



BOTTOM GEAR

The OFFICIAL Voice of the SWRC

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Editor

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EDITORIAL

Thanks to the overwhelming number of contributions I have received lately, this is probably one of the most action packed edition I have ever put together. With one or two items I have just had to 'carry over', I have decided to take this opportunity to bring our publication date forward by one month for all future editions. The reason for this change of dates is to make the publishing date more appropriate for the various notices throughout the year - e.g. you will get the annual programme of events early in February instead of March.

Before I sign off, I would like to apologise to contributors whose articles have not made this edition. This is no reflection of the quality of the material, but just a combination of the order in which various bits were received and whether they have a 'sell by date' i.e. who wants advanced notice of an event after it has happened? Please be assured that missing articles will be dropping through your letter box in two

months time. What have you got to look forward to? "Ask Gloria" a new regular column from our very own Agony Aunt and "Dirty Nuts on the Menu", an extract from the trials and tribulations of a group of cyclists/canoists on their journey from London to Sidney. I am also led to believe that a submission on the recent mountain bike trek across the Andes by several of our members is being tapped out on a keyboard some where in Kingston as we speak. On with the mag!

NEW MEMBERS

Since our last edition the following new members have joined our ranks:-

Liz Burnside
Graham Sykes (Tolworth)
Chris McDonnell (Wandsworth)
Mandy McDonnell (Wandsworth)
Mark Tucker (Bookham)
Brian Amsdell (Bookham)

We offer them a warm welcome.

E.Mail REQUEST

Next year, the committee are planning to remind you of up and coming club events via e.mail. If you want us to keep you in touch, please pass your e.mail address to Peter Wright at the club room or e.mail to peter.wright@bacs.co.uk

Winter 2000

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The ups and downs of the Raid Pyrenean 2000.

Saturday morning June 17.

Off on the charabanc from Victoria, destination Hendaye right in the south west corner of France on the border with Spain. On board with a selection of hardy (or foolhardy) souls all intent on cycling across the Pyrenees, courtesy of Graham Baxter Sporting Tours. Peter Sturton, Bill McCombe and myself were about to show the club colours to any sheep, goats, marmots, eagles and any other sort of wildlife who cared to look, as we wheezed past their usually quiet mountain homes. Along with us was club member Geoff Parsons and his triathlete friends, and a selection of riders from as far apart as Hull, Dublin, Cumbria and London. The coach driver is 'Steady Eddie', who seems to be able to not only drive for ever, but can manoeuvre the huge coach and trailer into impossible spaces I'd worry about in a mini. He's done these trips before and loves it, which is a good job really, considering the crazy mountain passes he'll have to go up and down. Respect!

Sunday 18th.

Watching France go by and arriving late afternoon at the Campanile Hotel in sizzling Hendaye. After getting our trusty steeds together, and a briefing on the route, most people go off for a little leg stretcher with Ruocco, our courier/guide/jolly redcoat and broom wagon driver. But in the great tradition of the SWRC, Bill, Peter and I go for a little refresher at the local bar to discuss the next day's ride. Reliably informed by the locals that there's been record temperatures in the region, I begin to wonder how it'll all go next day. Gulp, better have another drink.

Monday 19th. 160 km.

Off we go, the day dawns bright and warm and 24 (I think) multicoloured lycra clad cyclists of all shapes and sizes on all sorts of bikes, set off for the blue looming hills inland. Some guys have opted for "the complete tourist" style, with panniers, bar bag, spare tyres, tubes and spokes with a

selection of extra clothing and wet weather gear. Others, like us, are pretty minimalist - racing bike, spare tube and covered in factor 15, while most are somewhere in between. After about 10 miles I suffer my first tyre incident as my new skinny Vittoria squirms its way off the front rim. Up the first climb worthy of the name, Col St. Ignace, and noticing how some riders are already in the lowest gear of their triple chainsets...oo-er! On we go, further into the beginnings of the mountains proper and the biggest climb of the day, the Col d'Osquich. A half hour of extra effort and it's over. A hot little 'hors d'oeuvre' before the main course tomorrow. The roads are melting and sticky in the 35 degree heat and tar bubbles pop as we descend at speed and grind on to the evening's stop at Oloron, stopping for well earned cold drinks, coffee and nosh (and a couple of punctures) on the way. Phew, what a scorcher!

Tuesday 20th. 130 km.

Today is a bit of a tester. The Aubisque and the Tourmalet. This should be interesting! Setting off from Oloron, all is pleasant and cool until I decide to go whoopin' and a hollerin' down through some woods, seeing how far I could get without putting my brakes on. Bang! There goes my tyre again. This time it's a small rip in the tyre and a puncture. Mend it as best I can and off we go towards Laruns and the Aubisque. Here we go. As you turn off the main road at Laruns, the road goes up straightaway. Not too hard at first, but getting steeper as we go through Eaux Bonnes - a town built at an angle (not suitable for cricket, old boy!). Follow the signs and up it goes, but it's not too bad, even easy in places. But then it settles into fairly hard all the way up to Gourette - a winter ski town - through the main street, turn left and ouch... a hard slogging grind up to the top. Phew, made it! The sun is shining and the view is spectacular all the way round. Time for lunch. Bill arrives looking not quite so fresh as when we started, followed at a long interval by Peter, looking a bit the worse for wear and actually walking. Big cramp attack for

Peter means no more riding for him today. After borrowing and then replacing the front tyre, Bill and I descend from the Aubisque, go along a wonderful road along the side of the valley, up the small climb of the Soulor, down a great descent and on to Argeles Gazost. On we went with the road seeming to gradually tilt up and up, to Luz St. Saveur where it really did tilt, and me thinking "I'm not even at the Tourmalet yet, but this is hard work already". Stopping briefly at Barreges (last shop before the top) for some tonic water to keep the cramp at bay, Bill arrives just as I'm setting off. "See you at the top". Onwards and upwards. I have a 48/36 chainring with 13-26 on the back. I think I'm in the 23 as I round a corner and look up at the big bad mountain towering up ahead, and I can see the road as it twists round trying to find its way like a snake up a granite wall, dotted with little patches of white snow. Getting in a rhythm (by now in my bottom gear) I grind my way slowly up and round, stopping a couple of times to slap some snow down the back of my neck and on my burning arms and legs - I'm getting there. As I get higher I spot 'Steady Eddie' coming in the coach way down below. "Beat the coach...beat the coach..." the thought spurs me on as I'm nearing the summit. But 'Steady Eddie' has a much bigger engine than me, and overtakes with about 500m to go, followed by Peter in Ruocco's car shouting encouragement. Round the last bend, up the last really steep bit and I'm there. Now I know what it's like, I can only wonder at the Tour riders who conquer these climbs at such incredible speed - how do they do it? Time for a coke and a look round the famous cafe, full of photos of famous riders like Coppi, Bartoli, Anquetil, Hinault, Lemond, Indurain etc. all making their efforts on this famous mountain top. Plus lots of really old black & whites of way back when...complete with the old black bikes before gears were invented...now those guys really were heroes. I was waiting for Bill to arrive and starting to feel cold when up to the top comes Geoff Parsons, so we rode down together at breakneck speed (Geoff



says he touched 52mph) and into our hotel for the night at Ste. Marie de Campan. A few riders never made it to the top that day and much ferrying of bikes and bodies had to be sorted out before we all sat down to refuel.

Wednesday 21st. 160km

Never being one to get out of bed too soon, I always seem to be last, or nearly last, starting out in the mornings. No different today as I set off with Bill and Nat (from Hull Thursday RC). Oh no! Another puncture. This time I have to borrow a tube from Bill, and I also manage to leave my pump behind. I'm getting fed up with this and decide to replace tyres, tubes and rim tape and a new pump at the first possible opportunity. So, up the Col d'Aspin, which I can't remember, and on to the Col de Peyresourde. Not far up the climb we find Peter (now fit again) and one of the Irish guys lolling about in a cafe. The day is yet young, the weather is warm, the hill is steep. We join them. This is the best cafe stop yet, with a delightful girl serving us peaches, coffee and some mellow jazz to put us at ease. Unfortunately, all good things come to an end, so when her boyfriend arrived back we reluctantly made a move - uphill of course. Over the top of the Peyresourde - a not unpleasant climb, quite scenic and not too long and hard - and down a lovely descent, lots of bends at first but turning into a really fast easy turning roller coaster down into Bagneres de Luchon. This is my chance to refurbish my wheels, so flash the plastic and stuff tyres, tubes etc. in pockets and up the back of my shirt to the lunch stop at Chaumes where the coach will be and I can dump the old stuff. Great - new confidence inspiring no-nonsense Hutchinson Golds on the bike, a ham and cheese omelette in the stomach, I feel a new man as Nat and I set off towards the Col de Portet d'Aspet. The weather changes and becomes wet as we make our way over a couple of small hills and through a woody area to the Portet d'Aspet. Quite a few riders arrive at the same time and we pay our respects quietly at the memorial to Fabio Casartelli, the

young Italian Motorola rider tragically killed descending this very hill during the Tour de France. Nat and I set off and find this to be quite a nasty climb,



not too long but pretty steep. What goes up comes down, and after the effort comes the pleasure with a long loping descent through the drizzle, Nat and I sprinting for signs, and onwards along a wet main road to St. Girons, our haven for the night. Even the sounds of the St. Giron Music Festival till the early hours failed to disturb me as I slept the deep sleep of exhaustion.

Thursday 22nd. 180km.

Today I feel frisky. Today I am going for it! Today I am on a mission as I set off alone for the hills ahead and feeling good. I gradually pass all the earlybird starters along a winding drag up a river valley and make my way up the Col de Port. A lovely climb that winds on and on into the mist, not too steep so you can really feel like you're climbing at a decent speed. It's like going up into a cloud as the hairs on my arms are covered in little drops of icy water. Steady Eddie is there at the top with a hot cup of tea and I stop to put more clothes on for the cold descent. Still feeling good along a long rolling main road to Ax-les-Thermes, but by now I'm starting to feel hungry and in need of a little break. "Press on" says I, but the road has now started to rise and rises even more up to l'Hospitalet, where I give in and stop for a slap-up steak and boiled potato bingie. I see Eddie drive past in the coach but no-one else as I finish my meal. As you leave l'Hospitalet the road turns left and you're climbing - straight on to Col de Puymorens, turn right and you're in Andorra. There's the coach and there's Peter at the top (another rest day), who tells me Bill

has already gone through about 15 minutes previously. So much for my going for it! Bill has got stronger and stronger as the week wears on and now I set out to try and catch him before Prades, our destination for the day. Down a long, long descent (along which I threw up more than once), and along to Bourg-Madame, straddling the Spanish border. My legs really started to hurt as I climbed Col de Louis, Col Rigal and onto the plateau of Col de Perche. There had been no wind to speak of so far, but along the Col de Perche the wind was really strong and like pushing against wet porridge as the thick mist came down and the visibility was down to about 20 feet. Mont-Louis is the point where the road (what you could see of it) goes over the top and points downhill, and I was just able to make out the shapes of some coaches where tourists had come to admire what I've been told was a tremendous view. Unlucky. Then came a very dodgy but very exciting descent down the side of a long gorge, all the way for about 20 miles to Prades. The sort of descent only another cyclist would understand how good it could be. A very hard, long day and a congratulatory beer to Bill who indeed beat me to it by 15 minutes. Hard!

Friday 23rd. 80 km.

Here's a day to enjoy. Slightly downhill and along the coast for only 80 km... mm nice. Peter, Bill and myself along with Nat have somehow turned the day into a team time trial, as we go steaming along towards the coast. We gather up anyone who wants to hang on, and spit out any who can't or won't. Strangely, no-one else seems to want to take a turn at the front as we crank it up towards the Mediterranean. Into St. Cyprien and there it is, shining silver in the morning light. We've nearly made it, just find our way along the coast for about 15 miles - job done! As expected, the pace hots up as a few steep little hilly bits rear up between the beaches, and riders drop off the back. Bill, Nat and me are still slugging it out for the glory of getting the Cerbere sign, until the final steep rise with about 3 kilometres to go. Nat



steps on the throttle and leaves Bill and I gasping in his wake. Over the top, round the headland and we see Nat disappearing round the last bend to get "first home". Stopping at the coach parked by the sign into Cerbere, Steady Eddie tells us we're about an hour earlier than expected. I'm not surprised, given the pace we were going. Everyone arrives in little groups to have a celebration meal together down by the sea. We collect the final 'tampon' on our brevet cards and it's all over. Pack up the bikes, into civvies and off on the coach to dear old blighty. Sort of disappointing to stop riding, and the chat went on about this climb and that descent, and we all felt like we'd had a lot of fun but achieved something. We had.

A few tips: No gear is too low. Sort your tyres out. Watch out for the weather. And don't forget your tampons.

Ken Dolman

Ups & Downs of Cycling

Having been a cyclist for most of my life, I am now finding, at the mature age of 52(!) the sheer pleasure one can experience of just riding a bike for enjoyment rather than racing.

A couple of years ago I heard of a club called the South Western Road Club and decided to go along to a club night. I met with some fellow enthusiasts and decided to join up. Unfortunately, I have not managed a single club run, but nobody minds. I wish I could go on the weekend club runs, and perhaps do some racing, but due to work commitments coupled with nerves and a touch of asthma, this holds me back a lot.

I have recently bought myself a new bike - something that my wife has now just about come to terms with after quite some time, but with a promise from myself that I will go to White Hart Lane with her to see her beloved Spurs. As I say, the ups and downs of cycling!

A couple of weeks ago, I took my new pride and joy with me to the club meet to show it off! I think it got the seal of approval?!?! It must have, as Dave Wright took it for a spin round the hall! If only I could ride the bike as good as it looks, I would be laughing. Oh well, we can all dream!

What I do enjoy is meeting up with other club members on a Tuesday night for a chat. It is all part of the experience and enjoyment of belonging to SWRC. Thanks a lot guys!

Ken Gudgeon

Don't forget should you wish to purchase a new bicycle, need spares or even a repair contact *Luciano Cycles* at Worcester Park Surrey on 020 8330 3141 or Fax on 020 8330 2018.

A DAY AT THE RACES

Let's face it - road racing is the pinnacle of all the forms of cycling. Ask anyone to name their classic moments of the sport and they'll think of great mountain stages in the Tour or epic rides in the Classics. Rides like Museeuw's win this year in Paris-Roubaix after 25 miles on his own, or Pantani's marvellous attacks in the mountains in 1998's Tour. I doubt if many people would think of mountain biking or the track (recent Hour Records excepted, perhaps) or time trialling - though Dudley Samuels might recall some 25 from a couple of seasons back when he came *that* close to breaking the hour. No, it's road racing that has the heroics, the hard men and the mythology.

And so in its own small way does the SWRC contingent of highly trained and finely tuned athletes who ride the Surrey League races. Heroics like Gavin Squires' nine-month long season and Paul Alderson's 6am training rides; hard men like our

skinhead tendency Curt Johnson, Tim Ferguson and Lindsay Ruocco; and the myth that we are part of the cream of British cycling. But such sporting excellence doesn't come cheaply.

You can't race without training. For lots of us this means the Tuesday night chaingang, a hard ride of 30-odd miles from the clubroom out through Cobham, Horsley, Clandon, Leatherhead and back. This usually involves going from the gun and wondering why by the time we reach the Scilly Isles roundabout; sorting out the men from the boys on the long drag up to the A246; a breakneck downhill section through West Clandon; and attacks and counter-attacks through Malden Rushett and Chessington with the hope of setting off the speed cameras.

These rides often bring out better performances from us than actual racing. Roger Jackaman is seldom in better form than when blowing his whistle and directing the gruppetto from the rear, or when grunting and groaning in the most alarming manner on someone's back wheel. John Harris continually breaks his personal best for time spent on the front of the bunch. Geoff Redhead even does a whole 30 miles without stopping for refreshments. All essential preparation for the real thing.

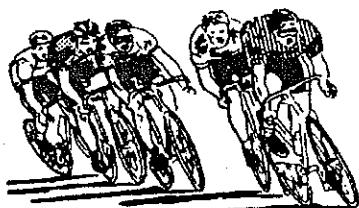
By the time race day comes we are all raring to go. A good night's kip and a healthy breakfast are followed by a leisurely drive to the race HQ, allowing us plenty of time to sign on, change into race kit, discuss tactics, check the bike and warm up. Actually that's not a bad approximation to the truth for weekend races. But Thursday evening handicaps are a different story - a mad dash through the rush-hour traffic after skiving off work an hour early, a pee and a quick kit change on the side of the road, and straight to the start line. Warm up? No chance.

The action starts, gently at first you hope, but no such luck. The first lap is always a killer, some lunatic deciding to go hard from the start. Gradually



your legs get going, the adrenalin rises and a bit of aggression comes to the fore. If you're feeling good you'll be doing turns on the front, thinking about starting a break and loving every moment of it. Very occasionally you even get one of those ultra-rare days when you're flying, at one with your machine, and the whole business is effortless. So I'm told, anyway.

On the other hand, if it's not your day it's a torment. Gasping for breath, legs made of lead, desperately trying not to let the gaps open up, only to give in to the inevitable when the man in front of you slides a metre, 2 metres, 5 metres ahead ... and you've got nothing in your legs. You might salvage some honour by getting in the group behind you and getting second wind. Otherwise it's crawl in alone and better luck next time.



As the race develops, you find your place in the pack, remember the features of the course – the gravelly left turn which needs extra care, the stiff little climb which needs extra effort, the flat bit where you can tuck in and take a breather – and recognise the dodgy rider who cut you up earlier or dropped his water bottle in the middle of the bunch a lap back. Past the finish line on each lap you can't believe the board says there are still three laps to go – you could have sworn there were only two left. The thought of an extra climb up that tough hill leaves you wondering how you're going to make it. The pace goes up and you'll be wishing for a bigger gear even on the flat. People start taking a few risks, the bunch spills over onto both sides of the road, panicking to squeeze back on the left hand side when a car comes down. Earlier breaks get chased down, people you haven't

seen during the entire race suddenly come to the front.

And then comes the finale, that Surrey League speciality – the 60-man sprint on 12 feet of pot-holed country lane with oncoming traffic. Amazingly some nutters actually go for it. Personally I usually settle for a rock-solid 37th position and tell myself we were all joint first, but our own nutter Ian Maylin achieved sporting glory winning one of these sprints last year. The bunch sweeps over the line in all its glory at 30mph plus, riders wheel-to-wheel and shoulder-shoulder, lungs bursting and legs burning with the effort. (Incidentally, how on earth does Keith Butler sort out the positions from this melee, even with all his high-tech equipment - a box to stand on, a pen and a scrap of paper?)

After the race and when the stragglers are in (Dare I name names? No, I couldn't do it to you, Gavin, mate) we have the inevitable post mortem. This is the best bit. Now we recount how small efforts on the front were actually marathon turns pulling the bunch along; how a transient 20 yard gap was really a pretty solid break; how a slight touch of elbows was a conspiracy to pull down the SWRC team; how a 30th place at the back of the bunch would have been top 5 with a bit of luck on the last corner; etc, etc, etc. The myths are made, the hard men established.

That's what road racing is all about – a bit of hard graft, the thrill of being in the bunch, the speed of the race, the satisfaction of finishing, and the simple pleasure of riding your bike flat out. We are very fortunate in having the Surrey League. This is run by Keith Butler and his small band of helpers in their spare time, and they put on the best program of races in the country, including the longest stage race in Britain at the moment (which is a bit of a poor show for cycling in UK but a big achievement for Keith). It's great fun and any prospective road racers out there should come and try it out.

Mark Packman

BRITISH CYCLING SHINES IN MANCHESTER

Although it was raining in Manchester most days while I was there for October's World Track Championships, the sun certainly shone on British cycling. No doubt most of you will know how well we did following the team's Olympic successes and at Manchester we came third in medals' table after Germany and France. Although several of the stars from this year's Olympics were absent, the new found success of the British squad really added to the atmosphere.

This was my second visit to the Manchester Velodrome: the first was in 1996 when I saw Chris Boardman break the world record for the individual pursuit. This time round, no records went in worlds events as such but we were treated to witnessing Chris re-establish the world record for the hour. Having changed the rules on what bike and equipment can be used, the record had reverted to 49,331km set by Eddy Merckx in 1972. Despite a very good start, by the closing stages he was obviously struggling and it looked as though he would fail but then, in the last few minutes, Chris gave it everything he had to just beat the 28-year old record at 49.442km.

The next day he was signing copies of the new book about him. Although I did not buy a copy, I and a few others managed to join the end of the queue and get programme autographed instead. Chris was his usual self. When some one in front thanked him for all the pleasure he given us over the years, he said he wished that he had been able to enjoy too! He also said he was looking forward to not having to go out training any more.

After the Olympics the French women's champion Felicia Ballanger retired. This made the women's event much more open than they have been for some years. For me, therefore, the high point was when Yvonne McGregor won her gold medal. In my excitement I bruised my thumb



banging on the wooden barrier that surrounds the track. I am sure that I was not the only spectator to have a tear in my eye when she won.

Unlike road racing where you see more of the action on TV, track racing is much better live. In the points races and madison events, for example, you can see the whole field fighting for positions. Although you miss out on the Duffield voice-overs and more especially Russell William's offbeat comments, the electronic scoreboard and Mike Smith's commentary kept the audience well informed. The general excitement over the British team's results may have been a factor in why Mike lost his voice on the second to last day of the championships.

During the heats and finals proper there were special events for local schools and disabled riders. It was surprising how fast someone with one arm or leg can ride given the chance. We were also treated to a cabaret each evening before the cycling began. Because this year is the 100th birthday of the UCI, there were special presentations of past champions which included Tony Doyle and Michael Hubner whom some of you may know from his appearances at Herne Hill. Graham Obree and Hugh Porter were others who were introduced to the crowd.

In spite of some complaints about the way that the event was managed, overall the Velodrome is a splendid venue for cycling. I understand that there are plans to try and get similar facilities in Scotland, Wales and the South East. If only we could have cycling of this quality in London. They are building a new stadium for the Commonwealth Games in 2002 and I am sure that we can look forward to the British cycling team winning more medals.

Although most of the audience were from the North and Midlands, as you would expect, I did spot a few southern jerseys including Hampshire Road Club and Willesden CC. They

were quite a number of Welsh spectators including a large group from Newport Phoenix CC, accompanied by several school-age children in club colours, mostly girls. Let's hope that the outstanding performances that we saw from the British team will raise the profile of track racing in the UK.

Ed Brown

* * * * *

The Musings of a 4th Cat Vet - or - The Swimmers Story

Well, I have finally reached the end of my first full season as a competitive bike rider. I dangled my toe in the water at the end of last season but this year I have dived in and swum a few lengths.

After 18 years as a runner, it has proved to be a bit of a culture shock. I have quickly learned that cycling is a very unforgiving sport, unlike running. When you compete in running events on road or cross country, the range of abilities is very wide from the 5 min mile leaders to the 10 min mile tail enders. Whatever your standard there will always be other runners at your level. With cycling however, there is no grey area, it is black and white. You either ride at a pace within a few percent of the strongest riders or you are nowhere, out the back, time to climb off. It has certainly sharpened my concentration, however because, from your own experience, the feeling you get watching the pack ride away from you is the worst.

There has also been so much to learn. The right and wrong way of riding in the group, the level of verbal abuse when you get it wrong, getting used to riding in the middle of a group of cyclists at 30mph and feeling relaxed about it, and generally making sure that I ride safely and correctly and do not cause any problems. The next thing to learn is tactics. I'm sure however, that they could take a lot longer to understand than one season. Until I do know what I should be doing and when, achieving the fabled 6 BCF points to move up to 3rd Cat seems unlikely. If I do, it will be by

luck, because at the moment in races, I am not in the right place at the right time. Hopefully it will come in the future.

This year would have been a very different story, or possibly not happened at all without a club, The South Western, an organisation, The Surrey League, to welcome, support and organise events for riders such as me.

As far as the Surrey League is concerned, my praise cannot be high enough. The spread of events is very broad, from 4th Cat to elite riders including the biggest stage race in the U.K. in 2000. To find yourself riding next to Gordon McCauley in a handicap event is a real ego boost, even though it didn't last very long! You are made to feel part of the events by the organisers, including Keith Butler, which makes a very positive statement about the organisation. Long may it continue.

With regard to the South Western Road Club, when I realised that joining a club made sense, there were several close to my home in Guildford, but in a moment of insanity fuelled by dangerous amounts of alcohol, I applied to become a member of S.W.R.C. I was influenced in this decision by encouragement from existing members (Thank you John & Graham) I had met and their assurances about friendship, encouragement and support. I have to say that I have had no reason to regret this decision. It is a friendly club, happy to put new members at their ease and not elitist like other clubs in the area. There is always interest shown in your achievements and the atmosphere at club nights and get togethers (curry night etc) is always friendly and easy going. You don't have to prove yourself to anyone at the South Western, which for a newcomer to the sport makes all the difference.

So as the millennium year comes to an end, and we head into 2001, I can look forward to another 7-8 months seeking the Holy Grail, 6 B.C.F. points. Will



I remain a 4th Cat forever? The quest continues. Watch this space.....

STOP PRESS

Due to a couple of top 10 places at the end of the season, I have achieved the required points to become a 3rd Cat rider. The next chapter in this enthralling saga is, Can this lofty position be maintained? Roll on next season.

Lindsey Ruocco

THE ITALIAN JOB

The Cast

Tractor - I was caught taking a tow from a tractor for circa 15km into Treviso. (Dudley)

Cake (plus a name we can not print in a family publication) - for his new found love of Italian Cakes (Paul)

Su-Pear - because he is (Ken).

Stanco - on one return trip we got separated from Nick, when we returned the Head Chief said Nick was Stanco (which is Italian for tired)

Day 1 (Monday)

An hour before take off Su-Pear hadn't arrived, being brave we woke Mrs Su-Pear at 06:00. He had left the previous night - was the sleepy reply; we apologized for waking her and promptly hung up. Should Mrs Su-Pear nab you at the next club dinner and say "so it was you that woke me at 06:00 in the morning" you will now know we fitted you up. The funny thing was (well we found it funny) as we put the phone down he arrived. It always pays to read your tickets - arrive an hour before take off - not two hours. We arrived in Treviso to be greeted by my Cousin and the company that she had arranged to pick us up, 20km later we were "home". Whilst we assembled our bikes lunch was being prepared (she's still an excellent cook) and her husband got the wine out. We politely made our way through starter, pasta, main course, cake (Paul Cannon), coffee and wine, by then we were was bloated. We then managed to saddle for 1km to the Hotel. After checking in, three hours suddenly passed by - we had fallen asleep due to all that eating. Feeling guilty (yea right) we

opted not to watch the Giro on TV but get some miles in. Map reading was down to Su-Pear, which meant more arrows than a Red Indian tribe. After circa 32 km we stopped for coffee, cake and we took in the scenery, giving Su-Pear a chance to check out a route home. The return to the hotel was hard work we sprinted for every town sign. The one to win was the hometown sign, I thought I had this one in the bag especially being up against two mountain goats. Suddenly the two goats took off, I didn't even see the sign and never got on - who says your eye sight fades when you get old! The two of them could have been mistaken for Chippo and Quaranta as they battled it out in the distance.

Later that evening we decided to find a local eatery as we did Stanco arrived after a long drive down. It seems that Monday evening was a "no open" night except one restaurant. We later discovered that was a Gay bar and restaurant, amazingly we visited this place twice during our stay - no comments please, we were there for the quality of food and service (oh er Mrs!).

Day 2 (Tuesday)

After the previous day's warm up ride we were gagging to get out. An early rise and a face full of breakfast we were off. With circa fifty miles of pure pancake territory we rolled out. Already the sun was beating down on our backs as we started to eat into the miles. Once again Su-Pear did the honours of map reading with the odd "contribution" from Stanco. The miles (or should I say kilometres) quickly passed by and the quality of scenery was top dollar. Before we knew it we were arriving at Padova famous for its University. We made ourselves comfortable at a Café and decided to take on more food and drink. Our early arrival gave us the opportunity to participate in one of Italy's well known past times - posing. We felt at home in no time riding around the square giving it large (as they say). Su-Pear went down to the 1km flag to maximize the atmosphere and live those final 1000 meters. We then

returned to the Café to have a few more cakes and then settled up our bill. We moved over to the finishing area to try and obtain a good view (yea right!). We did managed to meet up with the Linda McCartney PR guys and Graham Watson who remembered me from the previous year.

Before we knew it the riders were ready to arrive we stretched our necks and elbowed our way for a good view but all we managed was a riders arm go up, which we later found out to be Quaranta. Although we didn't get to see the final sprint, we were more than satisfied with our visit to this great place and to take in everything that was going on - amazing. Our return trip was less enjoyable Stanco took over the map reading - enough said. Before we knew it we were back at the hotel reliving the day.

Day 3 (Wednesday)

We were scheduled to see the Time Trial, which entailed a 140-mile round trip. With 100 miles due the next day and 100 the previous we opted to stay local - don't anybody call us soft tarts - we were on holiday. That morning we decided to take a casual stroll around the town and stop for a well-deserved coffee break. With hundreds of yards of walking under our feet we deserved it. We then pulled ourselves together donned the lycra and rolled out circa midday, the time mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the mid day sun. Su-Pear resumed the map reading position due to the previous day's mishaps. As per Monday, we enjoyed the sunshine, scenery and friendliness. Late afternoon arrived, Stanco returned to the Hotel to check out the local shops and we headed to my Cousins home. After a good helping of wine Su-Pear and Cake got in the car and chased me down as I rode to the Mecca of cycling the Pinarello shop. As the kilometres went by they were beginning to wonder if I had lost my way, as I didn't have a map. Then suddenly they spotted me in the distance and the realized why I had managed to average an easy 23-25 mph in the late afternoon heat, I had been tailgating a tractor - hence the



name. We all met up at the shop and were like kids in a candy store. As we all know Italians are posers and Mrs Pinarello was dressed topically all in pink as the Giro was on. We made our purchases, saved shed loads of money headed back to our base. That evening we all got together and visited a local pizza place. I was keen to get the waitress' number but, as her boyfriend was working with her, that was a no. We then staggered back to our hotel planning the next day's trip.

Day 4 (Thursday)

Two very contrasting days in one. Su-Pear supplied the report for the three amigos (see below). What did I get up to? - visited relatives, fell asleep, put my feet up and watched TV, drank/ate wine, cake, dinner, ice-cream and finally rode my bike 5 km - not the type of day just anybody can adapt to!

Three amigos - Italian job: day 4 Thursday:- From hotel to Passo di San Boldo where Dudley went back to do 'the relatives' thing, Nick, Paul and I ventured on to boldly go where no crank had turned. Over the Passo, which was like Disneyland's Thunder Mountain, only without the water splash, and over the high pastures leading to the Dolomites, glowering in the pale blue heat haze ahead. Stopping for a coffee and pastry break mid-morning, we decided not to strike out for Cortina (famous ski-resort) after studying the map and seeing lots of uphill arrows (and double arrows, and treble arrows). We would take the

scenic route as far as Agordo, deciding a National Park road alongside a lake looked good, 'cause lakes are flat! That's what we did and the scenery alone was worth the trip, as the lake shone blue on one side and the rugged Dolomites towered around us, daring us to take them on if we were hard enough. We weren't. But we were hard enough for a long, hard 995 metre high climb over and down to Agordo, where 'big lunch' awaited. Of course, the downs became ups and vice versa, but after a few map reading challenges and closed roads, we made it safely back, near enough 100 miles round trip, tongues lolling and gasping for a cool Nastro Azzuro (or two, or three).

Day 5 (Friday)

Possibly the best and worst day, the worst because it was our last day and the best - read on. We could have stepped out of our hotel and watch the Giro pass our front door, but we are hard SWRC cyclists not some mamby pamby bunch of bike riders. Today's treat was to watch the Giro at two points and ride some of the route. We rode piano style to take in all the cheers and the publicity but as we turned the corner we found the road littered with people of all ages cheering and shouting but also waiting for you to crack as the climb got steeper.

Su-Pear took up his customary position and greeted Cake and myself at the top. We waited for Stanco but he never arrived. He had to go and

collect rent from a frightened tenant. We parked our bikes up (oh er Mrs), adopted the normal pose position and waited for the riders who mattered. A select group including Chippo passed, shortly followed by the chasing pack. After all the riders and publicity crew passed we saddled up and made our way through the back to the finish location, which was about 20 clicks away.

Once again we found the Linda McCartney Team and chatted like old mates and had a few words with "the boy" Yates. We were on such a high people thought we were on EPO. We made our way home and linked up with a 20-rider train. As the clicks went by riders were being dispatched out the back but the SWRC boys held in there without a problem. After an enjoyable day we packed our bags headed to my cousins home and had an evening meal followed by Ice Cream and wine.

I think I can say for everybody that this was an enjoyable week of, cycling, sun, food, wine and friendship it had everything. By next year hopefully my Italian would have improved, I hope I was of some help to the guys this year. Subject to the route announcement later in the year I will probably go again. There is already talk of staying for 7-10 days. Don't miss the next trip, I think 3 places have already been reserved.

Tractor

CYCLING SHORTS

No one is spared (the humiliation of a mention in Cycling Shorts, that is) - Your editor duly admits to taking a tumble after coming off worse following a collision with a car on the way out to join the first club run in November. To be honest, I am not sure if the car took a late turn into the petrol station just in front of me or whether I was merely day dreaming and wandered into the car. I can't remember and the car driver did not stop to argue the point. Still, the good news is that my machine suffered no real damage and I was able to continue my ride. It's just so embarrassing! - sitting in the car with a few concerned bystanders hovering around offering sympathy.

Chain Gang Down - Yes, the inevitable has happened. Whilst out for their usual Tuesday evening ride the chain gang regulars (on this occasion Geoff, Lindsey, Chris, Mandy and A.N.Other) hit a patch of diesel or ice and came down one and all. No one suffered any bad injuries with Geoff getting the lions share of the cuts and grazes, whilst Mandy managed to crack her helmet.

Alive and Well, and living in Rio - From 15th December (for a rumoured 3 years) David & De Jordan are moving to Brazil. Their address will be Ave Borges de Medeiros 3535, AP11 06 Liagoa 22470-001, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Tel 005521 579 3445 or Mobile 005521 9766 9474.