

# RADAR RIDE

## SURF'S UP!

### DOWN TALLA AT 45mph AND OTHER LUNATIC TALES FROM THE 2010 RADAR

**By Jamie Buchanan**

Last Sunday was EPIC!

The weather had not been too promising and during the week I had become obsessive about checking the isobar action on the Met office website. What can I say, they got it wrong! They said "12 gusting 30"; we said "is that the wind shaking the car".

When Mike and I arrived at Wanlockhead it looked like a scene from Quatermass, shrouded in mist with much vertical moisture! We parked up and wandered into the Inn and with me wearing just flip flops and shorts I was already cold. From the off the welcome was warm, relaxed and friendly, belying the prevailing conditions. After registering and chatting to Peter (organiser) and the guys my mind had virtually switched off to what was happening outside.

We re-parked the car and waited, and waited and then waited a bit more. Mike then had a brilliant idea. He thought we could drive round the course. We both agreed that we may have come across as a bit soft if we had done that, so that plan (however tempting) was a no-go. So with the car still shaking from the wind and with 15 minutes to zero hour we got out of the car and started getting wet. The bikes went up in record time. I forgot to close my brakes properly and only found out on the descent from the start (ooooops brown pants!). Then we were in the pen and away over the line without even a pause. This tactic is to be recommended as it reduced the standing around time in the wet to an acceptable time of precisely 'no seconds'.

The descent did nothing to help warm us up so it took till we got on the flat with a high cadence before we felt normal. Then there was a bit of off-roading (or that's what it seemed like). On this stretch of track my bottles kept ejecting themselves from my rear carriers so I got three extra warm up sprints from stopping to pick them up and then having to catch up with Mike.

The ascent of Dalveen was windy and that's about all I have to say about that. We got over the top and all of a sudden the wind was behind us. Yes, we were confused; the wind is a fickle mistress. On the descent I picked up the first of the abandoned timing chips I found (no 17) and handed it to the Marshalls at the Elvanfoot turn-off.

Back on to the road along the M74 and there was the wind again till we crossed the motorway and started climbing up Greenhillstairs. A nice bit of flat to downhill and there was the feed station. A quick top up and a couple of bits of ginger cake and we were ready to tackle the Devil's Beeftub. It was just a long grind (is there any other kind?) Unfortunately there was no scenery pay-off just a few inconsiderate drivers who overtook too close round the unsighted left hand bends (guess they must have been in a rush to get somewhere). Half way up the Beeftub and I had an opportunity to savour the ginger cake again (nice). This was clearly not a reflection on the chef and more to do with the heady mix of gels and High5 concentrate.

Another bit of respite and a chance to chat. I hadn't appreciated that we passed the source of the Tweed on the Recce so I had a natural history lesson in the rain.

I also hadn't appreciated that the route up the glen to Talla was so visible from the road and knowing I could see where it was just added to the apprehension. As soon as we had turned off it was time for a couple of gels and a comfort stop to get us up the hill. When we were level with the reservoir it was obvious we would have the benefit of the wind. This stayed with us up the climb to the top and added to the acceleration off the summit. It was, on reflection, the quickest ascent I have had of Talla in three goes! We all smiled for Susan when we saw her and made sure the pics would reflect how much fun we were having! Another rider had employed his own logistics and called his wife to meet him at the foot of the 'Wall of Talla' with dry clothes and food. Good thinking but there must be a rule about bringing enough for the rest of the class! All I can say is I would have had no chance of getting any such service from my good lady. I found my 2nd Timing Chip at the summit of Talla!

As has already been committed to history (and now probably RADAR Legend) the descent off Talla was FAST I hit just under 45mph and that was me taking it easy. The Recce pays off under these circumstances but it was good to see so many others get down without incident. On the fast push past Megget I looked at the water and I reckon the swell was 3 feet plus! The waves were breaking on the dam like I

remember them hitting the breakwater at Ardrossan harbour when there was a fresh westerly. They looked like you could surf them!

After the respite of the down there was the instant hurt of being hit head on by the wind on the drag past St Marys Loch to the Grey Mare's Tail it was head down all the way as I tunnelled through the wind to help Mike. We picked up and dropped three souls who just couldn't catch a wheel as we went past at 8mph (ouch). Off the top of the climb and just before the GMT we had to pedal downhill...just outrageous. The drag towards Moffat seemed to get easier as we approached the town and once we were through and climbing back up we were relatively unfettered by the wind. After a quick stop at the feed station to mix up the last of the High 5 we set off for the last part of the challenge.

It didn't matter what the wind and rain did at this point it was just head down and go - we got wet then we dried out! There was no talking. I perfected the gel manoeuvre without dropping cadence, Mike took a turn at the front and before long we were heading back towards Wanlockhead. I even had enough energy to sprint at the speed radar at Elvanfoot to see if I could trigger the frowny face. (No luck, it didn't even register!) As we had come along the road that morning we knew it had been re-surfaced and Mike's Honda Accord Type-R had struggled to get the power down due to the loose surface. We were the same - it just sapped a mile an hour out of the pace. As we got close we could see that visibility had improved at the top of the hill and the golf-ball came into view. More gels, more electrolytes and more thinking about getting up the hill. The last six just flew by and then we hit the hill. When I saw the inflatable with the START sign facing out above the timing mat I thought we were getting timed up the hill (just like the KOTM in the Etape Caledonia) great Idea I thought. But an even better idea was to get off the bike and see lots of nice smiling people ready to help.

It was the end of an epic challenge. The ride was one thing the weather was well..... you wouldn't chose to go out on a training run in that would you? There was a huge sense of relief and achievement. Got round in one piece and with enough energy to smile for Susan.