

THE PENGUIN PELOTON – GUYS TO BLACKPOOL – TOWER TO TOWER CHARITY CYCLE RIDE



Penguins Assemble – The Penguin Peloton at the entrance to Guy’s Colonnade

Day 1 – 3rd May 2024 - 160 km

On 3rd May 2024, 40 Penguins, a mix of Students, recently qualified doctors and Fossils, ranging in age from 18 to 66, assembled as a Peloton at Guys Hospital Tower near London Bridge. We were there to undertake the Guys to Blackpool (G2B) challenge to raise money for Penguins Against Cancer (www.penguinsagainstcancer.org.uk), (PAC), a UK registered charity. Also present were the incredible Rat Pack Support Group of Black Rats: Sasha and Tony Smith and Jer Humphries, and White Rats: Paul Gillam (artist, musician, photographer and polymath) and Will Taylor, the Physio, a new addition to the party. We assembled in the rain, exchanged the usual perfunctory greetings, traded ancient jocular insults amongst the Fossils, and posed for a photo. We then set off for 100 miles of joyous cycling in incessant rain. Team Jackass as usual started proceedings and managed some 400 metres before the first puncture. They were therefore overtaken by the Chinstraps, ably led by Rowan White, Tom Downie’s Snares and Ben’s unceasingly noisy Macaronis. Team Fairy fittingly started last with King of the Fairies, Lutz Hostert leading.



Guy's Tower



Westminster or Wetminster

The route, exquisitely planned by Trevor Kelly, as ever, took us over Westminster Bridge, past Buckingham Palace and through Hyde Park.



Chinstraps outside Buckingham Palace

All marvelled at the delights of Neasden and Maida Vale, (*named in memory of General Sir John Stuart who won the battle of Maida in 1806 and did much to restore the morale of troops flagging after a heavy defeat at Austerlitz*), before pausing for refreshment at a pub in Bushey. As is traditional the first stop was chaotic and protracted, which did little to restore the morale of the soaking Pelotonistas. Where is John Stuart when you need him?



The Bushey Stop

Eventually the Peloton extracted itself and continued its humid procession. Helpful reminders that skin is waterproof, and being told 'if you can't take a joke you shouldn't have joined,' were met with variable responses. Leaving London, more incredible sights awaited including Hemel Hempstead (*originally Hemel-Amstede in the Domesday book*) and lunch served at the wonderful Globe Inn by the side of the Grand Union Canal near Leighton Buzzard (*possibly after Theobald de Busar, Canon of Lincoln*). The Globe serves very good real ale.



Lunch in the Globe



Nice White Top

After lunch we rejoined the rain and meandered through Milton Keynes - lots of roundabouts, but no concrete cows sighted, and most were forced to take a significant detour due to a chemical spill on our intended route (surprising that the deluge hadn't washed this away). The final tea stop of the day was in Woody's bar Northampton – dealing nonchalantly with 40 soggy Penguins, and the Regulars made a sizeable donation to PAC. Then there was just the final 40km stretch into Lutterworth (*after Old Norse Lutter's Vordig*).



Happy Young Penguins after 160 km

The Lutterworth Travelodge was basic, the staff were welcoming, helpful and considerate. The Peloton dried somewhat and then transited through the Fox Inn to the Sawsdee Thai Restaurant run by the incomparable Mr Nuk. The food and service were fantastic. Everyone dried out some more but were careful to also take on some fluid. The Penguin Peloton AGM was conducted efficiently and Jer Humphries and Will Taylor were elected as Honorary Peloton Members, entitling them to buy drinks for the rest of the Peloton for the remainder of the evening.

Day 2 – 4th May 2024 - 134 km

As is an annual recurrence, Day 2 dawned far too early. But wait! Something was amiss. Where was the rain? The clouds had been emptied and with a smile Team Jackass were first away, without punctures, and reached the superb Acorns Café for breakfast after 20 km. The other teams followed in quick succession with the Fairies, again, bringing up the rear. Wildlife appeared in abundance: Kites, Buzzards, Rabbits, Kestrels, Pheasants, Gamecock and Rats.



The Outstanding Acorns Café Team



Lutz getting substantial

After a substantial breakfast however Team Jackass splintered. The majority continued unhindered, skirting the beautiful Cannock Chase, onto Barton Marina, but Pat Davis and Mark Lowey became separated. A phonecall was received from Pat asking for directions. It did not start well. 'Hi Charlie, We are with a local who says there are several marinas near Burton.' - 'No Pat it's Barton, with an A.' - 'Well, whatever . . . Which Marina is it?' - 'Barton. Have you got navigation?' - 'Yes, We've got a paper map' - 'Has it got Barton Marina on it?' - 'No, but it has got Burton!'



Pat and Mark in either Barton or Burton Marina(s)



Fairies flying majestically through the countryside

Eventually order, in the widest sense of the word, was restored. Lunch was at the Cock Inn at Stowe. Beer and a very efficiently organised pasta bake fuelled the hungry Peloton. This was a good thing as the next stop was in central Stoke, in as unprepossessing an area as we had seen thus far (which is saying something as we had cycled through North London in a persistent downpour). A relatively quick coffee and blueberry muffin was followed by an unpleasantly steep climb, so steep that Julian fell over whilst still clipped into his pedals.



Greg contemplates life in the Cock Inn



The delightful London Road café, Stoke

Numerous undulations (great for racing snakes, but tiring for the larger units) gave way eventually to a beautiful downhill stretch into Crewe Green and the unabashed delights of the Crewe Hall Spa 4* hotel. We were met by the **Sherry Squad: Charlie G, Pat G, Charlotte, Gaynor, Becky, Nicki, Mike and Bianca** who had travelled up from London to provide entertainment.



Half the Peloton posing, with a Penguin, outside Crewe Hall

After a quick shower (and a sauna for some) we enjoyed a wholesome complementary 3 course meal with wine, faultlessly organised by Matt Rose, before repairing to a private room for an evening of music, singing, some dancing, some ribald anecdotes and some impromptu performances. Pat Gush, as MC Hammer, ad libbed his way sensationally, whilst the world renowned Jammin' Good ensemble (Gilly and Glorious Gaynor) played their way through an eclectic list of singalong anthems including: (West) Country Roads, Wonderwall, Sweet Caroline, and Show Me the Way to Amarillo. Sasha Smith provided a stand out performance singing Jolene, and Will Taylor wowed the audience with his rendition of Delilah. Social interaction continued well into the night. There is only one Peter Davis.



Dinner at the Hall



Jammin' Good with Sasha Jolening

Day 3 – 5th May 2024 - 132 km

Strangely, Day 3 also arrived far too early. Not everybody was ready at the appointed hour. The weather was kind and progress good. Presently, we arrived at Warburton Toll bridge (*commissioned under the Rixton and Warburton Bridge Act 1863, 20 years after the founding of Guy's Hospital Rugby Football Club*). On learning we were a charity cycle ride, the tollkeeper very kindly offered to waive the 12p per person toll for us. Sensing an opportunity, we asked if he would like to make a donation to support Penguins Against Cancer. He did. He gave us 1p, which was later delivered to George to add to the fund.



The formal handover of the Warburton Penny



The Little Marton Windmill

Café Nero in Knutsford has a charm all of its own, and we duly made the lunch stop at Chiquitos in Horwich (*after Old English meaning the place at the grey wych-elm*) in blazing sunshine. Another frenetic round of eleventh-hour negotiation enabled all those who desired lunch to get it. Meanwhile, Jer managed after much effort, to get his misbehaving support vehicle back on the road. With sights now looking towards the finish, The Penguins were anxious to be away. Another 30km ride saw us reach Preston Marina (Pat and Mark were still in Burton, or Barton) where excellent organisation again, saw everyone fed and watered and away in good time. The final 30 km flew by with a brief stop at the Windmill. We then gained Blackpool Tower. The Pelotonistas reunited, amid much congratulatory fist bumping, for a photographic record, before preparing to wend their way home.

Over the 3 days there were no serious physical injuries, just occasional wounded pride. There were numerous mechanicals (many due to poor bike preparation) and a number of punctures. Three riders had to leave the event early, for various reasons. We wish them all well. It was an excellent experience all round – challenging, fulfilling, empathy generating and unique in parts. **The G2B ride has so far raised £62 000 for Penguins Against Cancer.**



The Penguin Peloton at Blackpool Tower – 426km distance and 3120m of ascent in 3 days

All the riders worked hard. The Road Captain (Trevor Kelly) Rider of Tour (ROT) awards are:

Bronze ROT - 3rd place: Mark Lowey 66 years young, wit, raconteur and someone who truly understands perseverance.

Gold ROT - 1st place: Shared between Cloe Ragot and Kat Lister. Cloe saw the Peloton off on Day 1 then had to sit a professional exam before joining the Peloton later in the day. She had been loaned a 'bike' [described by a Black Rat as a washing machine with wheels] and

managed to keep up with her team for over 260km without complaint. Kat, a novice, successfully overcame all obstacles to remain to the fore of her team for the duration of the ride, and outpaced all the accompanying Fossils, apparently. Great effort both.

I would like to pay tribute to all of the more than 500 incredibly generous individuals, and organisations, whose unstinting altruism has enabled us to exceed our fundraising target. I would also like to thank the Penguin Peloton, Rat Pack Support Group and Sherry Squad for their camaraderie, humour, tolerance and perseverance. A fantastic 3 days.

The Penguin Peloton:

Team Jackass: Charlie, Trevor, Julian, John W (Black Rat), Pat D, Rob, Mark, Pete

Team Chinstrap: Rowan, Kat L, John C, Harry C, Jez, Wayne, Graham, Cloe

Team Snares: Tom, Greg, Heather, Kat B, Jessie, Dylan, Georgia, Nick

Team Macaroni: Ben, Guy, Ian, Ash, George, Rory, Paul, Nat

Team Fairy: Lutz, Darren, Harry D, Theo, Jamie, Matt R, Matt L-P, Alan

The Rat Pack Support Group:

The Black Rats: Tony, Sasha, Jer **The White Rats:** Gilly, Will



Tony and Sasha Black Rat in action

The Sherry Squad:

Pat G, Charlie G, Charlotte, Gaynor, Becky, Mike, Bianca, Nicki



Half of The Sherry Squad relaxing

POSTSCRIPT:

The Way of the Roses (or the Via Dolorosa) for Lutz's Lunatics/The 7 Samurai

Most of the Peloton sensibly returned to London by coach. As usual, Lutz was not happy with the distance covered over the 3 days, however, and was determined to do more. He also inveigled some others, using flattery and weasel words to join his harebrained (*16C Harebrain – a giddy or reckless person*) scheme. The phrases: 'It will be fine - it's short - mostly downhill - there are very few uphills – etc,' dripped off his tongue like honey. Thus, 6 other poor souls joined him to do more after reaching Blackpool.

The 7 Samurai travelled, by various means, to Morecambe for dinner in an amusement arcade (always a good start) and discussed what may await them next day on the Coast to Coast route. Breakfast on 6th May was followed by gathering at the Eric Morecambe statue with the ritual beseeching of 'Bring me Sunshine,' and we were away.



The 7 Samurai - 6 imitating Eric Morecambe, 1 Ernie Wise

It was 'dead easy' for 40 miles or so until Settle Hill. Imagine, having had a nice lunch, you leave a village to be confronted by a 20% hill for 200m followed by an 18% hill for about 500m. It's like someone dropping a fridge on your back. Lutz **had** stated quietly there were a few uphills. However, this was all good training and an integral part of Fat Camp. We then travelled through the delightful Yorkshire Dales via the Craven Arms at Appletreewick, where they serve an excellent pint of Theakstons Old Peculier. We were treated to some Wassailing (odd as we were 200+ miles from the West Country) to welcome in the Spring.



Lunch at Appletreewick whilst being Wassailed

The day continued and we ended up in Ripon. Fairly tired after 4 days of cycling, sleeping was not easy as we were in a hotel next to the Cathedral sporting a rather large bell which chimed very loudly every quarter of an hour. On the morning of 7th May, Trevor departed to catch a train home and the rest of us cycled through Stamford Bridge, of Tostig Godwinson and Harald Hadrada fame, then via York and Driffield.



Greg entering York

We eventually reached journey's end at Bridlington. Total distance from Guy's Hospital covered over 5 days was 705 km with 5720 m of ascent. Coast to Coast support was provided by the fantastic **Harriet** and her car which enabled the team to keep moving despite a number of challenging incidents. Many Thanks indeed for your help Harriet.



Lutz's Lunatics at Bridlington

Lutz's Lunatics/The 7 Samurai: Lutz, Guy, Greg, Charlie, Steve and Jason (both Finishers brought in to bolster the squad after Blackpool) and Trevor

Charlie Beardmore

President

The Penguin Peloton

15 May 2024