

Newsletter February 2017

London Edinburgh London.

London Edinburgh London (LEL) is a non competitive randonee of approximately 1400 km (870m), over an out & back course. It is held every 4 yrs. & began in 1989. Then, there were 29 starters & 26 finishers, all British. It started at Doncaster (home of the organiser) that year & finished in London after 1300km.

2005

For the 5th edition, 306 people started, 246 finished. They came from Europe & other countries including Japan, Russia, Australia, USA & Canada. Riders set out from Cheshunt & Thorne, near Doncaster.

2009

31 nations took part. Started & finished in Cheshunt.

2013

In 2013 the route took a loop through Scotland & over the Humber Bridge.

2017

This year's edition will take place between 30th July & 4th August. Three Cambridge riders plan to take part over the 1,433km & 11,128m of climbing. Quiet lanes are used where possible.

Along the route there are control points where basic hot food, showers & somewhere to sleep are provided. Bike mechanics are on hand to do repairs. There is also assistance if you are sick or can't finish the event. All this is included in the entry fee, £319. Public entry opens 20th January. It is limited to 1500 riders.

As long as you are over 18 you can enter. Teams will be started together. Starts are staggered across the day.

Alston and Back 300km.

Lucy McTaggart is a club member who lives in Scotland. She is helping to organise some Audax UK events this year. Galashiels to Alston and back is the first. Held over 2 days, 15th-16th April. Lucy used to ride and race in the Cambridge area years ago. She still visits occasionally. As well as riding long

distance events, she keeps fit with yoga and regular trips to the gym. She will send us some more information on her other events in the near future.

Duo Normand Time Trial.

Dave McGaw has kindly written this article about his experiences in last year's event.

The Duo Normand is a 2up time trial around Normandy. It's quite legendary on the UK time trialing scene. I've heard many people say it is an amazing experience and that everyone should ride it at least once, but they never really say what's so awesome about it. What's the big secret? This is my report about how I learnt to ride a tandem and raced "the Duo".



Part 1 - Tandem trauma

Months before the Duo Normand I bumped into Tim Williams at a café stop. Tim said that one of the athletes he trains was looking for a tandem pilot to do some racing. Would I be interested? I said sure, but that I didn't have a tandem and err... actually I've never ridden a tandem before or touched a tandem or seen a tandem close up etc. "Oh don't worry about that" he said.

The rider Tim was talking about was Iain Dawson. Iain is a world champion paratriathlete and paraduathlete. He is also an awesome cyclist who has represented Great Britain on the track at the Paralympics. Anyway I phoned him and we chatted about possible racing plans. We wanted to target the UK Para TT Champs. Iain also mentioned the Duo Normand. This is a race that I'd wanted to

ride for years, Iain had also always really wanted to ride it, so we agreed to enter. I just had to learn how to ride a tandem. How hard can that be?

It was a few weeks later that I visited Iain's to get my position sorted and go for my first ever tandem ride. To be honest I was feeling a bit apprehensive, but Iain is an old hand at this. I've heard that people normally start riding a tandem as the stoker (that's the person at the back) and later become a pilot (on the front). This wasn't really an option as Iain is blind, so I got chucked in at the deep end.

The first time riding a tandem with someone else clipped in is a really weird sensation. I found we had to plan through and synchronise everything that I would normally do without even thinking. For example what foot do you start off with? What position are the cranks? How do you push off? It was like when I was learning to walk again after 3 months on crutches, I didn't know what to do with my arms so I asked my work colleagues. None of them had a clue either and we all spent the next few hours self-consciously walking around looking at ourselves to see what our arms were doing.

Setting off on the tandem turned out to be quite easy but when we got to the end of the road I realised that we hadn't talked about how we would come to a stop, ahhh!

Soon we were cruising around some nice country lanes and everything was going well, "Hmm", I thought "I'm getting the hang of this, it's not too hard really". It was going OK because I was really concentrating on riding the tandem. Suddenly a very loud motorbike roared past, it didn't pass too close to us but it surprised me. I lost concentration for a moment, forgot I was riding a tandem and steered normally. This created a really horrible "death wobble" type of effect, where the bike would lean over to one side, I'd try to correct it by steering into it but I'd steer too much and we would end up leaning over the other side. This oscillating from side to side repeated several times and was getting more extreme. I couldn't seem to correct it and we were wobbling uncontrollably towards a ditch. "Oh bugger" I thought, "I'm going to crash and I didn't even last 10 minutes". As a last desperate measure before we crashed I yanked on the bars and with a deliciously swoopy swoop we were suddenly back in a straight line. I thought Iain was going to go totally ballistic at me and refuse to ride anymore (I would have), but he just tapped me on the arm and said "good catch". I'd just received my first tandem lesson. After a quick breather to stop shaking we got back to practicing.

Before I rode the tandem I had tried to imagine what it might feel like. On my first ride I was finding out that pretty much all of my preconceptions were wrong. I thought the tandem would be really unstable at low speeds but it is actually super stable, maybe it's to do with the long wheelbase and that two people are balancing on it. Also I thought I would be really fast and that we'd be cruising around at 30mph, taking down Strava segments at will. In reality it only felt a little bit quicker than my normal bike and we still needed to really push to get the speed up. I thought it would handle like a normal bike in high speed corners but it felt awful. It's a bit like riding a fully loaded touring bike except that the "panniers" are moving all the time, especially in corners. This alters the balance of the bike and I think is what had created my "death wobble" experience.

My strategy in these situations is to take the time to make sure I understand the basics well: why things are happening and what I can do in response. Once I

have confidence in my technique I just need to add speed. Sharp and slow corners were fine as we could ride them upright but I was having real problems going fast around corners, I couldn't understand what was going wrong. The only solution was to keep practicing and try different things out. You can't recreate high speed cornering on a pottering ride so my second ever tandem lesson was racing in a CC Breckland club event. A twisty hilly route similar to the National and Duo Normand courses.

You never forget how to ride a bike, but it seems that you do forget how to ride a tandem. Getting back on the tandem for the second time it felt just as weird as the first time. I had reconnoitred the course to find all the tricky corners... which was all of them. We were in full race trim (pointy hat, skin suit and aero wheels) and I really wanted us to go well. As well as being in charge of gears and steering, I was also looking after race strategy. I like to think of myself as a bit of a master tactician and after mulling it over I said to Iain "Oh, let's just gun it".

We set off like a stabbed rat. Coming up to the first corner we were doing well over 30mph. This was probably the worst corner on the whole course, a sharp right with adverse camber and loose gravel everywhere. As we were entering the corner I was still thinking about what the best line might be, but it was far too late for that. I thought we were going to crash into the sign warning us that it was a sharp corner, we managed to scramble round. The second corner was an easy left and I totally screwed that up too, riding it like it was a 20 pence piece with about 3 apexes. The third corner was a normal 90 degree left turn, but I cut it too fine, ran wide and we ended up on the wrong side of the road. Maybe it was a good thing that Iain couldn't see what a total mess I was making of this.

Most of the corners were like this, with me trying different things and finding new and interesting ways to nearly bin it. But something did start happening, a few of the corners were beginning to click. Eventually we got round the course, and amazingly we were fastest and broke the course record. "I think I was getting the hang of it on a couple of corners" I said with my optimistic hat on. Conveniently forgetting about all the other corners where we nearly died.

On reflection I think the problem was that I had been trying to ride the tandem like a democracy where we make decisions equally. That doesn't work though as when cycling you need to react so quickly that there's no time to discuss anything. It needed to be more like ballroom dancing where one person takes the lead and the other follows. Really I think being the stoker is the hardest position on a tandem as they have to react at short notice to changes and trust the pilot. I think this is what makes Iain such a great stoker, he can react and anticipate really well. I just needed to trust that Iain would follow my lead.

The third ride was meant to be a drag strip course in Attleborough, we wanted to see how crazily fast we could ride, but the race was cancelled at the last minute because of rain. Instead we did some training and I was finally getting the hang of it, "woo hoo!" I squealed as we hooked up a few corners and went flying through them. I had found that being a tandem pilot in the rain does have some benefits... my bum didn't get all soggy from spray off the back wheel, thanks Iain!

Next up was Normandy. Oh dear☐



Part 2 - The race face

We took the overnight ferry to Normandy and arrived in the little village of Marigny where the Duo starts and finishes. It was Saturday, the day before the race and it was already rammed with cyclists.

It's weird how the UK and French time trial scenes are so different. Some basic things about the Duo were really annoying for example: the entry process, finding out our start time, getting any results, getting hold of zip ties and safety pins for numbers. However the French had some things that were totally amazing for someone used to racing in the UK like: the race taking over an entire village, a proper start ramp, a massive seating stand, a party atmosphere, locals that are actually being happy to see cyclists without trying to ban them, big inflatable arches, commentators and a lorry just for the commentators. They also had a separate lorry for the time keepers, in the UK time keepers use a deck chair.

It was the day before the race, so we signed on, got changed and rode the course. Well most of the course, I had plotted what I thought was the route and put it on my garmin but it turned out I had got the beginning bit wrong and also we couldn't ride the final out and back section as it was closed off. It was good though as I was able to see almost all of the corners and could think about potential lines I would take, when we did our practice ride I was still having a few problems with corners.

While we were mooching around the start a guy came up and said he was also riding the tandem event. We got chatting and it turned out that they had won the tandem category for the previous two years. It was a bit depressing actually as he seemed to know what he was doing and I felt like such an amateur. He helped us out by telling us stuff like where the start was and that there were only 4 tandems in our category.

In the evening we went into Saint-Lo for dinner. It was really touristy and it had loads of burger places but I said to Iain we should eat some proper French food and so we found a rustic French bistro. The food was awesome except for the fact that my French is so terrible I thought steak tartare was steak. They were really nice though and offered to cook it for me... after I had waded through half of it.

I always get really nervous before a race, I think it's good though as it means I really care about it and want to do well. If I ever had a race and didn't get those tingly excited pukey feelings beforehand I would quit racing. For club events it normally starts about 5 mins before the off, for the duo it was about 12 hours.

The day of the race we got up early and headed to Marigny. I was a bit of a nervous wreck and was hoping it would be so foggy that they'd cancel it, but by the time we arrived the fog had cleared and I was running out of excuses. We warmed up by using my highly technical pre-race strategy of "riding around a bit". I was so nervous I must have gone to the toilet about 5 times. As I fidgeted time relentlessly moved forward until there was no putting it off any longer and we rode to the start.

As we waited outside the start tent the French commentators, who talked continuously for the whole event (about 12 hours), introduced us and absolutely butchered our names. I was "Davide MaaGow" and poor Iain became "Leanne Daaason".

"Come on Leanne" I said, as we dragged the tandem up the steps of the start ramp. I felt awful, I might as well have been walking up to the gallows. I was absolutely bricking it, all the blood had drained from my face and I was very pale, more so than usual. I simultaneously wanted to puke and go to the toilet (again). I kept thinking that this was totally insane, it was only my 5th time on a tandem and I still had no idea what I was doing. You wouldn't believe the number of forms I had to fill out to rent a car and take it to France but absolutely nobody asked me if I knew how to ride a bike. Iain seemed completely fine though.

There was a photographer on the start ramp taking photos as people started. I didn't even notice him as I had my head down, trying to keep all the sick in. He started clicking his fingers to get me to look up, I looked up and he snapped a few photos. I wasn't wearing my visor and my helmet was squeezing my cheeks together, I must have looked like a terrified chipmunk. Whilst I was still on the start ramp I saw him deleting the photos he'd just taken.

Five seconds to go. A French guy started doing the countdown using his fingers to indicate the seconds. With one second to go he was holding his index finger out, then with a smooth movement he pointed down the ramp. Just like on the telly, that was so cool. The ramp was a few meters long, at the top I was a nervous wreck but by the time I hit the bottom I had got my race face on. All the nerves had gone out the window and I had become a cold blooded cycling killing machine on a mission to slaughter some French!

Part 3 - The pain cave

The first few meters of the Duo is all downhill, but the next km or so is an uphill drag.

Whilst wandering around before the start we had seen other teams heading off. Some teams were riding so easy it looked like they were on a club ride. We had agreed not to do that so ragged it down the start ramp and up the first little hill.

The route is basically flat for the first half (apart from the first km) initially there are lots of 90 degree turns, it reminds me of the fens but with more trees. The next bit it is still flat but the corners are less sharp and run into each other so it's like being on a rollercoaster. The second half of the course is where it gets interesting, it is quite rolling and there are about 4 short and stabby climbs. The final 10k is an out and back dog leg. For pacing I thought it would be important to make sure that we didn't get too excited at the beginning and go way too hard for the first half before we hit the hills. So the strategy was: "ride pretty hard for the first half, saving a little bit, then smash the hills".

After going crazy for the first km or so we had settled into a nice groove. Initially when heading out of Marigny we got our very own motorcycle out rider who was blocking the many small side roads as they joined the course. It was awesome. I'd never had my own out rider before. A weird thing about the duo is that the course is anti-clockwise in a country that drives on the right. This means you're always turning left across traffic, but this was not a problem as when we got close to any junction we'd hear whistles from all around us and Gendarmes would leap out of nowhere into the road and stop the traffic. It felt great as we shot out of side roads onto main roads at high speed, with the wide roads we could take a shallow line and go really fast.

Just before we climbed the start ramp we had been watching the riders before us. Teams were going off at two minute intervals and we were the first of the tandems. The team in front of us looked really professional, they were wearing full team Europecar kit and had a team Europecar following car. They must have been part of the development squad. I realised that riders must have been seeded for each category with the fastest guys from the category before ours going off directly in front of us. As we hadn't ridden the duo before we were seeded last in our category. With two minute intervals between teams I said to Iain "there's no chance we'll catch any other teams, guaranteed!". After about 10km though I saw a slow moving car up ahead, as it turned left I saw two riders in front of it. "We're catching a team!" I excitedly cried. As we caught and passed this team I saw another team in the distance "there's another pair!", I yelled. By the time we'd caught the second pair I had seen another two teams in front of them that we were going to catch. The novelty of overtaking teams had worn off and I gave up mentioning it anymore to Iain.

All teams were allowed to have a following car, but we didn't have anyone to drive a follow car for us. Most teams following car were driven by family members who seem to have brought everyone along. As we would catch a team the people in the car would hang out the windows, waving and screaming encouragement at us. When we passed riders I would always shout "ALLEZ!" at them. I always try and do this as I've been in that position and think it's nice to give a bit of a shout out. Some people have told me it helps them dig a bit deeper and I often get a shout back. For this race I shouted at every team we passed and literally nobody shouted back, it must be a French thing. I lost count of how many teams we caught during the event, maybe 20.

The first easy section had gone OK, we'd been riding hard but saving a bit. I was in my pain cave but was just chilling out and putting my feet up. We started in on the flat twisty section. I had seen most of the corners already and was feeling more confident. I was trying to push as hard as possible in the corners: leaning right over, trying to take the straightest line and using the whole road. My cornering technique seemed to be holding out. It felt awesome to go so fast. Before the race Iain had asked me to shout out corners to give him a heads up, I was using a rally type of system where I'd shout "sharp left", for tricky lefts, "left" for a regular 90 degree turns or "fast left" for turns that were not too bad. We were pedalling right through the fast lefts and were leaning so far over I needed to think about the possibility of pedal strike.

Almost half way around the course, we were riding along a straight flat road, the wind was coming from the left. I saw a couple of riders up ahead, they seemed to be going pretty fast. As we got closer I saw it was team Europecar who had started two minutes ahead of us. Something was not quite right though and as we got closer I saw what was going on. Team Europecar were spread out across the road, imagine a 3 rider echelon, now imagine that the lead rider is not a rider at all but the Europecar team car. "You can't do that!" I said.

The team Europecar driver saw us coming and dropped back. As we rode past the riders accelerated, "They're on our wheel!" said Iain. I've had some experience with wheel suckers during races and I gave Iain the only advice that I know "Ignore them, we'll ride our own race".

"They're still there", said Iain.

"Stop looking!" I shouted, but really it's impossible not to look, it's like having a loose tooth and not being able to stop wiggling it. After they drafted us for a while the team Europecar car driver started honking the horn at his own riders. Finally they dropped back.

Just after halfway we whizzed around a corner and the course suddenly changed from flat to hilly. We were beginning the first of the 4 climbs. I absolutely love hilly courses, I've tried lots of different ways to pace them but have found that the best strategy also happens to be the most fun: "smash it up the hills!". Sometimes in the past I've found it difficult to get a teammate who can keep up on hills, but on the tandem this wasn't a problem and I could go totally crazy. I'd been taking it easy up until then, but it was finally time to open the taps and unleash hell.

I've heard many people say that tandems are quite slow up hills, but we weren't, we were flying. I think it's because Iain and I are both quite light (about 130kg combined weight) and we both like hills. Although I didn't have a power meter I reckon we were maybe pulling about 700 watts on these sustained climbs.

As we began the climbs I think many of the other teams were realising that they had started way too hard. We were now steaming past teams with even more ferocity than before. On one hill we overtook 3 pairs of riders at once, it was carnage as all the other teams had following cars. I find the TT position really comfy for climbing, plus we hadn't practiced standing up, so we climbed whilst seated and I chewed on the stem.

Every time we reached the top of a climb I was slammed to the back of my pain cave, stroking my totem animal (which is a squirrel BTW) for any comfort I could get. (This is a reference from the film "Fight Club".) The temptation was to push

hard down the hills but there is so little benefit plus we needed to recover to go hard again up the next one. "Easy tiger!" I shouted. Once we had crested the last hill before Marigny we were joined by another motorcycle out rider who escorted us into the centre of town. We just had the final 10 km out and back part to go, I was feeling pretty knackered at this point. We hadn't ridden this section before and I hoped it would be flat but no, there was a climb just outside Marigny, that we'd also have to do on the way back. We pushed hard again up the climb, grinding it out. On the hill there were two French men staggering around on the pavement, they were still plastered from the night before. They pointed and laughed at us.

As we rounded the final turn at the end of the dog leg I had a quick look at my garmin. It said 1 hour 3 minutes, it wasn't showing seconds. As this was an out and back part of the course we'd be seeing the riders behind us as we rode back and we could work out roughly what the time gaps were to the other tandems. Time ticked by, eventually I saw the top tandem seeds. I looked at my garmin, it said 1 hour 6 mins, they had started 6 minutes behind us so it was close but it felt like a long 3 minutes. "I think we're ahead, but it's close!" I yelled.

On the way back I saw a smallish old French man wearing a suit standing by the side of the road. He was screaming "ALLEZ!!" at us and punching the air, I think he might have been reliving old days when he'd raced. I gave him a nod but by this time I was drooling quite a bit and rocking side to side, I was a total mess.

We reached the bottom of the final climb, I was completely wrecked but we just had to keep going. I have noticed that I'm quite good at pacing myself in races so that I implode just as I cross the finish line. However I had misjudged this one a bit, as we climbed I could feel the rubber bands powering my legs begin to stretch and lose all their power.

I was no longer in my pain cave, I'd been blasted out into oblivion. When I'm in the pain cave everything hurts. On occasion I've finished a race only to then notice that I'd been sitting on the saddle a bit wrong and have rubbed all the skin off a certain area. The pain in my legs and lungs can be so strong that it swamps all other senses. Oblivion feels totally different though, it is not painful at all, I normally can't feel my legs anymore. It feels quite nice actually: warm, fuzzy and everything has a slightly dreamy feeling. When in oblivion I could quite happily take a nap, it's very tempting for my mind to wander and get hypnotised by my front hub, think about resting my head on a big fluffy pillow or to imagine being a squirrel in a forest furtively digging for berries. If the pain cave is having a painfully cold hand, oblivion is the point when it goes totally numb.

Over the years of riding and racing I've found a few sneaky tricks that I can use to get a small advantage. Everyone does this though, right? Right? I love sitting at the back of a group acting like I'm totally knackered so that no one expects me to do a turn on the front. Most of my sneaky tricks are to get a benefit for myself but I have noticed, when running spinning classes, that the simple act of shouting encouragement at someone can help push them right up to and sometimes beyond what they think is possible.

We were getting close to the top of the final hill but I had to ease off a bit as I was totally stuffed. When I did I felt something awesome, Iain had been saving some energy somewhere and started driving us on. I began screaming at Iain to push harder, the more I screamed the harder I could feel him pushing on the

pedals, so I screamed even more. Iain dragged us to the top of the last hill. It was downhill all the way from then so I could finally shut up. We went flying down the hill, I was so knackered I couldn't be bothered to steer much but it was mostly straight on.

Part 4 - The aftermath

We crossed the finish line. For a few moments we were both doubled over breathing hard. We shook hands and congratulated each other. Iain said he didn't think he could have ridden it any harder, I was exactly the same. In some ways it didn't matter how we had done overall as we could not have gone any faster and that is all you can ask for. Yeah right, but after about 30 seconds I started wondering how the other riders had got on. It could be quite close between us and the top seeded pair.

I'd had enough of cycling so we walked gingerly back to the car and got changed. I downed a whole can of coke and started to feel a bit more normal.

We went back to the square to have a look around. We kept hearing our names but the commentator was rambling on in a continuous stream of numbers and names, we couldn't make out what he was saying. It could be that they were running down the top three in each category. We asked at the signing on booth if they had results. They said we should try the commentators or time keepers' lorry. I asked at the time keepers' lorry, they said that they were giving results to the commentators and so should ask there. We popped to the commentator's lorry, they said they didn't have the results we should ask at the time keepers. "Ok thanks we'll try that" I said and we gave up. In the UK there would be riots if people didn't get results within about 30 mins of finishing.

We sat in the stand and ate some lovely freshly made pommes frites whilst watching other riders cross the finish line. Then we watched the pro category riders start. Some seemed totally amateurish riding road bikes, but other teams looked great with matching kit and those really expensive McLaren aero helmets. The commentators (who had not stopped talking for 12 hours) interviewed the riders before the off. I was so glad they hadn't tried to interview me before our start.

As we walked to the commentary lorry for the prize giving I noticed I'd lost my wallet. We found the lady in charge of signing in. My French is really bad and she couldn't speak English so I had to do a terrible sort of charades to explain what had happened, she took my details and arranged for an announcement to be made. They announced the people who needed to go up and collect prizes and they said our names, but we already suspected that we were in the top 3. It took ages to mime to the French woman helping me with my wallet that I'd be back in a minute as I had to go and collect a prize. By the time we were scrambling up the really steep stairs at the back of the commentator's lorry on all fours we should have been on stage, "Leeanne and Davide please come up on stage, you have won your category". So that's how we found out we'd won. We got pushed on stage and there were loads of people staring at us as and taking photos. They gave us some goodies: flowers, cider and a trophy.



It was a relief to get off the stage, even though we'd only been on stage for about a minute. We went back into the crowd. I found the lady that had been helping me with my lost wallet. I cobbled together pretty much every French word I knew "Pour vous Madame, merci pour tout" and gave her the flowers I'd just won. She looked at them and burst out crying. I didn't know what the French for "Please stop crying" is, but luckily they were tears of joy and she smiled. We gave each other a little hug and a kiss on the cheeks in that weird French way.

We hung around to watch the other prizes then said our goodbyes. I was a bit bummed out about losing my wallet, wondering if some crazy Frenchman was running around with my Tesco's club card. But I hadn't lost anything that couldn't be replaced and had gained something that couldn't be lost.

The drive home was really weird. Normally after a race it's like an autopsy, analysing all the things that went wrong. But we were really happy and just talked about how awesome the whole experience was. We got home the next day. Even though the trip had only been 3 days it felt like a week.

In the end we won the tandem event by almost 2 minutes. Technically we could have ridden in the "handisports" category. We would have won that too. Our time was good enough to place highly in most of the categories apart from the professional one.

So what's so great about the Duo Normand? For me it was so different from races in the UK. The French who organise it put a lot of effort in and it's a spectacular event. There's also a special feeling around the race which is difficult to explain, you're just going to have to try it and find out for yourself!

I want to say a special thanks to Jill Dawson for organising all the logistics for the trip. Also thanks to Iain for asking me to ride with him in the first place, then being so patient whilst I figured it out.

Dave is going to be riding in the British championships later this month at Manchester. Louis Rolfe (MBE!) is riding too.

Club Road Race & Evening Time Trials.

Please can everyone find time to volunteer and help out at the club's events this year. New helpers are always needed to give some people a well earned rest. There are also opportunities to help at ECCA events too. Don't forget that other clubs marshal for us so we can enjoy their events. It can be good fun. You will see a lot of things you normally miss. Club road race is March 12th. Thankyou.