here in the Dutch hills. I even took some extra time off, so that I could leisurely bike to the start. But reality proved different. Shawn Shaw now has the reputation over here that he is the only route-designer who can force me to retirement.



Arriving in Poole at the Shaw-residence I was immediately struck by the quality of organisation. Food was available at excessive levels, and the route was perfectly visible on a map.



Many riders came early, to have a good time discussing the ride itself, or catch some extra sleep as Dave Lewis did.



But after some waiting and picture-taking, we all set out for the first, flat kilometres of the Crackpot.

The first kilometres were the usual mad-dash, with the only trike-recumbent functioning as welcome shelter (Peter Marshall, front right)



After several kilometres common sense prevailed (except for the leading group) and we scaled back to a leisurely ride enjoying the sunset. (Ian Hennessey and



Before midnight we could enjoy one of Shawn's known controls, a village hall at Halstock. Many of us stayed a lot longer here than planned, enjoying the usual products of British 'haute cuisine'.



I resumed the ride, together with Chris Avery and David ... in this way I could translate Shawn's route instructions to real life. Riding together with Chris always makes you sure of a talkative ride. I was still a bit puzzled by David's choice of tackling the Crackpot with a mountain bike, little did I know by then of the true character of the Crackpot ...



The early morning control at Minehead was used by some as a venue for a kip (Dai Harris). We even did meet Shawn again, who had been blasting off with fast guys like Jason, Alan and Steve.

Since I discovered a popped spoke while setting out from Minehead, I drifted to the tailgroup. But I was soon to sense what the Crackpot really meant as we entered the Exmoor National Park; stunning scenery and very hard work.



After a while four of us banded together through Exmoor, Jamie, Dai, Dave and myself; a truly non-English group riding through south-east England. Together we arrived at the secret control; a van parked in a lay-by.

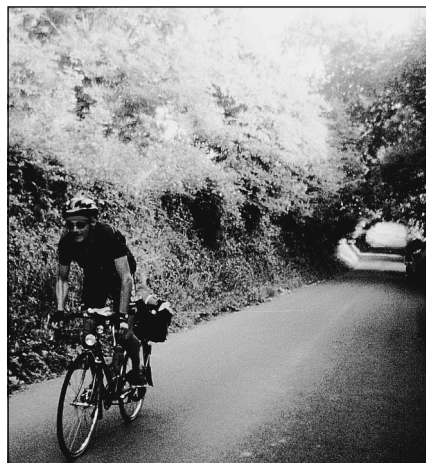


After a while Dai (above) and I resumed together. As Murphy's law predicts, the same spoke popped again, and I punctured. So now it was Dai's turn to help me fixing, just like I helped him fix his light during the Edinburgh London. But worse things were to come. Descending to the Bovey Tracey control, on a 25% descent, my front tyre exploded. Somehow I managed to keep my bike upright, evading a wall and only brushing some hedges. Being quite familiar with steep descents, Dai managed to evade me.

Fixing the tyre and cooling off my nerves caused me to fall back to a solo ride. The scenery was interesting enough though, so I didn't mind. My spokes didn't break anymore, probably because I bought a nice supply in Exeter.

I've had some knee-problems before so I resorted to walking several times, in fact I walked up more hills than I ever had

done before. But one hill proved to be a real knee-breaker, Broomfield Hill near Bridgewater. A sudden knee-pain forced me to quit cycling.



Even walking up was very difficult. Michael Friday (above) was only passing me very slowly. During the descent I caught up with him again.

My knee-pain increased all the way to Axminster. Since a couple of hours of sleep didn't improve the situation I decided to quit. Chris Avery also packed due to dehydration. We were joined by Shawn Shaw, who had run out of time due to an excessive amounts of punctures. So the three of us made our way back to Poole by train. Or rather the four of us, since PB Bear joined Chris in retiring.



After a day of behaving like a decent tourist in Poole, I went back to the finish to see the other riders coming in. Jean Shaw really proved that she had won the Helper's Cup, by filling us with excellent food. So now I must differentiate my earlier writings about British food.

Even though I failed this time, I do consider trying the Crackpot a second time, on my other bike, with lower gears, wider tyres, and probably a suspension-stem. The scenery was excellent, the roads quiet and the controls unbelievably good for such a small number of people. Quitting was necessary, since my knees haven't yet recovered from riding the Crackpot.



Crackpotting - Ian Hennessey

At the finish, Shawn had a look of quiet satisfaction on his face as he contemplated the list of DNF's. The fact that he, the organiser, was one of them seemed not to bother him at all. Pedals and Steve were nursing painful knees and vowing never to ride fixed again. Several people had come back for a second attempt, having been thwarted the first time:-

Keith Smallwood rode a steady and methodical event, worrying when he got ahead of his schedule. Anne Learmonth meticulously prepared for the ride with photocopied and marked maps for each section. Dave Lewis struggled with a bad stomach but recovered to finish comfortably. Dave Pilbeam chugged steadily round, determined to finish this time, which he did. Annemarie Manley arrived to help at the Axminster control some little time after it opened:-

"The only person I missed was fast man Jason. The fixed twins, with smiling Duncan and Secretary Ian were still feeding their faces. Next to arrive was our only lady entrant, in very good form. She only stopped to eat, and was soon on the road again, into the dark night, chasing Ian to Tor Hole. After her was a suffering Dave Lewis and Mr Happy, Andy Lander Stow, reported only to have continued because he had left his mobile phone behind and so had no means of calling the broom wagon.

Keith was followed by Devon points chaser, Dave Stevens, with Bournemouth's Brian Callow, on only his fifth Audax event. Dave Pilbeam looked pretty shot away, but he always does on long rides. Chris Avery seemed fresh as a daisy, but even daisies need their sleep.

Richard Harding looked like a man who had another 550km to ride. One man arrived determined not to continue, but disappeared before I could offer a lift back. Others failed to show, including Shawn and Peter 'repugnant' Marshall who had managed to unship his chain and mangle the rear changer on a hill start. He still feels that it should be possible to complete the Crackpot on a recumbent trike."

So what did Annemarie mean about "Mr Happy"? Here is Andy:-

"I found that the proposition of packing it in was getting more inviting as the first day dragged on. Stubbornness, dogged determination, stupidity, insanity, and a basic refusal to understand the situation that I found myself in: These are the prime attributes that helped me to complete a really hard ride." *To be continued*