

Man of Kent 200k Audax Sunday 28th March

This report by Rob McIvor appeared in the Summer 2009 issue of Arrivee (the official Audax UK magazine).

To enter print an entry form go to the Calendar pages of the Audax UK website scroll down and click on whichever ride interests you and print an entry form. Send this with a cheque and 2 stamped addressed C5 size envelopes (9x6½ or 225x160) to Tim Feneron - address on the form.

Man of Kent, run by David Winslade, has been on the list as both a 200 and 300 permanent for a couple years but this was the first time it had been run as a calendar event. "The decision came after really positive feedback from everyone who had ridden the perm," David told me. "The deciding factor was that my brother-in-law, who is the vicar of Bridge Parish, offered the use of the Vicarage as a control. Then Andy Uttley came up with suggestion of using the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway Cafe as well, which was a masterstroke."

The ride begins at Golden Green, near Tonbridge. There is plenty of parking nearby but it's also possible to get to Tonbridge or Sevenoaks by train and have enough time to ride to the start. It first heads east across northern Kent with a control at 37km in Charing Station car park with drinks and snacks provided.

Then it's on to Bridge, at 63km, for tea and cake at the Vicarage, taking in the only noticeable climb of the day, at Charing Hill, and the only stretch that could be even considered as main road, 14km along the A252.

Sandwich, at 82km, is an info control at the local Co-op and then the ride turns south-west towards New Romney. This 50km stretch is particularly enjoyable and lightly-trafficked. There is even one stretch of one-way country lane, something I have never come across before, taking riders down the narrow and steep Gravel Castle Road. What fun to be able to descend at speed without worrying about what might be coming the other way!

Lunch is at the aforementioned railway cafe - and very good it is too Then it's off across Romney Marsh towards Headcorn, again entirely on small lanes. It's a garage control at Headcorn, after another 51km. The selection of food here is fairly limited but with only 25km to go that's not a problem. The last stretch is gently undulating and the final lane brings you out opposite the village hall from where you started.

I would recommend this as a first-time ride for several reasons. Its almost entirely run on small lanes so there's plenty of opportunity for chatting with other riders and, of course, generally more pleasant than being squeezed by 4x4s on the main roads. The route sheet is very easy to follow and the controls are well spaced. Having free food at the first two means that having the lunch stop 131km into the ride isn't a problem. There's also good food at the end. Although it's undulating, there are no hills that would seem gratuitously hard to a newcomer and there are some great stretches where you can really whip along if you want to, particularly between Sandwich and New Romney.

This year 36 started with just two DNFs. I imagine that next years (March 28th) will attract a much larger turnout.

Rob McIvor