

Chase the Sun - cycling 205 miles coast to coast across England between sun up and sun down

My CTS adventure only started on 27 May this year when I heard Dries De Bondt share the inspiration behind his stage win at the Giro D'Italia. He described how his motivation was driven by turning ambitions into goals and turning those goals into achievements. In my head the seed was sown and two days later I tested the legs by leaving at 4.45am and riding to the start of RideLondon. If I could manage the 30-mile ride there, the 100-mile ride round and end feeling strong then I reasoned I was just about ready to turn CTS from an ambition into a goal.

That done I contacted Olly who confirmed a late registration was possible. Onto the next major obstacle – securing accommodation near the end point. Less than 3 weeks before the event and all hotels, B&Bs and camping spots were long gone. I reached out on the Burnham community Facebook page and asked for help. Three kind souls very quickly offered me a bed for the night and I arranged to stay with a lady who lived less than a mile from the finish line. I booked a train ticket back home to Kent for me and my bike, and on 8 June, 10 days before the event, I confirmed my registration for CTS South.

I rode solo and self-supported and though I had a crib sheet of stops I planned to make and the latest time I would need to leave those stops to make sunset, my goal was simply to do the distance. My strategy was to plod, keep plodding and keep stops and faff to a minimum.

High points – I locked eyes with another solo female rider at the start. She rode behind me for the first two miles to see if our pace would be compatible. She then came alongside, introduced herself and from that moment we were a team. She fed me flapjack, I fed her malt loaf; she waited whilst I had a minor mechanical, I navigated when her Garmin died; we both readily adopted the 'plod, don't stop' philosophy. She was in a relay team with her husband so we rode miles 1-60 together and again miles 100-150. All those miles tripped by and were an absolute joy.

Low points – before lunch, back on my own, I hooked up with two lovely, welcoming kind riders out of Kingston for an hour. Their pace was a bit too high for me and eventually I was dropped. I had burned too many matches staying with them and was tired and solo for the 2 hours leading into Bramley. I couldn't keep my mind from dwelling on the task still ahead of me – I wasn't yet even half way and the urge to call it a day at lunch was fierce.

From Devises to the end I was solo again. This time, however, my mind was strong and though the rain and the wind and the cold made for the most uncomfortable cycling I have ever endured in my life, I knew I was going to make the end - I had no choice. There was a job to do and I put my head down and got on with it. Sharing this experience with the riders around me was a source of great strength. We were like a small tide of humanity, inching forward and united in bearing terrible conditions. I lost the navigation on my phone at the bottom of the gorge and my hands were too frozen and I was too feeble to press the buttons on my phone to right the problem. I followed a small group of twinkling red lights, pedalling as fast as I could the last hour to keep them in sight and to keep from freezing. We arrived in Burnham at 9pm – half an hour before sunset - to cheers from the amazing supporters.

I spent an hour in the pub waiting to get feeling in my fingers again and warming up over endless cups of hot tea then ventured back out to my overnight accommodation where my lovely host had a chicken casserole and hot water bottle waiting for me. It was the perfect end to the most incredible day. I started with an ambition. I made it a goal and somehow with the help and kindness of many many people I turned that goal into an achievement.

