

Fairies 5 Audaxes Sunday 27th June

This report by Rob Mclvor appeared in the Summer 2009 issue of Arrivee (the official Audax UK magazine). Although it's about the 300k it also gives an overview of the whole day.

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.

The Fairies Flattest 300 is one of five rides run on the same day by San Fairy Ann CC with the declared aim of encouraging first-time riders or existing riders to try longer distances. All start at Bethersden. You really need a car for this one. Trains do run to Ashford, a few miles away, but not at particularly convenient times.

The 300 begins at 2am with a flat and fast run down the (virtually empty) main roads towards Folkestone before looping down to the coast road near Hythe for a dawn feast at a car park control. Another pancake-flat stretch takes you along the coast to Rye, after which there are some gentle climbs back to the start at 100km. Most of this is on main roads but in the early hours of a Sunday morning traffic is minimal so it's very enjoyable riding. There are refreshments at Bethersden and it's quite handy to be able to dump the night riding kit.

The remainder of the ride is also offered as a stand-alone 200km. The route goes west, to Matfield, then turns south to a food control at Mark Cross. It actually gains quite a bit of height along the way but has been planned so well that it's hardly noticeable and it comes as something of a surprise just after Kipping Cross when a spectacular view across the Weald opens up alongside the road.

All the height is then lost as you head off down the lanes to Dungeness on the south coast. At 197km, the 150km riders join the route, supplemented at 226km by those on the 100km, and all four rides descend upon the Railway Cafe at Dungeness - a regular lunch spot for Audaxes in this region. That's at 243km into the 300.

The final two stages are very gentle. From Dungeness it's 32km round the headland to New Romney and then back across the edge of Romney Marsh to revisit Hythe where the control is at the Light Railway Restaurant - another Kent Audax favourite. The route retraces a little out of Hythe, again avoiding the hills, and rolls easily back to Bethersden.

The combination of distances and the way in which they are all brought together contribute to making this an excellent first-time event. There's even a 50km 'taster' which would be good for young families. Organisation is impeccable and support along the route is very good. For those making the step up to the 300, the 2am start provides an opportunity to get the feel for group riding in the dark on good-sized roads while the other rides all start within 90 minutes of each other so there's a bustling atmosphere in the hall at both ends of the day. And it does what it says on the tin - I never knew Kent could be so flat.

Rob Mclvor