

Peddalling all the way to Paris

David Butler from the Personal Training Centre in Oxshott led a team of enthusiastic amateur cyclists all the way to Paris. Here he recounts the highlights of their adventure



So there we were in the pouring rain in Oxshott on a Thursday morning contemplating 250 miles to Paris. All the training behind us and all the tarmac ahead of us. Alan, Alan, Emma, Doug, Chris, Graham, Paul, Matt, John, Ravi and David (the Coach) set off from the Personal Training Centre in Oxshott. The goal? To get to Rueil-Malmaison – Oxshott's twin, just 10 miles outside Paris and then onto the Champs-Elysees, our own 'tour' finish.

The first flat tyre was in Cobham High Street, the second in Ockham. There are five more before the day is out.

The lanes of Surrey are truly stunning as we stayed away from the major roads. You see so much on a bike and you constantly make mental notes about places you want to go back to revisit. Actually, you add it to the list of favourite places on your Garmin, and you download your route and data after each ride, and pore over the map showing where you have been.

It stopped raining by the time we arrived at the appropriately named Halfway Bridge Inn in Lodsworth for lunch. It is exactly 35 miles and halfway to the ferry at Portsmouth.

With some good food on board, hosed down clean bikes and the sun on our backs we were flying through lanes, passing hedges and fields, over hills and onto our cabins on the overnight to Caen.

Trevor, our support vehicle driver, bike mechanic, cycling nut and all round good egg, loaded up the bikes in England and drove off at 6.30 the next morning into France.

Sun, sand and sea all the way through Deauville and onto Honfleur and then south-east flirting with the Seine, village after village,

crop after crop and then another 87 miles in the bag and a welcome bed at Saint Etienne du Rouvray.

Another 78 miles on Saturday was punctuated in Giverny, home of Monet and his garden, some fabulous French cuisine and then all the way to the Holiday Inn in Roueil-Malmaison.

Rueil-Malmaison was originally called simply Rueil and in 1928 it officially became Rueil-Malmaison in reference to its most famous tourist attraction, the Chateau de Malmaison, home of Napoleon's first wife Josephine de Beauharnais.

At the end of the 19th century, Impressionist painters such as Renoir, Manet and Monet came to paint the Seine which crosses the town.

On the Sunday morning we crossed the town and climbed, and there it was, spread out in front of us, every tourist attraction to be picked out.

Down to and through the Bois de Boulogne, Allée de Longchamp, Avenue Foch, Arc de Triomphe and breakfast on the Champs-Elysees.

Coffee, croissant and cobbles onto Place de la Concorde, Avenue de New York, Pont de Bir-Hakeim, Tour Eiffel, Notre Dame, Rue de Rivoli, Madeleine and more cobbles to Moules et Frites and a huge jug of lager at Place du Tertre and another amazing vista from Sacre-Coeur.

A rendezvous with Trevor at Gare du Nord, bikes and bags in the van, us, passports and a change of clothes on Eurostar and back via St Pancras to Oxshott. So, we all got to Paris and we all got home safely and Chris raised several thousands of pounds for the various charities he supports.

Some of us then went off to the Pyrenees



in September for three days' climbing the big ones – but that's another story.

We ride every Sunday morning from the Personal Training Centre in Oxshott, not to Paris I might add. Next door is The Oxshott Club, new home of South Western Cycle Club and the start/finish of the May fier.

We are now training for the Cape Argus race in Cape Town next March, another Oxshott to Paris in July and we have already booked the B&B near Lourdes for next September. ●

essence info

If you want to take part in the rides, please contact David Butler on 07850 102568. The Personal Training Centre provides fitness testing, bike fitting, training, sports massage and injury treatment.

Website: www.thepersonaltrainingcentre.com

Grumpy Godmother

Jenny Eclair is making her pantomime debut in Cinderella at Richmond Theatre this Christmas.

Brian Alexander reports

Jenny Eclair is one of those no-nonsense, no-holes-barred comediennes who knows how to get lots of laughs from a challenging adult audience. That's why it will be intriguing to see what she brings to the dainty role of The Fairy Godmother at Richmond Theatre's production of Cinderella.

"I'm going to have to watch my language," she admits. "But I've never done panto before and the theatre in Richmond knows what I'm like when I do my regular stand-up shows. I've done enough telly over the years to know how to stop swearing, so it won't be a problem." But Eclair has been given the go-ahead to introduce her own gags into the Cinderella script. "They want me to be me," she says. "There's no point me trying to be someone else. It's not Ibsen. It's panto."

Eclair, a regular on Loose Women and Grumpy Old Women, won't start rehearsing her role until the end of November, with performances beginning on December 9 and finishing on January 15.

She is joined on stage by panto stalwart Gary Wilmot (Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, Me And My Girl, etc.) who plays Buttons and Jenny adds: "I've told the theatre that I can't sing and dance and I've promised them that I won't swear. That's the deal and I'm really looking forward to it."

Eclair is very busy at the moment. She is



just about to finish off her third novel and is working hard on a film script. "I can't say what it's about, but we've got funding and I'm keeping my fingers crossed something will happen," she says. She also appeared in last year's I'm a Celebrity...Get Me Out of Here!

Richmond audiences will also know her from Grumpy Old Women – the stage version of the hit BBC series came to Richmond Theatre in 2006 and 2008 and went down a storm.

"It's going to be a lot of fun," Jenny tells me. "It will be lovely to have a range of ages in the audience. And it's not too far from my home in London, so I'll be able to get home to my own bed after each show." ●

essence info

Cinderella runs from Friday December 9 to Sunday January 15

Tickets: www.atgtickets.com/Richmond-Theatre/Information