

How I broke the UK record by cycling 445 miles in 24 hours

By Carol Westmorland



THE first lesson in success has to be commitment. You have to be able to commit fully. You can't dip in and out and expect to succeed. If you are passionate about something it is easy to put it first.

It seemed like a natural progression to enter the National Championship 24-hour. Like an Olympian hopeful I had competed in 12s for four years and felt ready. I covered 240 miles in my inaugural 12-hour in 2002 and became National Champion in 2004 with a distance of 243 miles.

I was approached by Dave Lloyd, an ex-pro turned coach, who felt that he could improve my position in aerodynamics and results. Open-minded, I gave him free rein which resulted in a Dolan custom build cycle with 650 (ie 26-inch) wheels.

In January, 2006, I was a guest speaker at a prize presentation night. I announced my intention to compete in my first 24-hour during my speech. I wasn't going to go back on my word.

In March the friskiest bike arrived at the same time as a bug. I had to contend with feeling rubbish and a bike that felt extreme. My position was now so tucked. I didn't like it at all. It was only after taking out my old faithful that I realised I couldn't go back to my old position and had to get on with it – and quick. We gelled together in May.

I never cycle the course beforehand instead we drive around it until I'm happy. I have to see only positives. Jumping on the bike is too close to reality. I can see the good in the most tedious of roads in the car. With my notes I lay the maps out and



look at them every day. I will then script the event. It makes for interesting reading at a later date.

Rather like those who do the Bob Graham Round, I wanted to do the 24 and get in the record books. Not for me going back year upon year. Do it once and do it properly.

My drinks, a rotation of carbohydrate, protein and isotonic are prepared in advance. I don't eat as such during the event – I just take up gels. I follow a strict dietary regime in the nine lead-up days to prevent the need for any solids on the day. I cart the lot into the hotel room. The bikes and spare wheels come in too. The tension I'm feeling by the time I'm wheeling bikes along hotel

corridors is palpable.

I look after myself very well. Although my body fat stays the same, at around 17%, I expect to put on at least seven pounds in the run up. It drops off afterwards at an alarming rate. I keep my body clock exact by waking at 6am and going to sleep by 10pm every day.

I then limit my miles and have a daily massage. Oddly, for someone who loves endurance events, I am not big on training miles. I will complete a 100-mile time trial usually in around four hours and 20 minutes in early July. Then, I race 10 days before and leave the bike alone.

I have a specially adapted skin suit and wear carbon SIDI shoes

two sizes too big and always white. Numb toes are excruciating. Wristbands around my forearms protect the bone against the screws in the tri-bars.

Demonically organised, I clear my mind for focus. The only thing I want going through my mind is motivation. Queen's *Don't Stop Me Now* works. Memorised, it plays in my mind. It would be useful to have a 'b' side but that doesn't happen.

My Dolan time trial bike was too streamlined to be fitted with lights so I dressed my Caygil road bike like a Christmas tree. Cateye produce very sophisticated lights with chargeable packs that fit neatly on the bars.

My day coincided with a heat

wave. Mercifully cycling produces its own air cooling system. The moment I started I knew I felt good. Father was due to join us once I had covered my first 100. He called half an hour before to casually mention I needed to average 18½ mph to achieve a target of 445 miles. The enormity of the task ahead hit home. It was going to be relentless.

I will only listen to advice from ex and current champions. The best advice was *just don't stop*. I had no intention of doing so. With great support and no mechanical problems (just flash flooding) it was a perfect race.

I dipped at dawn but a team banana on every lap saw a quick recovery. It was an amazing feeling when my body kicked back in. You naturally lose a degree of pace at night – it must be all that blackness. I was impressed that my support had any idea how to recognise me.

Changing bikes meant a period of uncomfortable readjustment at first light. I was able to keep my legs stretched on the more undulating interim section. I was vaguely aware that I was ahead but the field is so spread you see surprisingly few competitors. I could sense my team's exhilaration which told me all I needed to know. I couldn't let up at all. The concentration required to stay focused was all consuming.

The final circuit was exhilarating I felt fantastic and the final two miles were a sprint.

I achieved what I set out to do, becoming Ladies National Champion with 445.19 miles. I hopped off the bike and thanked Pilates for that!

■ Carol is also a qualified Pilates instructor who holds classes throughout the week. Further information from www.pilates-cumbria.co.uk.

Number one: 'The only thing I want going through my mind is motivation,' says Carol Westmorland. 'Queen's *Don't Stop Me Now* works

Time for a law change to allow us all to enjoy a wild night's camping

IF YOU are a regular reader of Active Cumbria, you may remember that one of my new year resolutions was to do more wild camping.

So far, I've managed only the one night – high up on the fells during that now dimly-remembered heat wave in May – but it was a wonderful night.

To make sure the climb didn't turn into an arduous slog, my partner and I were travelling light – in addition to our usual walking gear, we had just sleeping bags, foam mats, a tiny gas stove and a flysheet for shelter. We'd cut down on weight even further by using our walking poles as tent poles. Choosing a spot not too far

Guidebook writer VIVIANNE CROW shares her love of the great outdoors



from a beck, which served as our water supply, we pitched late in the evening, long after all the day walkers had disappeared.

For anyone who loves the solitude of the fells, a night of wild camping far from civilisation is an unforgettable experience. The stress and day-to-day banalities of 21st century life seem a world away as you temporarily adjust to a different type of living, something a little closer to nature.

Who cares about the credit crunch or the gardening that desperately needs doing when the last of the sun's warm, golden rays are lighting up the mountains in spectacular fashion?

Watching a fox make its way casually across the open fell, oblivious to your presence, blots out all thoughts of those deadlines you have to hit on Monday.

The joy lies in its simplicity; it's a liberating experience to pare everything down to the bare essentials.

We woke early the next day and watched from our sleeping bags, mugs of warming tea in our hands, as the sun rose and the

birds searched for breakfast. It was hours before we saw another walker.

Now, you may have noticed I've been a bit vague about where, exactly, we were camping. That's because, even though we were on access land where walkers have the right to roam wherever they want, technically we were trespassing by camping there.

If we'd gone a few miles further north, into Scotland, we would have been totally within our rights to camp just about anywhere on the mountains.

Strictly speaking, in England, if you want to wild camp, you need the permission of the landowner; in practice, many landowners in

remote upland areas, such as the Cumbrian fells, tolerate wild camping, as long as campers behave responsibly.

In Scotland, access rights are now enshrined in law, the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 clarifying what outdoor enthusiasts can and cannot do.

This is what we need in England too, so that everyone who wants to spend a night in the wilds can do so without having to keep their fingers crossed that the landowner is one of those who turns a blind eye.

Maybe then we can all get a small but healing taste of that last, faint hint of wilderness that our landscape has to offer.