# The Clock to the Rock

**Day 1: Hell of a lot of wind and rain**

And so it starts.

My day starts much like any other; awake at 5.10am quick swim in our pool, 10 k run and back home to make HRH a proper coffee by 7am sharp!

OK some of that might be true.

So 8am at Wellington Barracks, Birdcage Walk SW1, to sign in and meet the rest of the *pelican*, clearly some of them have not put in much in the way of training for this event and the pink lycra is not as kind as it could be to the larger gentlemen. For the first leg, which is 84 miles to Portsmouth, we have 47 riders of all shapes and sizes, mixed ability and no one under the age of 36 (which also happens to be the smallest waist size on show too) ladies excepted of course.

After the usual round of pictures for the real Lions ( I was a bit upset not to have been asked as I have been on 3 Lions tours so far) in front of Big Ben (who was also in lycra) we get a rousing talk from Wints & Togo about road safety, riding as team, WWTW as a charity which brought a tear to many an eye, or was that the tight pink shorts or the dangers of gluten that Togo eulogised about and we set off at 9.05am.

My 3 daughters had come up to cheer us off but the sight of a dozen horses at the barracks was far more interesting.

The first few miles getting out of Central London were painfully slow as there had been a warning of a £10 fine for anyone running a red light so after the first hour we had only managed 12.5 miles and about a £150 in fines. The regular riders of Richmond Park didn’t know quite what to make of 47 riders dressed mainly in pink hogging the road and it’s safe to say that Richmond Park’s collection of (old) dears was doubled (boom boom).

Our first stop was at The Plough in Downside (18 miles in) and modesty forbids me from telling you who was there first for the stage win (it clearly wasn’t a race but I did win) but they seemed to have got the wrong end of the stick when providing bacon sandwiches for us on a Charity ride which turned out to be £4 each. BUT I can tell you they were well worth it and that was £12 well spent. After this we split the pelican into 3, Roger Uttley OBE’s team of White Walkers (see GOT for the reference), Peter Winterbottom MBE’s team of Expendables and Togo’s Team of Anorexics.

Then onto Guildford RFC (37 miles) for lunch (which was free) and they were also hosting a ladies 7’s event for qualifying for the Olympics no less and for some reason we were ushered into the back room before anyone could be put off their lunch by the sight of elite athletes devouring plate full of lasagne or sweet potato cottage pie both served with chips.

A few nasty hills later we passed Midhurst and the big hill in Harting which should really be Hurting, caused a few of the pelican to join the White Walkers of shame, it would be unfair to name names because we all know what goes on tour, stays on tour, (unless of course it is in my blog), but it was very steep and it had started to rain and Togo’s pedal must have slipped when he put his foot down!

Anyway we soon arrived at Portsmouth RFC where they had laid on a mini-rugby festival, live band as well as hot cider and lots of food for us. The Chairman was there to greet us, he was old enough to have seen several of our line-up play rugby, albeit he did say he watched Rodger Arneil and Roger Uttley play with his grandfather when it was still 3 points for a try. Special mention must got to Roger and Louise Baird who managed to get lost on the way to the Club and so did another few miles with Roger refusing to stop and ask the way and Louise telling him she wasn’t going to let him come on the next ride as cycling was clearly her thing!

Then everyone got lost on the way to the ferry terminal and the lady at the barrier seemed not to know who we were as we had to wait ages to be allowed on but several of our line up where taken behind the screen for a full cavity search, but why Michael Goldie and Craig Chalmers went round twice beats me. Then onto the ferry and up to the bar for a few energy bars and lucozades for tomorrow’s efforts.

Stats, 84 miles, 5 hr 44 mins riding, only 14.6 mph average, 1,354 metres of climbing, average heart rate 150, max 197, 4685 calories (out), 5000 in

We do it all again tomorrow and I haven’t had time to check my English and grammar sorry.

**Day 2: *Sunday Bloody Sunday -* St Malo🡪 Nantes.**

Let’s start with the stats, 109.3miles, 7 hrs. 10 minutes, average speed 15.2 mph, max speed 32.9 mph, 1,872 m climbed, average heart rate 139, max 184, calories 4056 out (6000 in).

A tough day after not that much sleep on the ferry, due to a tiny cabin, constant rocking all night (but James Rory Hibbert said it helped him sleep, and his forearms are pretty massive!)

Full-English on the boat in my lycra and the lady at the cash desk said “you only have a little one” which was quite observant of her as she was looking me in the eye, but it turns out I was shy on my breakfast quota, for some reason the boiled bacon didn’t appeal.

Anyway the first section of riding was only 8 miles before we then stopped for breakfast, I forced down a couple of plastic sandwiches, a beef pasty and a scotch egg and felt ready to tackle the day.

Then our first proper stop was at 28 miles and another stage win for me (clearly not a race, but I did win). Mike and the support crew were slightly concerned that they didn’t have much petrol as the French are on strike which Sully had warned him about the day before, but just like at home he wouldn’t listen. The lack of petrol had nothing to do with him leaving the engine running for the whole of the ferry journey either apparently.

Dark clouds with us for most of the day but we just about managed to dodge the showers and rode as Roger’s White Walkers and Wints Weightwatchers until 50 miles which was another stage win for me too. Lunch was set for 70 miles to break the back of the day and warm slightly stiff sandwiches never tasted so good. Adam Harper (Diesel) and his roommate Jon Eaton  (a pair of doctors who trained together and now ride together, live together and indeed shower together) cut the wind for Rodger Arneil and have mastered the knack of slowing down just before the hills to make them a real challenge.

After lunch (where I was robbed of another stage win by Rory Hibbert and mis-information on mileage) the White Walkers were making good progress with Roger doing his best head of PE bossing as usual, “up a gear, down a gear, alter your cadence, pull your socks up, brush your hair”…….. he’s old school that way. Turns out blowing your nose all over the pelican is quite acceptable behaviour and he isn’t  shy about who gets both barrels, Craig Chalmers getting more than his fair share too.

10 miles after lunch the weather took a turn for the worse, it was biblical at one point with hail stones as big as Uttley’s haemorrhoids and we had to take shelter under a tree for 15 minutes. After this we rode on into the sunshine and after crossing one quaint little bridge Chalmers tried to take the inside line on Roger (Overtaking Blocked Easily) who promptly shut the door and Chalmers was down like Aston Villa.

As luck would have it the flying physio Paul Sidi was on hand on his electric bike to fix Craig, but when he applied the TCP to knees and elbow the ear piercing scream was haunting.

Roger and his disciples rode on whilst Adam Harper, myself and Harmi selflessly waited for Craig (to stop crying) and it had nothing to do with us being a bit tired either.

Togo was his usual generous self, he gave a helping hand to Goldie & Paul (the latter who has a similar rolling style as Rory Hibbert) and actually had a run in with Mr Hibbert  resulting in a fall but luckily Paul didn’t spill his lager or meat pie but his cigarette was ruined. Soon after this Paul decided to join the crew in the car and help look for petrol stations.

20 miles after lunch we had another stop where Sully produced some lovely snacks, not just salted caramel popcorn but M&S scrumptious Artisan salted popcorn and salt & vinegar kettle crisps (to replace lost sodium) and Boom & Boost energy drinks.

Ken and Kevin then showed how tough they are (in) bred in the North and smashed the last few hills, they were very quick going up and like the Toon –Army even quicker going down (to the Championship which is the old 1st Division for those non-footballers amongst you).

The last 20 miles were at a steady pace with Wints & Goldie blocking the wind (and the light) for the dirt trackers and were shouting out the pot-holes, and the rest of us took it in turns (funnily enough up the hills and when the wind picked up) and we had plenty of “car-back” warnings and then the shout out for a “car-front” and before you could say Leicester Tigers, Mark Carr hit the front and his blazer was flapping in the wind like Mike trying to ask “ou est le Texaco si vous plait Monsieur?” to the passing farmer in the fields (burning produce paid for by the EC).

So at long last we saw the magical sign that we had all been waiting for, there it stood, loud and proud McDonalds Drive-Thru and we were at our Hotel at last (which was next door).

I then had a quick massage with Paul Sidi and it did the trick I can tell you, he felt like a new man at the (pleasant) end.

A demain mon amis……………………….

**Day 3: *Nelson Mandela* – Nantes 🡪 La Tranche-sur-Mer.**

Stats : 97.5 miles, 5hrs 44 mins, average speed 17 mph, max speed 31.8 mph, only 829 metres climbing, average heart rate 135, max 168, calories 3,471 out (4500 in).

7.30am start after another poor night’s sleep where Rory Hibbert seems to think I am the “speaking clock” in the middle of the bloody night.

First real problems of the tour so far, ignoring the lack of washing facilities, no petrol for the cars, 2 lots of fairly low speed crashes, was that in Nantes there was no (meat based deep fried) cooked breakfast ! There was almost a riot when the Scottish contingent weren’t allowed to deep fry their own Mars Bars with neeps and tatties for their scran. I have no real idea what this means but according to the translator we brought along this was like big Gavin missing that kick in the RWC in 1991 !

Anyway after placating the Jocks with some McEwans Super Strength in their water bottles we set off for a fairly relaxed ride today.

After 8 miles we were on a ferry across the river where they didn’t even wait for the last car and rider to get on before they left the port for the 200 metre crossing. This caught one or two boys out who were headed off looking for the duty free and fruit machines but we were soon back on dry land and cycling south again.

The next 20 miles were fairly relaxed and yet another stage win for yours truly on my fast blue bike.

Lunch was at 58 miles and to be honest we were lucky to have any, the support cars were still living off 5 litres of rationed petrol kindly donated by Toyota one of our official sponsors, but the main reason was the major accident we just managed to avoid on one of the many roundabouts on the route today. Diesel was sent to the front to block the wind for Roger Uttley OBE (other buggers efforts) and Togo (don’t overtake on the inside, howzit man, this is good electrolyte I tell you) joined him.

No one really knows what happened, some say Togo said bear left, some say he said hard left, others thought it was the sight of the kebab shop that did it, but Diesel veered left across the front of the pelican so sharply that Togo almost dropped his gluten free, sugar free, taste free rusk, Roger Uttley almost didn’t have time to snot all over Craig Chalmers and Kevin put another foot down. The only person who missed it was Jon Eaton who was just thanking his lucky stars that he was still alive after pointing out to Paul that his lack of training was letting the side down the night before (after 12 pints of wife beater and few brandy chasers).

Anyway Diesel was sent to the back of the pelican, the quality of chat improved  and the miles ticked by. One very minor detail as Rory won a tiny stage with no points on offer (so there, bad luck, my game my rules).

On to our Hotel where the staff were ready with cameras on hand to take our pictures with the sea in the background, not sure they could believe the size of the pelican or that Roger’s White Walkers were actually the elite riders. This became clear when the So Solid Crew led by Peter Winterbottom tuned up an hour and a half later smelling of fish and chips and cheap white wine vinegar. Apparently they had a pile up too, but as I wasn’t there I can’t say what caused it but big Rodger Arneil seemed to think Wints was “acting like a *rock*” or did he say “big *‘anchor*” !?

Anyway a few of us headed down to the see for a dip and once we let Greenpeace know not to launch a rescue ship for the unexplained pod of beached whales, we were fine.

A shorter day with even less climbing tomorrow.

Chapeau

**Day 4: *A wobble* – TsM 🡪Royan**

Stats, 84.5 miles in 5hr 30 minutes, average speed 15.4 mph, fastest 28.6 mph, a paltry 447 m climbed, average heart rate 143, max 237 (on a flat day!!!), 2,494 calories burned

Well today was the day I wobbled.

My normal start to the day with Rory asking me what time it was at 6am, when breakfast was 8am, then finding a floater in the loo which he swore blind wasn’t him.

Breakfast was more of the same (non-cooked variety) but we did have boiled eggs which were nice.

Maybe it was the impromptu court session the night before where hang’em high Judge Paul Sidi (he of the electric chair, sorry bike) was giving out punishment or the previous few days of cycling but for some reason today I had spasms where my heart rate shot up to 200-210, peaking at 237 at one point. This was odd as we weren’t pushing it, well I wasn’t and hung off the back of the pelican all morning and I only noticed when looking at my Garmin.

So mental note, tonight no Sambuca, not drinking at all in fact.

In case you were wondering my fine was for sending our illegal and unauthorised blogs, but I think it was more like jealousy as the chief snitch was Gore Junior who was trying to deflect on the whole petrol fiasco. Other fines were for Jason Smith, Kevin & Ken for eating only with the Toon Army on the ferry over, singing the fog on the Tyne is all mine all mine and generally talking about “soft southern bastards, why eye man”. Jess the physio was fined for leaving her money in the room so the crew had to go back for it the day before and Rory Hibbert for swapping rooms so he didn’t have to top and tail with Michael Goldie in a single bed.

Anyway back to today, I was rubbish but the White Walkers were very kind to me and I didn’t have to do any real time on the front. Having Roger (Oddly Benevolent Elder) being nice to me was quite un-nerving and sent my heart rate racing even more.

After lunch I went with the Unsullied led by Togo and Jon Eaton and tried to keep calm, I even resisted the temptation for a sprint finish and stage win which shows how off-colour I was.

Tonight we are eating Al Fresco, which means Mike & Wints forgot to book a restaurant for us.

Oh shock horror and to back up my claims that it was a very flat day, Mike got out on the bike for a session or 2. This showed up some shocking manners as he went the wrong way round a roundabout and then ran Craig Chalmers off the road whilst swerving to the right of a pothole when he was on the left of the 2 up pelican. There is no question that his fines will be building up and even the bent Judge Sidi will have to take corrective action before the court throws him out of his ermine lined chambers.

Tomorrow is also meant to be a gentle day, fingers crossed anyway.

Christiano

**Day 5: *Still Alive* – Royan 🡪 Arcachon**

Stats, 88.24 miles in 5 hrs 50 mins, average speed 15.1 mph, max speed 30.6 mph, average HR 129, max 234, calories 2288 out (3500 in)

After a quiet night last night with my first steak frites of the trip, I was a bit nervous how today would go with the racing heart, but as luck would have it we missed the first ferry so the first hour of the morning after our 6.45am start for breakfast was spent in the Hotel lobby. This unexpected delay meant Rodger Arneil caught up with his beauty sleep, Roger Baird managed to find Louise’s lost electric toothbrush (well that’s what he said it was when he retrieved the vibrating machine from the maid cleaning the room) and the brains trust of Mike and Wints took turns to blame the hotel staff, the ferry company and the petrol strike for us all missing the ferry.

Anyway it was another short ferry trip across the mouth of the river and then off we set on another fairly flat day and yes Mike did manage a stretch on his (low mileage) bike, Sidi and Jes took turns on the electric chair and Roger’s White Walkers had Togo with them to keep them in line whilst Harper & Eaton were sent to look after the Expendables.

I did the sensible thing and joined the great unwashed for a day’s gentle pedalling on one of France’s straightest roads and pretended to understand most of what Michael Goldie said to me in his heavy Glaswegian accent, it’s amazing how long you can keep this going by nodding and laughing and generally saying “oh right” “yeah yeah” and “really”. There was the general sprint finish to the first drink’s break which Diesel won (but we are waiting for Vaughan to produce the video evidence for this) closely beating the (much older) Will Wall, his Siamese twin Jon “always beaten in a sprint” Eaton, Russ the beast Kesley and yours truly who left it too late to test out his new rested HR which quickly got up to 238 BPM again.

Anyway after the drinks stop, and just as we were leaving Paul Smith decided now was the time to have a drink (his first soft one of the day) and have a pee and buy a coffee, so God knows what he was doing for the other 15 minutes of the break. So when we did leave he then fell off his bike on the gravel so this meant that Sidi whipped out his TCP spray and Paul was good to go after a little whimper or 2.

The next lot of riding was pretty dull, we even played the “naming bands beginning with A, then B then C game” but even with 4 of us getting this to work wasn’t easy, Gordon Kendall didn’t seem to be able to keep an answer to himself (must be an age thing) but it passed the time.

Lunch was taken at 46 miles and involved a pizza shop, this cheered the pelican up no end even though the pizza did seem to have a lot of vegetables on it and not enough salami, but they saved the day by bringing out lots of salty chips and cans of coke.

The trip into Arcachon was a few miles longer than we had been promised, there were quite a few road works and the general calibre of drivers was appalling, with lots of horn honking, finger wagging and shouting, and that wasn’t just Mike from the safety of his car. Maybe it had something to do with the empty cycle lanes we ignored for 15 miles just to the side of the main single lane highway with heavy holiday traffic on it? Funny bunch the French.

Mark Carr did have a bit of a whinge that we hadn’t ridden through many or indeed any vineyards, but had to make do riding past an orchard, which seemed to do the trick for a bit.

The Unsullied had missed our afternoon drinks stop as we flew past the so called Faster Group but as we were carouselling at the time it was easily done. 3 miles after the scheduled stop and the general level of moan was building up (mainly from Rory Hibbert who had offered to come ride with the “other group” as some sort of pro-bona gift) Paul “so sorry” did mention seeing the others having a drink a few miles back but didn’t want to make a fuss about it or complain about it ! Anyway we stopped in the next layby and the drinks van came to us.

We also picked up a discarded rider from the White Walkers, Kevin who was in tears by the side of the road. First rule of cycling “don’t leave a man down”, ok 2nd rule, (1st rule is don’t cycle too close to Snotter Uttley). Anyway Kevin was welcomed with open arms by our merry band of brothers (as opposed to the merry band of *mothers* who left him) and joined us for the  last 10 miles home. Turns out he was upset as he had booked a double physio session to ease his stiffness. When he found out that Jess now had one of the premium riders who had left him behind and he had Paul “knuckles deep” Sidi instead he was even more upset.

At the hotel we had a few beers and some of us went to swim in the sea. Shame we didn’t get here any earlier to enjoy the beach really………………Wints was the first in the water and from a distance looked like Bo Derek or Bo Selecta and Roger Baird went swimming in his pants or were they Louise’s, anyway red lace is all the rage in the South of France this year.

Another steak dinner and various video blogs where Roger Uttley was heard to extol the benefits of this Mediterranean diet on his “constitutionals” (even though we are on the Atlantic not Mediterranean coast) and the jocks thought it was a reference to the Independence vote and Paul came to dinner in his Scottish darts shirt which he has promised to wear as he and Roger Baird conquered the hills tomorrow ala Braveheart you can take our electrolytes but you cannee take our free wifi………..

You will be glad to know that week one is almost over………………………….but not as glad as me.

Christiano

**Day 6: *Week one done* – Arcachon 🡪 Biarritz**

Stats, only 67miles of the full 107 miles ridden today (more on that later), average speed 16.5 mph, 630 metres climbed , max speed 36.3 mph, blah blah blah.

So the last day of the first week and the pelican are weary at breakfast but excited to have almost made it down to Biarritz.

I head off with the White Walkers for the first 20 miles which has some ups and down and chalk up another stage win. Big mistake. At the drinks stop which was at the top of a small hill I was feeling a little bit dizzy but had my drink and muesli bar as normal. When we set off after 3 miles, the call was made that after my racing heart 2 days before I should sit in the van for a bit. This was clearly an attempt to de-rail my attempt to keep the yellow jersey by Diesel as with me safely stuck in the van he managed to beat the beast Russ Kesley on the next sprint finish.

To say I was a little bit cross was an understatement. Jess the physio bore the brunt of my sulking for 20 miles and even though she did promise me some “fun in the van”, this turned out to be going round roundabouts 2 to 3 times in a row whilst the pelican chugged along behind us. Joking aside this was a very low point for me and with everyone being so kind at the next stop I very nearly had a little cry but I guess it made sense. What really hurt was that Mike managed the whole 60 miles to lunch even with his heart-burn, toothache, halitosis and smoking a packet of Galouis (now see who is in trouble with Mum!).

The next leg I was put in a van with Judge Sidi who got some free advice about his property portfolio in Chertsey from me and talked me through how it was really beneath him to be rubbing and strapping fat old men with psychological tape when he had genuine healing hands and was destined for greater things. He then talked me through his playing days at Harlequins, his England trials, his house swimming gala, the last sports day he was at and his views on global warming, Brexit and the latest Chino-Pacific posturing by the US, China and the Philippines.

Anyway after sitting out 2 x 20 mile legs I was raring to go after lunch which was only small for me (I hadn’t deserved much) so had half a bowl of couscous, a banana and half a dozen chocolate crispy things.

So after lunch the White Walkers led by Togo knocked off a steady 20 miles, then we all met up after another 17 miles at Bayonne for a coffee and the promise of an ice-cream (yet another lie from the support crew) but it also meant the whole pelican rode the last 5 or 6 miles into Biarritz together as the Bayonne Express which was nice.

What goes around comes around, Diesel (being the whippet that he is at 115 kgs) ended up busting a spoke on his carbon rims (which for most of us means his wheel broke) ended up in the van for the last 20 miles.

The dinner was another meat fest and the best steak so far. Huge bottles of red wine (6 litres) and white wine for Louise and Jess (4 litres) did the rounds and then Judge Sidi conducted his final round of fines but not before Rory Hibbert got up for an impromptu and heart felt speech thanking the sponsors, the organisers, the riders, the support crew, the riders, his parents for getting together and virtually everyone is his rolodex in a very brief 45 minutes which absolutely flew by. Joking aside it hit the spot and he reminded us all why we were there to support wwtw a very worthy charity.

Rodger Uttley OBE then got up and thanked “little Jim the nodding dog” as well as Wints, Gorey and pretty much everyone else Rory had covered too. Spirit of rugby on a bike was Roger’s invention and by God he wished he had patented it back in Oz in 2013.

Wints then got up and sat down.

Judge Sidi who was by this time full of red wine and bon vivant then held his last court session where once again he picked on me for being a sick-note and a snitch and so my drink-free evening was put on hold. Other winners or losers were Paul “so sorry” Smith who needed Michael (kidney stone) Goldie to translate and he was fined for going the wrong way round a roundabout, not speaking the Queen’s English, not speaking hardly anyone’s English and most probably the most improved cyclist award too.

Craig Chalmers won an award for not washing his cycle shorts all trip before then lending them to his son who joined us for the last day’s riding.

Jon “always beaten” Eaton was fined for abusive use of medical terminology at almost every meal time and after sniffing some alcohol became a terrible potty mouth and was only too willing to share sordid medical tales and not all of them included him and Diesel at med school either.

Malcolm Wall was fined for having varicose veins that quite frankly belonged on a rambling holiday and Hammy should have been fined for hiding in the Fast pelican on the last day when he should have been in the Very Fast pelican with the rest of the Geordie Shore. This reminds me of the time Rory asked Ken quite seriously that as he lived in Newcastle and owned a caravan park “did he actually know Sheryl Crow sorry I mean Sheryl Cole ?” and seemed genuinely upset that Ken hadn’t met either but that as it was a Bank Holiday weekend coming up he would let him know if either popped along for a go in a static caravan.

[ While I remember other quotes I have missed over the week which are all true, at Portsmouth RFC one of the minis did ask me if I was a Lion as he looked for autographs, after tucking into his steak at dinner Roger commented that he liked the marbling only to find that someone else was short of their “canard”, not sure if it was the orange sauce or wings but Roger kept quiet anyway.]

Sorry this is late but today is a rest day and the sun is out and I have already seen a doctor and cardiologist and given the all clear, so bad luck another week of blogs from me as we smash Spain.

Christiano

PS as some of you are late to the party and missed some days of this rubbish if you want them please do feel free to ask and the whole lot will be available in the bargain bucket at WH Smith soon for 99p and a free Daily Telegraph and bottle of Buxton water.

**Day 7: *Heaven***

Well on the 7th day even God had a rest and so did the pelican and hence so are you !

It would not be fair of me to share details of the rather pleasant day on the beach where the pelican again split into 2 groups, those who were happy to get their guns (not to mention substantial girths) out and those that didn’t.

For once I am not dominating headlines as Michael Goldie has booked himself into a 5 start Hotel (aka hospital) for some EPO and a bed bath, wishing him a speedy recovery. Jon “always beaten” Eaton better check his PI cover as The Fat Cyclist will be suing for mis-diagnosis I’m sure.

Roger Uttley BEI (Bought Everyone Ice-cream) on the way back from the beach which was very decent of him.

The new pelican is assembling for next week’s Spanish Bull Fight and just as we have lost most of the non-English speakers Steve “beanbags” Bainbridge will be here shortly to make sure someone can keep the NFM (northern f\*\*\*in’ monkey) count high (why hi man) *needs to be read in an accent to really work.*

Here are a few pictures of my nutritious lunch, the Double Bask Burger that Mandy Fuge (our recently landed nutritionist) said was a well- balanced meal (for Elvis Presley).

Also this is Paul “knuckles deep” Sidi who seems to have lost his car keys.

Oh and the beach.

Tomorrow the fun really starts.

PS if you have missed any day’s blog and you want it just ask

**Day 8: *(a lot)* – Biarritz 🡪 Tafalla**

Stats, 89.7 miles in 6 hr 21 mins, av speed 14.1 mph, max 36.5 mph, 2017 m climbed, av HR 146 and max 220 (but that’s up a very big hill so nobody panic Mr Manwaring) calories 3,952 out and 5000 in.

Last night we had a quite night in the hotel in Biarritz as we were joined by the riders who were too scared of France and Wints gave one of his Winston Churchill like speeches that brought most of the room to tears ! So the pelican was up for a 7.30am breakfast for a 9am Grand Depart.

One of our pelican has now been asked to officially retire and it’s not because he was needed to bail Paul “so sorry” Smith out of Customs at Biarritz airport (who missed his flight home and lost his credit cards) but because Michael Goldie has been asked to join Team SKY by Sir Dave Brailsford himself. He will be fitting SKY boxes in the Glasgow area in the not too distant future and for £20 cash in hand you will get HD and some of those artistic channels that Rodger Arneil watches when he can’t get to sleep.

Chapeau Goldie you will be missed as will Jess McDonald who was also dropped from the team due to some irregularities with Paul Sidi’s electric bike (she was faster on it than him) and has gone off to join the Dallaglio Slam for some clubbing in Magaluf and Ibiza (wicked innit).

So back to today where we split into 2 groups for quite a lot of climbing, the Slow Group led by Roger OBE and the Slower Group led by Wints. I decided to stick with my own personal doctor Diesel who was in the Slower Group and can you guess who won the first real climb of the day ? Alas I am sorry to say it wasn’t me, but Joe Piri (who has a new £10 k bike) who had obviously picked the fatty group to ride with to get some cheap stage wins under his belt. I will have to keep an eye on him I can see that. I did manage a gallant 2nd and warmly congratulated Joe whilst making a mental note to bury him in my blog later on.

After a drinks stop at 20 miles where we had slipped into Spain (in fact sunny sunny Spain) new rider Ed (who did manage the trip down to Portsmouth) had to get his bike sorted by MtM (Martin the Mechanic) and the downhill was won by Sir Isaac Newton in that Diesel powered his 115 KG down in a flash.

The next real hill was upon us and was circa 7 miles long and this was dominated by Rus “the beast” Kesley and Mandy “the flying machine” Fuge. I didn’t see the finish but Rus was the winner and King of the Mountains (KOM) with Mandy (QOM) and I managed to sneak past Joe Piri when he was admiring his £10k bike right at the finish to scrape third place. I had been chased up the mountain (reads better than hill) by Paul “the gurney” Sidi on his electric bike with a ring of onions round his neck and a baguette stuffed down his lycra shorts. Mike G also rode this hill which was a shock to everyone but not as much as not being able to use his last 2 gears (he now claims 3) and resulted in MtM having to sort him out half way up.

The lunch stop was well deserved and once again the Sully twins did us proud with their baguette making skills, they had bought out the local shop and even had a couple of tins of sardines on hand which were great and hopefully explained the fishy smell on their hands !

Anyway lunch was at 48 miles and the next drinks stop was at 73 miles and I was back with the White Walkers after 3rd place on the climb. The ride in was pretty fast (even though Steve “beanbags” Bainbridge was reluctant to take the wind and was complaining about a sore hip, a broken Garmin and not having ridden longer than 50 miles this year and how much older policeman seem these days) and it was a good job too because not long after we got to our Hotel El Ninio arrived and virtually blew the place away.

The dirt trackers weren’t too far behind us and we only managed to watch the first 3 Godfather movies before they arrived and we all were sent to our rooms to get ready for a well-earned dinner.

Tomorrow is the worst day of the trip according to those that know about these things and I don’t mean new girl  Jen having to share a van with the Judge whilst he explains how he could have been a contender (in Embarrassing Bodies).

Adios amigos

Christiano

**Day 9: *Nein, nein* – Tafalla 🡪 Almazan**

Stats, 100.2 miles in a long 6 hrs 54 mins, av speed 14.5mph with 1,730 m of climbing, max speed 38.9 mph, av HR 150, max 254m calories 3911 out.

A long uphill day !

We left 20 minutes late mainly due to Mandy having to plait her hair and the White Walkers averaged a steady 20 mph for the first hour or so which was pretty flat to be honest.

The next 40 miles were uphill (not too steep) but never ending and the carouselling wasn’t working too well mainly because Beanbags wouldn’t go to the back and kept cutting back in, luckily Roger (Order Balls Eager) was on-hand to remind him of his cadence, the fact he wasn’t in tour kit, and that riding with a TENS machine on was tantamount to cheating (unless of course you are pregnant).

This long steady incline was just what Judge Sidi had been waiting for and he mounted his trusted stead to claim a stage 3 win but lost the last few friends he had with his chuckling as he ticked past whilst reading his IPhone, doing the crossword and fumbling in his shorts.

We had a late lunch at 63 miles and were lucky to have that as the SullyVan twins had got caught short on it being a Sunday (who’d have guessed that came after a Saturday) and Spain so they had a lot of trouble trying to find lunch for us all. Especially as they had a nice game of tennis at the Hotel, a spa treatment each and watched England beat Wales at rugby today too, but they did find some plastic sandwiches and crisps for us.

At this stage the pelican really needed a lift, apart from the constant height checks from Rus Kesley who is a mobile altimeter, and the sight of Mike getting on his bike after lunch was just the fillip we needed, there must be a flat section coming up ! Well it was a bit flatter but with the wind and rain it wasn’t as easy as he thought or we hoped. He and Mandy set of hand in hand skipping up the first hill (Mum don’t buy a hat yet sorry) but they were soon gunned down by the dynamic duo of Diesel and Rus with the big lad taking the stage win at 86 miles.

I had a sense of humour failure and said I thought it was too long a leg at 23 miles and Mike thought I was referring to his break and said that was rich with all my stage wins ! (I forgot to say that I won the last stage home the day before btw). Anyway after a few metaphorical handbags and the Judge taking notes for his next fine session it was all sorted amicably and I don’t have to get Mum to speak with him.

It made a nice change not to cycle past at least a dozen signs for Pamplona as we did the day before.

The last 14 miles home were a real struggle as the head winds really picked up, we had some heavy rain and couple of mechanicals and myself, Wints, Gordon and Jo £10k took turns at the front to break the wind and get the mini-pelican home. We stopped to help Al with his puncture as good Samaritans, only for Uttley and Bainbridge to cycle on by, happily talking about the good old days when they were at school with William Webb-Ellis.

Any tomorrow is a shorter day with some minor ups and downs apparently, but they do lie about these sorts of things.

Our hotel isn’t serving dinner until 9.30pm and is full of men watching Spain vs. Bosnia Herzegovina and playing cards, well it is only Monday tomorrow and the whole country seems to be closed during the day. Fingers crossed the food is good and we get another serving of apple flan which we have had for pudding 5 nights running so far.

Wishing you all a wonderful week at work next week !

Best

Christiano

**Day *(perfect)* 10: Almazan 🡪 Guadalajara**

 Stats, 77.8 miles in 4 hrs 57 mins, av speed 15.7 mph, max speed 39.4 mph, 1397 m climbed, av HR 137, max 241 bpm, calories 3054.

Last night’s dinner was a great spaghetti starter followed by a pork dish with roasted potatoes and a chocolate layered mousse washed down with a 14% red wine. No speeches, no fines and no apple flan. The day had taken it out of the pelican and most had an early (ish) night.

8am breakfast with no cereal, no eggs and no bacon, but plenty of bread, donuts, cupcakes and other carbohydrates covered in sugar washed down with watery orange juice, coffee and magdelana cakes, we are officially in Spain.

9am grand depart and Mandy was told she had to ready this time “or else” and we were briefed that we had a steady 20 miles with some ups and downs to start with but the sight of Mike on his bike meant the pelican wasn’t too worried about what was to come (at least in the first session). Wints took out the unsullied and Roger the White Walkers a little bit later and in time for the first mini-climb of the day.

Rus “the beast” beat Mandy (QOM) up this hill whilst I was keeping my powder dry for the bigger longer harder better trickier lovelier steeper (le grand) classic climb next to the stunning castle to come known as the Alto de Jadraque……………………………

Anyway lunch was at 43 miles after we just dodged a heavy rain storm and there was a sprint finish to the SullyVan where I beat Steve sick-note Bainbridge and Roger hurty knee Uttley but to be clear this was not a stage win but a lesson in life, the younger lighter sprinter nearly always wins. The SullyVan twins had come up trumps yet again, cheese and ham baguettes all round, individual salads (with no tomatoes) and sardines a plenty and with it being only a 78 mile day the pelican was in good shape. Mandy didn’t eat that much she had her sights set on the Alto de Jadraque challenge to come quite soon after.

After lunch Mike stayed with us as he didn’t have to rush off to pick up Rob 3 day tourist Henderson and Patsy Klein who were due to land at Madrid airport at 3pm but when the news came that their flight had been delayed he avoided the urge to tackle the big classic climb, meanwhile Judge Sidi was finely tuning his electric (go on you try it, it’s much harder than you think and has a limiter on it and eco power and only helps under 15 mph, you don’t know how hard it is, I don’t like rubbing fat men but seem to spend a lot of my professional and spare time doing it) bike for the hill to come.

Turns out Rob “I don’t go all the way” Henderson was refused entry to his flight as he had drunk Gatwick’s 3 Tuns public house dry and then tried to cycle his bike onto the plane, or he forget to check in the night before which is de riguer for slEasy Jet flights these days and was therefore put on standby.

Anyway at mile 50 we reached our goal, the hill (it has now been re-classified as a mountain) and team orders were thrown out of the window and it was every (fat) man, woman and child for themselves. Mandy set off like a scalded cat, Rus “the beast” was stalking her and refused to be goaded into chasing her too early as he said she wasn’t a finisher. Next up was Jo £10k but it was going to take a bit more than a flash paint job and a lightweight frame to beat the Fudge. Then Vaughan (great tan and I didn’t ride the morning section) Hobbs with his grand dads long sleeve vest on,  so I tucked in behind him and as time went on, hopped my way up the pelican, letting each rider cut me some air before I leap frogged them and discarded them like a used tissue as I climbed and climbed.

After seeing off £10k, I rode with the Beast for a bit (as he knew how far it was to the top (*snow-capped summit* sounds better) ) and maybe it was the speed, maybe the lack of oxygen but I sensed Mandy was slowing possibly tiring even. At this stage (2/3 of the way up I may add) there was a whizzing sound and out of the back of the Massage Truck came Judge Sidi on his electric massage table and him and Mandy vied for the lead. This was my chance and using every last ounce of energy from my years of drinking Coca-Cola and eating mars bars and forgetting my 180+ HR (after all it had been 240 the day before whilst not even pedalling down a hill) and set off for the finish line (even though I didn’t know where it was). Sidi pointed me in the direction of a few out-houses about ¾ mile away but I didn’t believe him and just gave it everything.

A car went past with a Spanish family leaning out of the windows shouting what can only be termed encouragement which went a bit like this “underlay, underlay, vamos grandiose bastardos” so I assume they were talking to the Judge.

I’d love to say we traded places and it was neck and neck to the finish, but it wasn’t and I smashed the 6 stone female rider like she was a 6 stone female rider really and I even managed this when I lost my left pedal with a cleat issue. KOM and a classic win for El Goredinio.

After this we all re-grouped with 27 miles to go and carouselled our way back home. I already knew that the British don’t like a winner and this was reaffirmed as I was made to cut the wind for ages, then told I was too slow, too fast (guess who by Old Beaten Engine OBE). Then on the downhill “no pedalling allowed” section I was beaten by Diesel who hit warp speed like the Millennium Falcon and then to make it worse by Mandy (but she cheated by pedalling).

The sun came out for the last 10 or so miles and myself and Roger helped Sean back home after he hit the wall and it wasn’t so I could have a rest honest.

Once we hit Guadalajara we had our picture taken under the giant cyclist and I don’t mean Wints (see attached) and then there was some fun and games coming up, the last sprint with Sick-Note Bainbridge beating me to the roundabout but then going straight on so I took the stage win (by default but a win’s a win) as I was at the Hotel first.

Another day gone…………….

**Day 11: (extra miles before lunch) – Guadalajara 🡪 Toleda**

Stats, 89.1 miles in 5 hr 11 mins, av speed 17.2 mph, max speed 37.6 mph, 1,250 metres climbed, av HR 136, max 239 bpm, calories 3344, less taken in as missed lunch.

As an addendum to yesterday’s blog, I failed to admit that I tried to win the sprint in for lunch but went too early and was well beaten by Diesel (and Jo £10k), see there you go but there were no points on offer !

Anyway last night we had pre-dinner drinks in Toledo where they served pork scratchings with roasted bacon still attached to them that was to die for.

Team dinner was spag boll followed by sliced pork with creamed mash potatoes and an apple sauce (quite good) and then a chocolate swiss roll. No greens in sight (result).

At this point Rob Henderson turned up as well as Steve Bainbridge’s Spanish friend Gabbi and all hell was let loose at the bar. Gabbi talked perfect Spanish (he is Spanish), Hendo talked perfect bollox and Bainbridge talked a combination of the 2, way eye man pedro Kawasaki.

I ended up sharing a room with Al from Muscat, and I was in bed before him and he managed to have a few beers with his old school pal Wints and get back to the room and fall asleep before me. So with Al Jazeera on the TV, I had Al de Snorer for company.

Breakfast at 7.30am for an 8.30am depart. No eggs, no bacon but fresh oj, nespresso coffee machine plenty of bread, cakes, cheese & ham and the pelican was well fed as usual. Then it was clear Sick-Note Bainbridge was still in bed with a terrible hang-over and he appeared with less than 5 minutes to go and it was clear he was going to spend the day in the van.

The first 8 miles had a few ups and downs and Mandy won the first mini hill with no real competition, Judge Seedy was still charging his batteries and Rus the beast was next up followed by myself, then Jo £10k, Mike G, Roger OBE and the rest of the fatties. Then we had a few messy miles before we re-formed for a proper pelican led by Diesel who smashed out 12 miles at well over 20 mph.

The second stop was at 40 miles and was ANOTHER stage win for me, at the last roundabout Diesel was slowing down and failed to un-clip and fell like a red wood to his left, luckily Mandy and Jen were behind him or it would have been murder, so Rus took the brunt of it and I bolted for home.

After the drinks we were heading off to the proper climb of the day and the White Walkers headed off first with Diesel covered in TCP and it was clear Mandy wanted it badly, but Mike was pretending to have social media duties (ie booking tonight’s hotel) so myself Mandy and Rus the beast set off where we made a pact to finish together. Big mistake Mandy, when the first few hills turned to a flat (the boys put their foot down) and the 3 musketeers turned to the 2 Ronnies and it was goodbye from him and goodbye from me.

Anyway the official result was a 3 way tie and the real result was a 2 way Thai with me and the Beast (but I think he had the legs on me today). This was when it all went wrong for me. I decided to deal with a few work emails and said I’d wait for the Unsullied so Roger (OBE) Old But Eager and his disciples carried on and after 5 or 6 minutes I suddenly realised that Wints Weight Watchers might be quite some time and I set off after the White Walkers.

At the first T junction and with no Garmin to guide me I asked the 2 locals who were sitting on the wall which was the pelican had gone, they smiled and pointed down the cobbled street opposite me, I had second thoughts and pointed right and sure enough they said “si si bastardo” and pointed that way. So I set off a little bit worried but it was the next roundabout that proved to be my downfall, 2 exits, one to Madrid and one to Chichcochoo and for some reason I was sure we were in Madrid tonight. Then it turned into a 5 mile downhill stretch and with no sign of the White Walkers I was worried. I knew lunch was at 60 miles (so 14 miles away) and at 56 miles I rang Mike to get Vaughan instead who was clearly on drugs listening to his ska music. Turns out I was now 15 miles away from the official lunch stop and the first 5 were back up that bloody hill.

I headed off with my Waze app eating data like no tomorrow (sorry work) and MtM was sent back to get me. MtM is a great mechanic but a lousy navigator and after an hour I had made it to the lunch stop to find nothing but a bare bit of ground covered in crisp packets, coke cans, meat pie wrappers, plasters and parecetemol packets (so I knew sick note Bainbridge had been there). I then swapped about a dozen calls with MtM who assured me he was getting closer and would be with me “in 2 minutes” every time we spoke.

An hour later he showed up and I was given my lunch box which included a salad with tomatoes (Judge Seedy apparently) but I had my ham roll, flame steak crisps, can of Boom & Boost and a nice tortilla as MtM assured me he would have me back with the pelican before the next drinks stop. Oh how wrong he was. We hit a very pleasant town with an interesting one-way system that we tried several different ways (MtM’s phone doesn’t self-orientate) so it was like a game of snakes on Tron with the existing route, our current route and planned route confusing everyone.

Anyway we finally found Judge Seedy just as the White Walkers left so I was given the important job of taking HRH Rodger Arneil into the Hotel. Once again I didn’t have the route so decided to chance it with my Waze app and Rodger blindly followed me as we dodged several motorway junctions on our way to the Hotel Beatriz. We called ahead and the crew were there already (getting the wash done no doubt) so Rodger and I blindly hopped our way into Toledo. He was a real trooper as I counted down the miles, 6 miles Rodge, then 10 minutes later only 5 to go now Rodge, 12 minutes later at 18 mph only 4 now Rodge, I finally admitted my app was wanting to take us on the motorway and he chirped up “well it will only be for a few minutes won’t it Chris?” but I refused to take him onto the 5 lane highway (paid for by the EC and with absolutely no traffic on it) so we circled Toledo for most of the afternoon.

At last we finally found the Hotel after negotiating the 12% last hill and found the birthday boy Peter “motivational speaker” Winterbottom sitting on the front step, maybe he was waiting for his birthday cake with quite a few candles on it, but Rodger and I made it home last to find the hotel pool was shut, but the pelican were happily tucking into a few cervezas.

Rumour has it Judge Seedy is holding court tonight, so not looking good for sick-note Bainbridge, Rob half tour Hendo or Mike half day Gore I’d say.

Until tomorrow amigos.

Christiano

**Day 12: Toledo 🡪 Puerto Llano**

Stats, 100.6 miles in 6 hr 10 mins, av speed 16.3 mph, max 31.3 mph, 1166 metres climbed, av HR 132, max 178 bpm, calories 3,664.

Last night we had a good meal starting with a lasagne and tuna salad (not together) followed by a steak with vegetables and boiled potatoes.

Birthday boy Wints was given a chocolate cake with 2 candles (29 years each no doubt) and a standing ovation from the China Taipei Peter Winterbottom Fan Club (but it wasn’t easy to spot they were standing) and Judge Seedy seemed to blend right in the sirry irriot. I was told off by Gordon deputy head master Kendall for playing 50 cent In da House to celebrate Wints birthday, too loudly. My next song was by Jilted John (go look it up).

I was rooming with HRH Rodger Arneil and so the cardiac twins set off both worried about the other, Judge Seedy reminded me of CPR “Nelly the elephant packed her trunk and made her way to the circus” as the tempo but we both made it through the night OK.

Breakfast was a real treat with scrambled eggs, bacon, chorizo, several flavours of juice, coffee, fresh bread, and plenty of fresh fruit.

We had a 9am grand depart and had a hilly start to the day for the first 5 miles, Mandy took a first mini-hill climb followed by myself and Rus but we let her win. All morning she was complaining about tired legs, sore bum ,having no energy, but it was all mind games and never kid a kidder. At the first real hill climb of the day, Roger’s White Walkers set off and it was soon a 3 horse race with me Mandy and Rus as J10K, Roger and Diesel brought up the rear, with Wints and the unwashed way way back in the Hotel still getting their money’s worth out of the all you can eat buffet. Rob Henderson’s name has now been added to the black-list along with Jimmy 5 Bellies and Mr Creosote.

Anyway at the business end the KOM was 98 KGs, blondish, greyish, balding, and this isn’t Mandy if you get me. Anyway Rus the beast was next and Mandy I have a sore bum and no energy was 3rd.  We had a few picture at the top and waited for the rest of the magnificent 6 and this time I didn’t hang about doing emails.

Another stage win for me at the first 20 mile water break, then at the 40 mile stop I went off too early and had Diesel slip-streaming me all the way to pop out as I ran out of gas to claim the stage win. Whatever, “am I bovered?”

The stage before lunch was largely uneventful until Roger (One Bruised End) was too busy telling the pelican to brush their teeth, comb their hair, watch their cadence etc etc when he missed a gear, and stalled which meant Rus the beast swerved and fell, hitting the deck quite hard, he was OK until J£10k parked his bike up his rear and Mandy rode straight over him thinking it was a hill climb she could finally win. He was up in a flash and wanting to carry on but his back side was on show and Judge Seedy was very keen to get his TCP spray out.

At the next bend Seedy was there rubber gloved-up and Rus had to “assume the position” but why Seedy had to suck out the poison no one really knew or cared but Rus was baboon bottomed with iodine dripping off him, but it meant at the lunch stop at 63 miles Rus full of adrenalin (and Seedy spit) raced in (to have a bath in the sink at the Repsol Petrol Station). We were playing “eye spy” at the time (honestly) and the letter was C, I will leave you to guess what it could have been. But “cut bum” wasn’t one of them but maybe we will “see you next Thursday” Roger was one.

Lunch was a bread roll, ham and cheese with garlic mayonnaise and ice cold coke with bacon crisps and water melon but why they can’t make them with no seeds beats me (which is more than Mandy does up hills these days).

After lunch the WW smashed out 20 miles with no real issues, except for Rus’s arse hanging out and weeping all the way, it was slightly unnerving to be honest and to have pacman winking at you all the way was weird. Mike half day Gore got back into the car for more social media duties and Vaughan got back on his bike in head-to-toe Road Rags gear (not rhyming slang by the way).

The drinks stop at 80 miles was at a one horse town where the owner seemed to think Judge Seedi would now be marrying his daughter, J£10k had a tom-tit and also bought some ice-creams which seemed to appease the Landlord.

For the last stage  of the day which was 20 miles Russell the muscle had a rush of bloody and bolted for the Hotel with 18 miles to go. Naturally I made the jump to light speed expecting to rein him in, but for some reason my after burners failed me and I made no real progress on Rus. Clearly the adrenaline was fuelling the beast, and yet again I rode 10 miles by myself. At the next roundabout I decided not to take a gamble on the right exit and sat there waiting for the WW to turn up.

This also saved me from the fine Rus will be getting later on for deserting the pelican, Roger (Oh Big Ego) was not impressed and was thinking about giving Rus a detention to go with his tanned behind (Harrow boys will know how this feels).

The Hotel is “charming” but the roof top pool hasn’t been built yet.

Asta la manana baby.

**Day 13: *Unlucky for my bum* – Montilla 🡪 Ronda**

Stats, 108.7m in 7 hr 4 mins, av speed 15.4 mph, max 44.3 mph, 1,763 m climbed, av HR 126 bpm, max 229 bpm (going downhill and genuinely scared), calories 4052 out.

Last night’s dinner was tuna pasta with tomatoes (quickly passed onto J£10k whilst he was busy staring in the mirror at his lovely bike) followed by sliced pork with boiled vegetables and yogurt and fresh fruit for dessert. The Hotel was “basic” to be fair and Judge Seedy had a mini-court session where Roger (Overtly Boorish Englishman) was fined for sexist comments, Rob Half tour Hendo was multiple fined for a whole smorgasbord of crimes ranging from breaking the lift, to missing his flight from Gatrow and snoring at Olympic level to playing drinking games without explaining the rules, other fines were to Mike G for spitting the dummy and Russell the muscle for bare faced cheek (and bolting for home) which reminds me that MtM explained to me that riding my bike yesterday was like having the break on which explains why I was unable to haul back RtM from his break.

Anyway after dinner I was yet again rooming with HRH Rodger Arneil who had smashed the last section of the ride into the Hotel.

So today we had a 7am breakfast for an 8am grand depart. Back to boiled eggs, watered down oj, average  coffee and plenty of croissants and donuts.

We had a tricky ride out of the town and at the first hill, Mandy took the honours as RtM and I sat back as seeing Mandy cry herself to sleep over the lack of hill stage climbs was just too much to bare. At the next hill Rus took the honours but at the signature category 3 climb of the day where I only decided to take it seriously half way up and exploded from the blocks like Ben Johnson and as David Coleman said it was “truly remarkable” as I smashed Joe £10k, RtM and Mandy as if I was a hot knife through mantequilla !

I notched up a few stage wins, the first drinks stop and lunch but there were only minor points on offer to be fair.

Lunch was at 63 miles and Roger (One Before Eating) treated his WW to ice creams before the SullyVans had had time to produce their customary baguettes with plastic cheese, sweaty ham and garlic mayonnaise, washed down by 2 cans of coke, a lemon Fanta and smoky bacon crisps. It was a very hot day trust me.

Mandy, J£10k and I had to give Roger, Diesel and RtM the silent treatment after one of the morning sessions where the Holy Trinity bolted after a long downhill section but as this didn’t do the trick we then had to point out the error of their ways, but apparently we should have pedalled quicker rather than them slower.

Anyway I am not one to bare a grudge and after reminding them of this for most of the day I have now let it go.

Funnily enough Mike half day Gore got back into the car after lunch but to be fair he seemed to have put in a decent hill climb in the morning session (well compared to Wints’ unsullied) but it was good to see Steve sick-note back on his bike and he was closely followed in by Gordon who wasn’t even sweating.

The last 47 miles of the day after lunch were by far the hottest of the trip and we squeezed in 2 water breaks in between the hills and it was a mental and physical challenge and even the hardest amongst us was close to cracking (Obstinate Bossy Endearing) being one of them. He gave up his customary seat at the front after pointing out RtM’s error of his ways when he drifted into the Ed position (which is a triple header) and not to be confused with a double header where RtM has been caught out by Mandy of loading his Garmin and Strava from his phone so he gets double mileage and double climbing metres ! Anyway back to Ed whose bike had yet another mechanical and ended up in the car again.

According to MtM this latest issue could have been intentional and might be explained by Ed having a lot of oil on his hands at breakfast !

Anyway at dinner Ed was quick to have seconds of the chicken in a basket which was served after a tuna salad starter and this was duly noticed by Roger One Buttered End but he did manage to get some extra salted chips which he did share to his credit.

The Hotel does have a pool which was very refreshing after so long in the saddle and we only have 90 miles tomorrow………………

Tomorrow is the 2nd to last day for all of us (riders and readers).

For those of you on Strava you might want to check out some of my climbs today where Mandy won another bevvy of QOM awards (based on my times on Strava as her battery ran out) and Shane Sutton has already been on the phone telling her not to have babies and join the SKY team (and not to help Goldie with the installation either).  For my age and weight division I am a contender not to mention in my family too but Mike has asked me to stop mentioning his half days as his Sponsors are holding back on him.

I am sharing a room with Patsy Clein tonight and he has already warned me about his snoring so I have my ear plugs at the ready and Diesel is going to let me have some sleeping pills too.

Wish me luck

**Day 14: The penultimate blog - Montilla 🡪 Ronda**

Stats 82.1 miles in 5 hrs 26 mins, av speed 15.1 mph, max 40.3 mph, 1603 metres climbed, av HR 130, max 173 bpm, calories 3532

Well Patsy Clein is not the snorer he makes himself out to be, or the combination of Mandy’s magnesium pills (which she rations these days depending on how badly I beat her on the hills so tomorrow I will be clean), Diesel’s sleeping tablets, my ear plugs and a few beers not to mention being v tired meant I had a good night’s sleep. Which is more than can be said for HRH Rodger Arneil who was rooming with Gordon Kendall who according to Rodger was a full on brass band from both ends which meant Rodger went off to find the Hotel Manager. He was quickly re-housed in the VIP wing, but when Gordon woke up in the morning he was all of a fluster and set off the alarm that Rodger Arneil had gone missing, possibly kidnapped and that road blocks should be set up in a 20 mile perimeter until has was apprehended.

Luckily Rodger was first in the queue at breakfast for the cold cheese, plastic ham, toast and donuts and Gordon was relieved as the fine for losing HRH would have been too much for him to stand.

Breakfast was at 7.30am for an 8.30am start but the grand depart was delayed whist Roger One Blown Engine demanded MtM replace his front tire “this instant” which also meant Mandy wasn’t the last one ready for a change.

Roger’s WW set off with Mike half day Gore and Jen amongst us so we knew the morning session would be doable. Diesel was in a relaxed mood and even had his flip flops in his back pocket whilst Russell the muscle was for once fairly quiet on the altitude and mileage front and Jo £10k was looking quietly determined.

The first drinks stop was at 20 miles with no real dramas, Mandy took the first mini-hill of the day and leading up to lunch I bolted up one hill, then eased back on the descent for Diesel, RtM and Roger in his Captain America Ski Socks (ala support tights) to fly past and semi-mock me for getting to lunch first. I had to put them straight on my easing back for fear of being reprimanded and Roger said that one should always pedal hard down a hill.

So lunch was at 43 miles and yet again baguettes with ham and cheese, garlic mayonnaise, pork scratchings, boom & boost, jelly babies and the threat of a decent hill to come, which would be split into 2 stages. Well at the first stage I decided to give Mandy a reasonable lead and then attack hard, and the rest is history. After reaching the drinks stop,  Mike half day was there and just about spluttered a “good effort” as I beamed with pride and heat stroke. Mandy breezed in claiming that wasn’t a climb but a sprint and she was right of course.

The next stage was a proper climb (7 miles) and her and RtM set off together whilst I decided to hang back and annoy Roger, which I did quite quickly as he said “you go ahead Christopher” and the next 7 miles were a right pain to be honest. The climb went on and on, nothing too steep but there was a decent head wind and it was pretty hot too. There was a flatter section with a town and I was desperately scanning the shop fronts for the SullyVans (but a distinct lack of porky men drinking beer and vaping) meant I had to carry on regardless.

There was no sign of Mandy or RtM and behind me it looked like Roger was gaining on me (but at that sort of distance it was hard to see or tell). Anyway after an age I finally made it to the top where Mandy and RtM were there but no drinks van in sight so I joined in the little moan that was going on and then J£10k joined us, meaning he had over taken Roger (On Borrowed Energy). Then Roger arrived claiming Diesel had also over-taken him but then had stopped to put his flip-flops on, which as he put them on the round Roger gave a huge snort and they went over the edge. As Diesel went to get a guide rope and retrieve them Uttley shot past to claim 5th spot.

The magnificent 6 regrouped for the final 12 miles home which also had a few ups and downs (which I pedalled on this time) and we made it to Ronda with virtually no water left. This was soon put right by Mike and the Sullys who had selflessly taken 2 tables in a bar and were hydrating themselves generously as the air conditioning in that van and Toyota can be quite fierce.

Judge Seedy had scooted in on his electric bike and had worked up quite a sweat doing the dot to dot puzzles on his IMac which he can’t really master, apart from Private Viewing and Deleting History which he can do in a flash.

The pelican are all safely home and HRH Rodger Arneil is in danger of being thrown out of Wints WeightWatchers for excessive speeding and making people look bad for the 2nd day running.

Tomorrow is the last day, hurrah and my lovely (not to mention understanding) wife Nickie and my 3 Goregeous girls are joining me as well as various other members of Nickie’s family who are coming to celebrate her birthday with us in Gib !

Chapeau

**Day 15: *They think it’s all over, it is now!* – Ronda 🡪 Gibraltar**

Stats, 65.4 miles in 4 hr 28 mins, av speed 14.6 mph, max speed 40mph, 1246 metres climbed, av HR 125 bpm, max 203 bpm, calories 2509.

Our last night in Ronda was spent at an amazing venue over-looking the gorge where we virtually had the whole place to ourselves. It was a 5 minute walk from the Hotel right next door to the Bullring and of course we split into 2 groups and got lost.

Wints’ Weightwatchers were there first, amazing what the promise of food can do to their speed, whilst Roger’s White Walkers (Old Buttered Ends) soon caught them up and the chorizo and black pudding starters were first class. The potato croquettes were pretty good and then the pork medallions were fairly average whilst the boiled vegetables were just boiled vegetables. Dessert was as close to crème caramel with a ginger biscuit on top as you can get.

After dinner half the pelican went back to the Hotel to get ready for the last day’s riding whilst the rest had a quick spin round the town centre where it got quite chilly, certainly for men of a certain age and even the SullyVan twins were thinking about a hot chocolate at the karaoke bar they were hovering outside.

Breakfast was at 7.30am for an 8.30am start and Wints had already given a no racing rule for the long climb out of Ronda, this caused tears from Mandy or was that the threatening Strava comments she had been getting from the various Eastern European female cyclists she had been getting since stealing my Strava times 2 days before ?! Anyway it was a long slow climb out of Ronda and at the first drinks stop at circa 10 miles Vaughan half day Hobbs had found the perfect spot on the outside of a bend on the brow of a hill to get some more sunbathing in when the pelican arrived.

A mass pile up was averted (just) but as I pulled in to get some flap-jacks, pork pies and sweets (it had been an hour since breakfast) Mike Gore took this as his chance and abandoning his social media duties he set off up the hill like he had 20 minutes to get to the off-licence to get his fags before they shut (yes Mum he does!). It was at this point that I realised it must have been hard growing up in my (considerable) shadow and I decided to let him whizz off like a ginger sparkler to take the first and only stage win of his 2 week driving holiday.

The scenery was truly stunning on the climb out even though some of the riders had too much sweat in their eyes to notice it, the next drinks stop was going to be at 19 miles but Jo£10k and Jen shouted out that they were going to “pull in for a bit”, but didn’t elaborate on a bit of what, other than to say Jo’s stamina was a bit patchy later on.

We then got to a 12 mile descent where Diesel left us for dead, Roger (One Big Effort) was next and I braked pretty much my whole way down, dodging motor-bikes, lorries with hay bales, other skinnier faster cyclists but once it flattened out eventually and even had a few small pinches I managed to overhaul the first 2 and timed my run to lunch perfectly for my last stage win. Lunch was a mixture of ham and cheese rolls, and tortillas and chips washed down with coke and Fanta lemon.

Wints gave a Churchillian quote about “never giving in” and Mike warned everyone about complacency and promptly fell of his bike as he exited the car park !

The next 20 miles were fairly flat and fast, but not a single sign for Gibraltar the whole way, just some graffiti about Gib being Spanish and the Aljaceria oil refinery getting closer and closer.

Then we went through no-man’s land which was an odd collection of industrial units and hit the traffic looking to get over the border. Getting in was a fairly smooth process but they did check our passports just to make sure we were legal and luckily the SullyVan was waved through with it’s fine collection of contraband.

Once back in blighty we made our way very slowly (and not just so Mike could keep up after a full half day in the saddle) to Europa Point where we were met by at last a dozen cheering people, at least 10 of which had come out for Nickie’s 50th ! But Gib RFC laid on some beer and finger food which was gratefully demolished and they then had a Q&A session with the remaining “has beens”, sorry Lions. There they sat in their pink tight fitting lycra waxing lyrical on a whole host of topics from how rugby these days wasn’t the same as when they played, Scottish independence, Canadian currency fluctuations, the postman who inspired HRH Rodger Arneil to give up on the wing and Roger Uttley’s life in the real world (as a PE Teacher at Harrow, which is as tough a gig as working in a coal mine apparently!)

After a scintillating 95 minutes of topical back and forth, the pelican promptly upset the coach driver who dropped us off back at the Eliot Hotel. The last court session was convened with Judge Seedy in his dark blue skinny drain pipe kitchen porter trousers busy writing notes and chuckling to himself. Winners or losers took their tequila punishment on the chin, (both of them sometimes) and Wints showed off the success of Trish’s firming cocoa butter which put quite a few people off their Bernard Matthews Butterball turkey crown for dinner. At the end there was a revolution and with Judge Sully presiding, after the coup Paul “commoner” Sidi was allowed to sing his Sedburgh song before polishing off at least a half a pint of tequila. He took it like a true Sedburgh scholar and I don’t mean bent over a chair whimpering.

At this point I went off to the first of many birthday celebrations for Nickie’s birthday fortnight and promptly fell asleep before then end of the night (so no change there then).

Finally I would like to thank all my sponsors for their donations, all the messages of support, even the ones offering to sponsor me to cycle back which I will politely decline, all the crew and organisers and the rest of the pelican who helped me through the tough times and it has been my absolute pleasure to ride with (or maybe slightly ahead of) you all.

Thanks everyone.

Chapeau