

The article below is taken from the July 1954 edition and relates an Easter trip to the Isle of Wight. The participants took in not only riding there and back but seemed to have occupied most of the intervening time in racing. The participants included Sylvia Wybrow, who a year later would be a member of the British team in the "Women's 5-day Tour Feminin Cycliste" in France (see the October 1955 Mudguardian). Sylvia still holds several club records. Also on the IoW trip was Merv Player a seriously good time-trialist who is still a member and riding his bike as COVID allows.

EASTER ON "THE ISLAND".

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There were five of us who started the long ride down to "Pompey", en route for "the Island". I was quite surprised myself that all five of us reached our destination. After I'd punctured for the third time I quite expected them to set upon me at least.

However, to go back to the beginning, the five (Audrey, Sylvia, Bob, Les and Merv) left Enfield at the awfully early hour of 6.0 a.m., and proceeded to do a "steady evens" along the North Circular. On arriving at Kew Bridge Les decided he knew a short cut to the Portsmouth Road. We decided we had better ask one of the "locals" the way after we'd crossed the Thames for the second time however, and we were soon "back on course". Eventually we reached Esher and promptly stormed a convenient Cafe, as we felt that a good breakfast would come in useful!! The proprietor was quite surprised at having us drop in on him at that time of the morning, and it took quite a while for our bacon and eggs to arrive; in fact Les was making some tentative remarks about "whether the chickens had gone on strike or something" when the B.& E's arrived.

After disposing of the B.& E's and several cups of "char" we proceeded on to the Portsmouth Road. On reaching it Les and Bob went "up front" and proceeded to set a cracking pace and we were soon "roaring" past other various sized bunches all going to the Island. Everything was going fine and we'd managed to get through Guildford 0.K. (despite Bob wanting to go up a 1 in 4 hill for no apparent reason) when there was the ominous sound of air escaping and it wasn't a "slow" either!! We all looked at our irons (with fingers crossed) and I proceeded to change my tub (just my luck). Everybody else sat around and made remarks on the merits of a certain make of tubular with yours truly keeping quiet. By the time the tub was changed we'd been re-passed by quite a few bunches. We soon got going again however and were just moving nicely when we reached the bottom of the climb up to the Devils Punch Bowl at Hindhead. Les and myself had a glorious prime up the steep and long climb and managed to pip various others doing likewise. On reaching the top we stopped to have a look at the Punch Bowl, wishing we could have a drink and also remove our track suits as the day was getting very warm by now.

A few miles after Hindhead I had my second deflation, this time conveniently outside a Cafe. Needless to say everybody piled in and started to devour coffee and toast, which was very welcome by this time. We were just settling down when Sylvia suggested that we should get on the road again as she was riding at Pompey at 2.30 and the clock wasn't waiting for us. After "the boys" had consulted the map we decided that we'd plenty of time to make Pompey at the pace we'd been making up till now. Sylvia and Audrey now went up the front and the pace really warmed up, with first Audrey "half-wheeling" Sylvia, and vice versa. We eventually reached journeys end at about one o'clock despite another puncture, our progress being greatly helped by being mixed up with some boys doing "bit and bit" as we neared Pompey.

Pompey reached we located the track and then retired to the nearest Cafe for sustenance. Emerging from the Cafe at a later hour we walked to the track and got Sylvia's iron ready. With all the Herts wheelers mechanics working furiously this did not take long, despite Les trying to see if he could blow Syl's tubs

sky high!! Luckily for us Sylvia's event was not until the middle of the programme so we were able to have a bit of a breather and watch some of the racing. When the time came for Sylvia to do her stuff we'd had a chance to survey the opposition and after some enquiries we gathered that the other girls in the event were riding gears about five inches bigger than hers, so we had to work out some tactics. Despite being under-g geared however, the Herts Wheelers managed to get third place, which made it worth the effort of getting down there in time. After watching the rest of the meeting we set to and made the track iron roadworthy again and made for the ferry and the Island.

We had a real sprint to catch the ferry by about a wheel. The party were soon taking photos of everything in sight and didn't have a chance to feel seasick before we pulled up against Ryde Pier. We were met on the pier by Jack and Pat who had come down later in the day. They had been looking for the digs "for hours" they said and couldn't find them. However the girls said they knew the way so with all "the boys" following faithfully we set off. After going through a maze of streets that would make Hampton Court Maze look easy we weren't surprised that Jack and Pat hadn't been able to find them. We even got off course once! We arrived eventually and were very glad to get inside and have a rest. However, in the words of the old saying "there's no peace for the wicked" and we were soon being dragged around the town again.

The next day dawned rather dull but "the boys" weren't particularly worried as it was a "rest day" for them. Sylvia was again booked to "do her nut" in the afternoon on Sandown Promenade. After a hearty breakfast we made our way towards Sandown, pausing now and again to refresh ourselves. On reaching Sandown we again had the job of stripping down Sylvia's bike, with most of us hoping that her luck of the day before would hold. After we'd finished the iron we went to see the start of the "Grand Prix of the Island" as they rode through the town in procession before being de-neutralised and really getting down to it. Back then to the sprinting with myself for one marvelling how the riders didn't pile up with all the crowds around the finishing line. We then arrived at the Ladies Handicap event with Sylvia off 31 yards. I suppose Sylvia was hoping she would be able to add another cup to her collection, and so were we. However Sylvia's luck proved to be out that day and she was pushed out of a place in the scramble for the line. I think we were all as disappointed as she was but "it's no use crying over spilt milk" and so we settled down to watch the rest of the sprinting and also the other events. While the racing was going on Les went off to Ryde to meet Pete who had had to work on Saturday morning and so had come down by train from Waterloo.

When Les and Pete joined us those who were riding in the massed start events the next day decided that they had better try "the circuit" so the three M/3 men, Bob, Jack and Merv set off: to have a try. ~ "I never knew there could be so many Hills in so few miles! Bob and Merv were certainly glad they were only going around once, though I believe Jack must have liked the hills as he proved on the next day. After going round once we decided it was enough and made off back to Sandown to meet the others, then making our way back to Ryde and digs.

The boys and girls then set too and got their bikes into racing trim for the morrow, the girls riding in the Vectis '10', Jack riding in the four lap circuit event and Bob and myself the one lap.

The time trialists were up early and had left with their supporters, Pete and Les, before the "massed start wallahs" began to stir. Eventually Bob and I arrived on the starting line along with over a hundred others, myself for one wondering how the heck we'd be able to get up the first hill without at least one crash. The sun came out as we waited for the starter's orders and the day later proved to be lovely.

As the starter gave us the "off" everybody lunged on the pedals and quickly got strapped in and into bottom gear, then it was up the main hill, about a half mile of 1 in 4, with everyone honking like fanatics... Bob had a bit of rough luck on this first climb and only got half way up when he was pushed into the

bank and brought to a standstill, though he soon got going again and finished just behind the bunch. For myself, I also managed to crash, though only a half mile from the finish, getting nicely stung in a patch of stinging nettles and eventually finishing about 20th. We had just finished when it was time for Jack to go to the starting line for his event. Jack did four times as much as we did that day but seemed to enjoy himself. Though the King Brothers (who won the event) go at a very sociable pace, Jack left them after a bit. He also got mixed up in a pile-up but still kept going the full distance.

While the "boys" (for my part at least) were showing how not to do it, the "girls" riding in the '10' were showing how to do it. Sylvia improved her time of last year but was only fourth. Audrey also did a personal for the event and both beat the winning time of last year.

After the races were over we decided that we might as well make the most of a nice day and see part of the island. Starting off at a very moderate pace to Shanklin, we walked the hill on the other side of the town and eventually reached Ventnor where we lounged about on the beach for a while. It was soon time to move again and we started to make our way back to Ryde for the last time, realising with regret that we would have to start for home the next day.

Easter Monday proved to be a nice day with the sun shining again, and though the tail wind that had been so welcome coming down was still blowing, this time against us, we made good progress with Bob and Les up front. Guildford was very nearly reached by the time we decided to have dinner. The journey was uneventful except for being caught in a traffic jam at Windsor where we took the usual photos (of the Castle). Soon we were going through the old familiar country again, Ricky, Watford (where we dropped Pete), Hatfield (cheerio Les) and so to our respective abodes. Altogether a very enjoyable four days and the sort of holiday to remember. Though we didn't win all the awards, we at least had a try.