

The VT Summer 100, 3rd September 2023

By Graham



Tory Power-stances Abound.

After a damp August the new month was set to deliver a welcome burst of summer, yet an early start on a September Sunday meant Emlyn was still resting in a cool haze for the start of this year's Summer 100. A motley crew had gathered from their grand estates and hovels: Pete and Eoghan, on separate bikes this time; Mark with audax set-up and James sporting the latest fully electronic, super-pro GC machine. Ed was all ready for the hills, of course - 2000 metres of Cambrian climbing looking like a gentle get away from international quad bike racing. Oh! And who's this? Unveiled and exposed as the WhatsApp 'You' trickster... of course, the Jav-meister himself.

As we tapped along the valley perhaps it was the still-dark woodland, or perhaps the slightly simian appearance of some of our team that prompted James to make an oblique reference to 'Gorillas in the mist' and lo, there ahead seated on a low wall, the taciturn silverback known as Mr H.

Pleasantries and un-pleasantries shared, this magnificent eight were now feeling the first warmth of the sun as the last whisps of river mist vanished and the Teifi showed more of her shameless beauty.

Through Llandysul and following the river's meander and open vistas before rejoining the main road to Lampeter at Llanybydder. The pace was steady, as was the chat, interrupted only by Eoghan making an unscheduled detour where he was seemingly accused of 'frightening the horses.' Details were sketchy but equestrian diplomacy was vigorous and our brave comrade made a swift escape with a hearty farewell.



Cappuccino-denier, Silverback and Horse-botherer ahoy!

Close to our Lampeter rendezvous two earnest looking cyclists appear. Riding towards us, heads down and determined, a steely demeanour. Two veteran pros perhaps? No, wait, it's our very own Dr Brian and Big Barry come out to meet us. No need to wait, for in no time the pair have turned around and with the application of awesome watts, honed at French training camps and Welsh Gritfests, they have caught us up and the group is almost complete.

Our final rider for the day is a guest from strange lands. That is to say, somewhere beyond Synod Inn. Gari was first met during this year's Preseli Angel and came along on the St David's ride for fun and games. Occasional training companion of local cycling sensation, Josh Tarling, and already 5000 miles of cycling done for this year our little awayday was just the ticket.

Most of us were clamouring for cake and coffee and so a strong pace was set for Tregaron via Llanddewi Brefi. The road, undulating and sinuous, follows the Teifi closely here but the landscape is open allowing sight of the high hills that we will later climb. On the way, we are briefly delayed by a farmer herding her cows along the road but soon we're rolling through cowsh*t and on to the pleasant Riverside Cafe.



Still those power-stances remain.

A valiant attempt was made to go for the Velo Teifi 100% cappuccino order, but sadly we were let down at the last by a troublesome Dr Brian, opting instead for an americano. Unrepentant, he then doubled down on his mischief by refusing to define whether he preferred hot or cold milk. When told either were available he replied 'either will be fine.' Such defiance...

Caked up and bidons refilled, we got down to (or should that be 'up to') some serious hill climbing. The road initially rises gently, then a bit more, you await the full hit but no... a pleasant flat section and then wallop... the road rises up steeply ahead of you. The clatter of gear changing is noticeable: once, twice and again but that's it, no lower sprockets remain. Steady grind now... Hell's teeth! It gets steeper. Stand on the pedals a bit... legs hurting now... a bit more and we are at the top. But that was just a taster. A short, sketchy descent - the road rough and broken - not made any easier by a 4x4 coming the other way. As the road flattens the trees clear and ahead we see our route. Along the right flank of this moorland valley, it climbs steadily, a thin ribbon at first, a series of tight loops later on before disappearing behind woodland. Three and a half kilometres of ascent with an average gradient of 6%, spiking to 15% in places.



The Author reaches for his six-shooter as the Jav-meister glides by.

Yes it hurts a bit, but it is wonderful. The scenery, the quality of light, a buzzard overhead. You strive for the steady optimum, the regular rhythm of breathing and legs and heart; you look up and the moors, streams, woods, sheep are steady too and, by God, you know you're alive.

A folded quilt of high moorland now spreads before us. The Teifi has been left behind and this is where the Tywi forms with an hour or so of hard riding still to do before lunch. It's mostly downhill but you wouldn't think so sometimes as we roller-coast around Llyn Brianne. The lake is full this year and where the commercial woodland hasn't been cleared, it's as attractive as many a better known lakeland.

The last climb breached, a fast and furious descent to Towy Bridge Inn follows. Pints of squash are ordered this year with few beers. It's getting hot now and there's still quite a way to go. An hour's rest is gone all too soon and we need to crack on. Indeed, Mark and Eoghan move off first and a few minutes later, the last few bidons filled, we're off again at, thankfully, a relaxed pace.



Steely. Beardy. Pantani.

A pretty side valley leads us to a low pass where we cross into the Cothi valley. The single track is quick and good fun but there are plenty of short but sticky climbs that sap the legs. Ed is still dancing away up everything. Pete too is climbing well and James and Jav show plenty of energy. Everyone's going well considering the heat and cumulative effort.



Big Skies.

At Pumpsaint the group splits as Brian and Barry must return on the Lampeter road. Mark and Eoghan decide they will go the same way and the remaining seven head on to Brechfa. There's not much chat now and the ride seems more focused on road and legs. Mr H takes the lead for a good stretch and then Gari takes us on nice and steady to Llansawel. A brace of draggy hills before Abergorlech have slowly split us into two groups, but we take it easy and, at Brechfa, we stop at the pub for more refreshments.



Framework for a Grand Day Out.

We are a sweaty, red-faced, dishevelled bunch but the host is welcoming and happily doles out pints of orange squash, iced coke and bags of crisps. This is what it must be like in an Enid Blyton book... 'The Cycling Seven.' Anyhow, despite varying degrees of fatigue, everyone is in good spirit and ready for the climb over to Llanllwni. Except, that is, for your intrepid correspondent who has now realised his popty has just pinged and, if not quite fully cooked, he very soon would be.

Having used up my allocation of A&E services for 2023, I decide not to tempt fate but instead order another pint and a bag of crisps.

Not quite the full 100 miles for me this year but nonetheless an absolutely cracking day out.

