

## Paul Revell's account of his preparation and riding of the Mersey Roads 24hr TT

*Everything you need to know about riding a 24hr TT event*

2016 saw me join BCW to have a go at time trialling and at the back of my mind was the idea of entering the Mersey Roads 24 hour.

I did not have the funds to get a proper time trial bike and my touring bike was not really suitable, so I got a Genesis Flyer on the cycle to work scheme.

Things went OK on the Coast Road, so I entered the 24.

Having ridden quite a few of the hillier 600km audaxes, LEL (London-Edinburgh-London) and PBP (Paris-Brest-Paris), I knew I would be OK riding through the night.

The main thing is to have a decent front light and to know that you'll be comfortable with your contact points and clothing. You need to iron out any feet, knee, back, neck or wrist problems with your position on the bike, which you can only do by getting some miles in.

I wasn't sure what gear to ride, so I left it with the 77" I had been using for Aldingham Hill for a trial run on a 400km audax. This was on a flat course called The Lincoln, which is basically Scotch Corner to Lincoln and back. I thought it would be too 'spinnny' but it turned out to be fine when I was tired, so I left it like that. The alternative was 84" which I will move to if I can get a bit stronger. I wanted to use the trial run to try out clip on aero bars, but they didn't arrive in time, so I just rode to Barrow and back when I got them and they were fine, a great aid to comfort.

To sign on and do some faffing, needs you to be at the event HQ late morning, so I decided to go down the night before and stay in my caravan to minimise tiredness. I also made sure that I got lots of rest for a couple of days previously.

My wife drove me to the start, but there was an option to leave a car if required. At the start HQ, George Jackson came up and introduced himself and had a chat, which was nice and I was able to drop off a plastic box with some extra clothes (leg/arm warmers, an extra top in case it turned cold and a very lightweight rain top). I also put in lots of sandwiches, egg custards, muesli bars, some Coke, flapjack, bottles of squash, Ibuprofen tablets, chamois cream, a folding tyre and some bike 'jumble', a microfibre towel and some electrolyte with caffeine tablets.

The organisers put the boxes in a van and drive them to a central point on the course, near the Raven Cafe at Prees Heath, where they are left in a family sized tent. The tent is manned and they helpfully made up new bottles when I had drunk mine. At the end, they bring the boxes back to the start. On the bike I carried a phone, spare tube, sticky patches, cleat covers, a spanner and a small pump.

My caravan was on a little 5 van site on the Quina Brook circuit, so my wife (Damaris) put out some water, some encouraging messages and a box of treats on the roadside before she went to bed.

The course might change a bit from year to year, but the general idea is a long leg from Farndon Sports and Social Club to Prees Heath then a couple of 'out and backs' (A41 and A49) and a loop (the Quina Brook circuit) before a return to the start area where you do a loop with time keepers every few miles. They call you in when your 24hrs are up. In my case it was George Jackson!



As you would expect it is pretty flat, but there are some gentle slopes. You're never more than about an hour and a half between visits to Prees Heath where you can get your food and drink or sort out your layers. Lots of riders have helpers who get the things ready and 'pass up' as their rider wheels through at jogging speed. The organisers also run a night-time drinks and snacks bar at the end of the A41 'out and back'. Stopping to sort yourself out probably takes about an extra 45 minutes overall. I had planned to ride through, with just the essential stops, but in the end I got too tired and had to lie down for 20 minutes in the tent, so I was off the bike for well over an hour in total.

The marshals shepherd the riders from one circuit to the next with the faster riders doing more circuits than the slower ones. Some riders use GPS to keep track of their speed and distance, but mine does not run for 24 hrs without an inconvenient external battery pack, so I dropped it off not long after dark.

The '24' attracts a wide variety of riders from all sorts of odd corners of the cycling world so there is no danger of turning up and feeling out of place. There are some riders with skinsuits, aero helmets, proper TT bikes and wheels, some with 'normal' cycling kit riding steel tourers and everything in-between.

The event has strong links to Audax riding, which hark back to the 70's when the organisers of PBP allowed some UK riders to use the 24 as a qualifier, to save them travelling to France to do a 600km. From this, Audax UK was born and proper qualifying rides (a set of 200/300/400/600km) were set up in this country thereafter. To this day, the 24 is the only time trial that gains AUK points, so my 376 miles gets 6pts for 600km.

Getting past the 600km mark was my main target, but I thought I had a chance of getting 400 miles and if I go again, that will be my 'carrot'. To do it I would have to have fair weather, less stopping and probably change up to 84". The next milestone after that is to try for 426 miles which would exceed the club record. The top 16 all beat that this year, so I am sure there are several BCW members who could do the same, especially with the good bikes and fast wheels. It's like a lot of these things though, being able to do something is not the same as actually going out and doing it and the 24 is not exactly 'low hanging fruit'.

If anyone wants to have a go next year and wants to ask a question about it, please feel free to do so at a weekly event or Sunday ride. It's a classic event and a privilege to share the road with some of the true greats of the cycling world like Jim Hopper, George Berwick, Steve Abraham, Michael Broadwith, Chris 'Hopppo' Hopkinson and the amazing Hugh Culverhouse.

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