

9/97



# Handy Cross Joggers Bulletin

## EDITORIAL

I always feel the summer has finished with the last of the 5K series in late July . However as anyone who ran in the Bearbrook 10K will confirm, it certainly did not mark the end of the hot weather ! But there is no denying the evenings are becoming dark quite early now and our Tuesday and Thursday runs are being completed in the gloom . My cycle ride in the land of the midnight sun is now just a distant memory, but I have written an article about it which appears on later pages (well, I had to fill the Bulletin with something) . Perhaps the last memorable evening event this year was the Gerry Grosse 5K handicap challenge on the track at Handy Cross on 3 September .

Looking back over the summer, the most memorable individual achievement was undoubtedly Rod Palmer's magnificent performance in winning the Birmingham to London race along the Grand Union Canal . For anyone who missed this and as a reminder to those of us who still can't believe it, Rod completed the 145 mile run in 31 hours and 11 minutes, breaking the record by one hour and thirty seven minutes at his first attempt . He was rewarded with a beautifully decorated watering can and a full page picture in the Bucks Free Press !

Other notable long distance performances were recorded by Mike Hickman and Pat Carter in the South Downs 80, Mike Stone in the Long Distance Walkers Association 100 and all the participants in the Fireman's Marathon . Over the shorter distances, both Pam Wilkes and Jack Sharp won their respective age groups in the Basingstoke half marathon and Pam Wilkes again at Slough . The 10K races produced age group wins for Alex Thomason and Pat Beesdon in the Icknield 10K, Alex Thomason and Terry Eves in the Prestwood 10K and Liz Davey in the Bearbrook 10K, while Pete Smith gained third place in the Bucks Championship in the same race . The team of Phil Jones, Eric Buckle and Peter Edington came third in the Tetsworth 10K .

Alex Thomason had a very successful summer, as well as his excellent performances in the 10K races, he also won his age group prize in the Penn 7, truly the Handy Cross Super Vet !

Over ninety Handy Cross Joggers ran in one or more of the 5K Summer Series events (a list of runners, events and times are provided on subsequent pages) and over two hundred local runners competed in our own race on the Rye . This event was again very successful, with so much food that it was almost impossible to consume it all after the race . Although I missed the Wycombe half marathon, I understand it was equally successful in spite of the earlier concerns about the lack of entries .

Seventeen potential "pot hunters" turned up on a wet and windy Wednesday evening on the Handy Cross running track for the Gerry Grosse Handicap 5K race, hoping for a generous handicap from organiser Mike Hickman . Nicy Edwards was the overall winner followed by Eric Buckle and Richard Stone . A full list of results are provided on later pages .

Congratulations to Mike Hickman on passing his final assessment to become a fully qualified BAF coach . This was achieved on the track at Handy Cross, Mike being assessed on his performance in leading a typical (?) Wednesday evening training session, which his colleagues treated with the seriousness appropriate on such an occasion . The only criticism voiced by the assessor, after more than an hours observations, was that he allowed us to warm-up without track suits, on one of the warmest evenings of the year !

On a sadder note our condolences are extended to Martin Franzese on the death of his father, to John Bradbury on the death of his father and also to Duncan Kennerson and his family on the death of his wife Brigid . Although the funeral had only taken place on the previous day, Duncan played his usual wholehearted part in the provision of drinks for our 5K race, for which he deserves our special thanks . Best wishes for a full and speedy recovery are offered to Kevin Duffy's wife Marilyn, following her recent illness .

Handy Cross Joggers will be celebrating the 20th anniversary of its inauguration next year and to mark the occasion, Rose Priest has formed a sub-committee to organise a reunion to which all past and present members will be welcome . This will take place on Friday 20 February 1998 in the British Legion at Flackwell Heath . Further details will become available closer to the event, but in the meantime make a note in your diaries and also inform any former members of the club that you may meet .

Another date for the social diary is the Christmas Disco, to be held this year on Monday 22 December at the Judo Club .

I met one of Eric Buckle's brothers (yes, there's more than one !) at a party recently and mentioned that we belonged to the same running club . He informed me that his brother is the best runner in Handy Cross Joggers . When I suggested that Eric was certainly one of our better runners, he insisted that, on the contrary, Eric was definitely the best . "He must be the best," he explained, "after all, he told me so himself !" .

Martin Dean  
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September 1997

# 5K Summer Series Results 1997

		Wargrave		Burnham		Marlow		Maidenhd		Datchet		Handy X	
		Pos	Time	Pos	Time	Pos	Time	Pos	Time	Pos	Time	Pos	Time
Dan	Ayres	125	23.25			227	31.09	119	24.40				
Michelle	Ayres	216	30.57	232	32.19	226	31.07	177	32.44				
Alfred	Benjamin	29	18.55	23	18.21	20	18.04	24	19.15	33	18.36	25	18.54
Mike	Blowing											112	24.13
Sandra	Bremner	53	19.56	55	19.45	49	19.4	36	19.57	48	18.20		
Eric	Buckle			34	18.57					22	17.59	21	18.31
Chris	Busby	112	22.49	111	22.23	100	21.43	93	22.47				
Bob	Carter											141	26.28
Claire	Carter											140	26.28
Pat	Carter			189	27.48								
Brian	Childs									158	25.20	131	25.38
Ian	Childs									124	23.05	109	24.09
Marina	Crisp	115	23.02										
Tony	Crockett	58	20.12									48	20.20
Sue	Darrington			196	28.07	193	27.49	153	28.34	173	27.12		
Liz	Davey	113	23.01			116	22.40			106	22.04	89	22.40
Eleanor	Davies	202	29.41	214	30.01	204	28.27	165	29.43	185	28.10	171	29.02
Simon	Davies	92	21.42	78	20.51	64	20.39					74	22.03
Martin	Dean	56	20.09			52	20.04					66	21.23
John	Dooley							2	17.27				
Maureen	Edington			180	27.20	167	26.06	128	25.41	162	25.53		
Peter	Edington	31	18.57	40	19.16	25	18.31	14	18.33	23	18.03		
Greg	Emmett											173	19.12
Nicole	Emmett											172	29.11
Terry	Eves			67	20.20	50	19.41	44	20.18	45	19.14		
Peter	Flannery	129	23.28										
Tony	Flannery	72	20.50	84	21.13	73	20.55	59	21.15			51	20.32
Martin	Franzese	158	25.57	174	26.47	152	24.50	122	24.58				
Jack	Fuller											168	28.48
Julie	Fuller					217	30.08	161	29.20	183	28.08	163	28.29
Kevin	Fuller			119	22.45	218	30.08	90	22.36	93	21.30	85	22.31
Anne	Gallacher	230	32.36	236	32.44							201	34.24
Gerald	Gallacher	197	29.15	209	29.05							192	32.08
Pam	Gilbert	215	30.54	218	30.23	207	28.39						
Alison	Gowers			145	24.21								
Chris	Hall							31	19.40				
Jenny	Hart	194	29.00	190	27.49					170	27.04		
Trevor	Hart	103	22.18	97	21.50					90	21.21		
John	Harvey											4	17.31
Kevin	Hayes									4	16.21		
Mike	Hickman	79	21.06	99	21.53	63	20.38	74	21.41	71	20.49		
Keith	Hicks	120	23.13			114	22.27	97	23.04				
Ian	Hodgson									154	25.16		
John	Hudson	25	18.47			24	18.28	20	19.06	25	18.10	30	19.05
Alex	Johnson	168	26.44	164	26.07	149	24.45						
Philip	Jones			20	18.07	15	17.41	10	18.16	17	17.42	18	18.20
Anne	Leigh	193	28.57	207	28.58	189	27.34	155	28.39	174	27.16	166	28.44

## 5K Summer Series Results 1997

		Wargrave		Burnham		Marlow		Maidenhd		Datchet		Handy X	
		Pos	Time	Pos	Time	Pos	Time	Pos	Time	Pos	Time	Pos	Time
Dave	Leighton	110	22.46	98	21.52	96	21.39			79	21.03	68	21.41
Gareth	Lloyd					202	28.24			176	27.36	143	26.32
Jonathon	Lloyd											202	34.25
Nigel	Lloyd	39	19.06	31	18.50	23	18.20			32	18.28	29	19.04
Tim	Long			89	21.26								
Peter	Mackley	76	20.57	63	20.01	43	19.24	30	19.40				
Jock	Macleane	61	20.23	69	20.31	59	20.26	55	20.49	56	19.50	62	21.03
Des	Mannion	51	19.49	57	19.49	47	19.37	37	20.05	50	18.25		
Lucy	Marsh												
Nick	Martin	45	19.31	50	19.31	27	18.39			35	18.41	47	20.19
Vernon	Martin							101	23.54	131	23.31		
Rob	McGrath											5	17.33
Adrian	Messenger							17	19.00	21	17.56	101	23.21
Margaret	Moody	97	21.57	93	21.41	86	21.17	71	21.31	95	21.32		
Dave	Nash			150	24.40	144	24.02	121	24.47	137	24.15	124	25.22
Stephan	Naunko			160	25.41					77	20.58		
John	Nichols	192	28.54	200	28.27	181	26.55	148	27.19				
Rod	Palmer	44	19.30			48	19.37			39	18.51		
Paula	Parkin	227	32.18	234	32.22	219	30.21						
Jeanette	Perry					97	21.40						
Mike	Perry			121	22.54	95	21.38	84	22.13	99	21.41		
Rose	Priest			201	28.34					187	28.15		
Kevin	Rabbett					138	23.38	99	23.23	98	21.39	91	22.48
Debbie	Ridout	161	26.23	159	25.41	142	23.52	112	24.23	125	23.07	123	25.16
Sean	Ryan	130	23.29	115	22.35								
Russell	Saunders									115	22.19		
Brian	Sinclair	165	26.34	165	26.16	154	25.01	131	25.44	142	24.30	106	23.48
Pete	Smith	3	16.41	5	16.52	4	16.29	1	16.59	2	15.54	2	16.31
Tony	Spencer											15	18.11
Christine	Stone	229	32.32	235	32.24	224	30.53						
Mike	Stone	66	20.32	81	21.06	51	19.54						
Richard	Stone												
Sue	Stone	187	28.36	204	28.53	191	27.35	157	28.43				
Thomas	Stone	167	26.41	216	30.08								
Alex	Thomason	87	21.34	101	21.57	89	21.29	83	22.05	110	22.12		
Anthony	Tonna							105	24.09				
Christine	Turfrey	184	28.07	213	29.56					184	28.10		
Natalie	Turfrey									186	28.10		
Peter	Turner									114	22.18	125	25.22
Alyson	Unitt	226	32.17	233	32.22	222	30.44						
Tim	Wallen												
Julie	Welch			162	25.48			137	26.17	148	24.46		
Hans	Wessel												
Pam	Wilkes			137	23.48	118	22.42	92	22.43			93	22.52
Roger	Wilkes					94	21.37	69	21.30			64	21.16
Dave	Woolley	43	19.28	47	19.25	35	18.54	29	19.35	36	18.44	37	19.28

GERRY GROSSE TROPHY - 5k HANDICAP RESULTS.

Thanks to all of you who turned out in spite of the weather to support this event. I seem to have the knack of choosing a wet evening, when we are doing something on the track which involves recording times onto paper. Unfortunately in the struggle to keep things dry, I managed to miscount the laps completed by two people, Liz Davey who did one short, and Gerry Grosse who did one too many (well we couldn't let him win his own trophy could we!). Apologies to you both, we adjusted your times to the 5k distance, so hopefully these mistakes did not affect the outcome.

Congratulations to all of you, especially to our winner Nicy, for coming so close to the "tight" target times I set.

May I remind you all that we shall continue to run our track sessions on Wednesday evenings, and that all members are welcome to take part. We shall be including regular 5k Time Trials in our schedules, which will give people the opportunity to check their training progress, and to establish times for next years event.

Mike Hickman.

RESULTS.

POSITION.	NAME.	TARGET TIME.	ACTUAL TIME.	DIFFERENCE + OR -
1	Nicy Edwards	23:30	23:04	- 0:26
2	Eric Buckle	17:59	17:37	- 0:22
3	Richard Stone	24:50	24:50	-
4	Rose Priest	28:15	28:18	+ 0:03
5	Mike Blowing	24:13	24:23	+ 0:10
= 6	Pete Smith	15:54	16:15	+ 0:21
= 6	Peter Edington	18:03	18:24	+ 0:21
8	Phil Jones	17:41	18:14	+ 0:33
9	Dave Nash	24:02	24:44	+ 0:42
10	Martin Dean	20:04	20:51	+ 0:47
11	Pat Carter	27:48	28:46	+ 0:58
12	Gerry Grosse	25:12	26:12	+ 1:00
13	Nick Martin	18:39	19:52	+ 1:13
14	Margaret Moody	21:17	22:34	+ 1:17
15	Liz Davey	22:04	23:22	+ 1:18
16	Kevin Rabett	21:39	23:04	+ 1:25

WEDNESDAY TRAINING PROGRAMME, UP TO 12-11-97.  
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Venue:- Athletics track at Handy Cross Sports Centre, starting promptly at 7-00 p.m..

ALL SESSIONS WILL START AND FINISH WITH 4 LAPS (OR EQUIVALENT) WARM UP/DOWN, FOLLOWED BY STRETCHING EXERCISES.

- 13- 8-97            20 laps, sprint straights and jog bends.
- 20- 8-97            6 x 3 min's effort (90 sec's jog recovery).
- 27- 8-97            12 x 90 sec's effort (90 sec's jog recovery).
- 3- 9-97             GERRY GROSSE TROPHY - 5k HANDICAP RACE.
- 10- 9-97            Paarlauf relay, 2 x 6 x 400m each person, (5 min's rest between sets).
- 17- 9-97            400/600/800/1200/800/600/400m. Pyramid session (90 sec's jog recovery).
- 24- 9-97            6 x 800m. effort, (1 min. jog recovery).
- 1-10-97            3 x 800/400/200m. "downers", (1 min. recovery), 4 min's jog between sets.
- 8-10-97            2 x 8 x 90 sec's effort (1 min.jog recovery), 5 min's rest between sets.
- 15-10-97            5k TIME TRIAL.
- 22-10-97            12 x 400m. @ half marathon pace, interspersed with 200m. @ 5k. pace.
- 29-10-97            Hill session (Knight's Hill), 8 x full circuit, effort on uphill and until 2nd. lampost.
- 5-11-97            4 x 1600m (2 min. jog recovery).
- 12-11-97            Fartlek session, 45 min's.

Mike Hickman.

## NOTICE OF THANKS

On behalf of my family and of course myself, I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their kind words of comfort and support when my wife, Bridie, was taken ill with cancer in March 1997 . Sadly, we lost Bridie to this tragic illness in July 1997. I would like to thank you for the wreaths and many donations for The Sue Ryder Trust . It has certainly helped ease the pain and it is a great help and comfort to have friends like you .

Thank you once again

Duncan



## Charity Bike Ride from Helsinki to St Petersburg

When I first saw an advertisement for this bike ride last February, it was for a trip from Helsinki to Moscow taking place in July, which sounded like an interesting adventure back in the middle of the winter . On enquiry I found the ride consisted of two sections, the first from Helsinki to St Petersburg and the second onward to Moscow starting a few days later, covering a total distance of 900 miles in 20 days and with a commitment to raise £3500 for the charity, Friends of Russian Children . A few days reflection convinced me that the first 450 mile section of the ride, taking nine days and with a more modest target of £2000 to raise, appeared more feasible .

At the time I was unaware of the aims of this charity, or how to set about raising sponsorship, but they sent me plenty of information and advice . The charity was formed following the Bashkira train disaster in Russia in 1989 in which 300 children died . Many more suffered terrible burns . The hospitals were unable to cope and turned to the West for help . The first Charity Bike Ride in 1995 set out to raise the £500,000 or so needed to build an in-house sterile laundry at Children's Hospital No 9 in Moscow . Prior to this, linen arrived back from the central laundry still dirty and more children were dying from cross-infection than from their burns . The laundry is now up and running . FoRC is actively working to *prevent* many of the deaths and burns injuries suffered daily by Russian children . This is to be done through fire safety lessons in primary schools, initially in Moscow and St. Petersburg and then, when funds allow, in other major cities throughout Russia .

In return for the sponsorship the charity organised the whole trip including bike hire, transportation of luggage, meals and pit stop refreshments, accommodation, visas, security, medical support, transport back to Helsinki and flights to and from Finland . In June a one day ride was organised in the Henley area to encourage training and allow people to meet before the trip .

The trip started with an early morning flight from Heathrow, arriving in Helsinki at lunch time . After lunch the 50+ riders were introduced to their bikes, which were a hybrid of a mountain bike fitted with road tyres . The riders were also a hybrid mix ranging in ages from 16 to 79 and with a selection of nationalities including English, Channel Islanders, Scottish, Irish, Dutch, Russian, Finnish, and Israeli and including three British ex-patriots living and working in Moscow who had arrived by train earlier in the day . The 79 year old, Jack from the West Midlands, was also doing the complete trip to Moscow, where he would be staying with friends until September .

Once everyone was happy with their bikes a short tour of Helsinki was enjoyed, led by the three Finnish guides who accompanied us for the whole trip and taking in all the interesting sights; including the Olympic Stadium, an underground church with a glass roof and the huge Baltic ferries that resemble not so much a ship as a floating block of flats . Apparently one in three people in Finland own a mobile phone and we noticed that they all seemed to be talking to each other at once, even when riding a bike or a skateboard, which they were able to do late into the evening, as the sun was still shining at 10 o'clock .

The following day saw the start of the ride proper with over 120km to be covered . We set out in two groups to negotiate our way out of Helsinki without getting lost . Rather like Handy Cross Joggers, the groups soon broke up as people cycled at their own pace, but frequent pit stops, with refreshments provided by the back-up crew in cars, enabled everyone to successfully reach the lunch spot in the picturesque old town of Porvoo . Here many of the traditional old brightly painted wooden houses and cobbled streets are preserved to accommodate the artistic community of this very old town . Fish is very popular in Finland as we were discovering . Lunch in Porvoo consisted of a fish soup accompanied by salad and followed by coffee .

The roads in Finland were excellent, rolling through gently undulating countryside in which trees and lakes were the predominant feature . Finland has a population of only five million people in an area as large as Great Britain, so there were only a few scattered farms and houses to be seen along the way . The weather was hot and sunny, so it was wonderful to be able to stop at the side of a lake in the late afternoon for a swim . An hour later we were wet again, this time due to a torrential thunderstorm, but this soon passed and we quickly dried out before arriving at our first overnight stop, a rural school where we slept on the classroom floors .

The following day was also to be a long ride of 124km through similar undulating countryside with yet more trees and lakes . Passing a large timber factory, we noticed an environmentally friendly way of transporting the cut logs, by throwing them in the river and allowing them to float to their destination ! At a village with the unlikely name of Kääpälä we came across a collection of modern sculptures made from rusty old junk like petrol pumps and car springs . The late afternoon produced the customary thunderstorm, which cut off the electricity supply to the hostel where we were staying . So although showers were unavailable that evening, the lakeside sauna followed by a midnight dip with the sun setting across the lake, provided a very acceptable alternative .

The third day of the ride also promised to be a long one as we were due to cross the Russian border late in the afternoon . This was the hottest day we had experienced so far and by midday we had only reached the beautiful lakeside town of Lapeenranta on Lake Saimaa, the largest of Finland's one thousand and eight hundred lakes . Our route to the border was alongside the Saimaa Canal which links Finland with Russia and provides access to the Gulf of Finland and the Baltic Sea . This canal was not like the narrow waterways we are used to, but more the size of the European canals with huge locks capable of accommodating sea-going ships . Unfortunately the canal side path we used was rutted and very sandy . After struggling for 17km along this path we at last arrived for a late lunch at 3 o'clock, just on the Finnish side of the border .

After lunch we took the last opportunity to fill our water bottles from a tap, after this it was to be bottled or boiled water only . A half mile downhill ride brought us to the Finnish side of the border where we were all lined up for passport inspection . Following this we turned a corner and passed a Russian checkpoint, but this was only the start of the border which is 22km wide, with nothing to see apart from the occasional canal lock and a duty-free shop half way across . At last we arrived at the Russian border post, which was reminiscent of a Cold War film, with lots of soldiers, important looking officials scurrying around, no photography allowed and a long wait

while our papers were repeatedly and suspiciously inspected before being stamped several times . The customary afternoon thunderstorm was threatening all the while and we eventually proceeded with a police car escort towards the border town of Vyborg .

Two hours after crossing the border we made a memorable entrance into Vyborg in the middle of a stupendous thunderstorm . The primitive Russian drainage systems, consisting of large holes in the surface of the huge bridge leading into the town, was unable to cope with this deluge and the road surface was flooded, with the numerous potholes invisible, leading to a few riders parting company with their bikes before we arrived at our hotel, cold wet and hungry . Having lost an hour crossing the time zone between Finland and Russia, we found it was now 9.30 in the evening ! However after a shower miraculously provided by the primitive Russian plumbing system, we happily devoured a late meal of onion soup and unidentifiable meat washed down with Russian tea .

By the following day we realised we were definitely in Russia, having been provided with an armed security guard to accompany us for the rest of the trip . The Accommodation in the town's principal hotel was very basic and a simple but a filling breakfast of porridge and sausages saw us queuing up to collect our passports, which had been confiscated on our arrival the previous evening . The floods had by now receded, but the town did not appear any more inviting and we were glad to cycle out into the Russian countryside . Although similar to the rolling Finnish countryside of lakes and forests, there was much less cultivation and what there was looked poor compared to what we had experienced before . Even the weather had deteriorated and everything seemed much less attractive than Finland .

We were prepared for the poor state of the roads, which were wide but badly maintained, particularly at the edges where we were cycling, but not for the sudden changes from tarmac to dirt and gravel which occurred frequently and continued for many kilometres . However the poor road surface made little difference to the Russian drivers who continued at the same speed, leaving clouds of choking dust in their wake .

Along these tracks we would pass people walking with shopping bags, although we had not passed any shops or houses for miles, nor came across any soon afterwards . When we did encounter a shop, close to a remote railway crossing, there was very little to buy anyway . As coins have no value in Russia, all money transactions are carried out using notes, with Dollars being more acceptable than Roubles . I offered a 500 Rouble note for some bananas, but that wasn't enough and as the only other note I had (100,000 Roubles) was too large for the shop to change, I came away empty handed . This shop was equipped with a modern electronic calculator backed up with an old-fashioned mechanical till and if all else failed, an abacus, which appeared to be used regularly .

A stretch of heavily rutted dirt track just before the lunch stop brought one of our party to grief and caused me to puncture, so I was grateful to find a picnic lunch had been prepared in a forest clearing by our Russian support crew, complete with a log fire and steaming samovars . After my puncture had been repaired and the patient's

wounds patched up by our medic, a soldier in the Territorial Army whose little pink tablets cured all ills, we continued on better roads to our overnight camp site .

This was on the shores of the huge Lake Lagoda, the largest lake in Europe . When we arrived our back-up support crew had already erected two rows of tents along the lakeside and were busy cooking dinner on a log fire . The lake looked inviting after a hard day's cycling, but turned out to be very cold, being fed from rivers having their source above the Arctic circle, so after a quick dip we queued up for some strange looking but very filling stew and then sat around the camp fire for an evening of singing and drinking cheap Russian beer .

I awoke from an uncomfortable night under canvas to hear the wind howling off the lake, but fortunately the morning was dry though cold . After a breakfast of porridge, bread and jam and tea, we walked the 2km from the edge of the lake through the forest and back to the road . Here we were met by a TV film crew who, after filming us, kept passing us at high speed and reappearing at intervals along the road . After 13km of dirt roads we joined a busy, by Russian standards, main road which was very hilly and seemed to attract all the badly maintained old lorries from the whole area which belched out clouds of black smoke up all the hills . After lunch we cycled along some pleasant forest paths, in contrast to the dirt track roads we had previously experienced, encountering a ford along the way where we could all have fun watching people fall off in the middle . That evening we stayed in a rest house which was very comfortable with two saunas and a bar . We were visited by a Russian song and dance troupe who entertained us in traditional Russian manner, then joined us for a drunken party until the early hours .

A very late start was made the next day, but as we were by now fairly close to St Petersburg, we had only 50km to cover that day, although much of this was on very poor roads . Our lunch time picnic spot was beside a lake a mile from the road, accessible only by a steep and narrow track which was hard work even on a mountain bike, although the Russians managed to negotiate it with their truck . This part of Russia once belonged to Finland and was the scene of many bitter battles before and during the last war . We saw several war memorials, cemeteries and destroyed shelters in this area . We camped by another lake at the end of this day and as we had to make an early start in order to arrive in St Petersburg at a pre-arranged time, most people took the opportunity of an early night .

Early the following morning we loaded our luggage on the support truck for the last time and set out for the coast before eight o'clock . A mixture of roads and tracks through the forest brought us to a clearing containing the single storey house in which Lenin had been exiled before the Russian Revolution . To protect the house, now a museum, a large pre-cast concrete roof has been put over it, which gives it the appearance of a self-service petrol station . We reached the shore of the Gulf of Finland and began following the coast road which was very busy, this area being much more heavily populated and prosperous than anywhere we had seen before in Russia .

On the outskirts of St Petersburg we were met by a police escort and accompanied through the streets to the centre of the city where our ride finished in the square in front of the Winter Palace . Here we were greeted by a large crowd and ushered onto a stage for speeches of welcome . It seemed a lot of trouble to provide a stage for the finish of a bike ride by a few British cyclists, but I found out later it was used for a huge outdoor pop concert in the evening . We then put our bikes on a boat for a trip around the city, which is built on a number of islands, before docking in front of our hotel . Here we regretfully (?) relinquished our bikes before finding rooms in the huge and magnificent tourist hotel which was as good as anything we would expect in the West . The view from my bedroom window included the battleship Aurora, moored in the river opposite . It was a gun fired on this ship that signalled the start of the 1917 uprising that led to the October revolution .

The ride successfully completed, we could now look forward to a gala dinner in the hotel . This was a gastronomic delight, the food being accompanied by vodka, champagne and wine . Following this we had an entertaining series of impromptu courts martial, in which various misdemeanours noted during the ride, such as falling off one's bike or wearing unconventional clothing, were punished by fines levied by a kangaroo court and donated to the charity . This was followed by celebrations in a night club with people arriving back at the hotel at times dictated by the river traffic . In St Petersburg the bridges are only raised at various times throughout the night to allow ships to arrive and depart .

The following day involved a long coach journey back to Helsinki with another long and frustrating delay at the border . We eventually reached Heathrow and said good-bye to the people who we had got to know well on the trip, to return home for a rest and to relieve the saddle soreness and treat the many mosquito bites collected on the ride .

I would like to return one day and complete the second part of the ride from St Petersburg to Moscow, especially as the roads are much flatter on this section . Many thanks to all the club members who helped me with sponsorship, I have so far raised nearly £900 for the charity .

Martin Dean

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