

FEATURE
London-
Edinburgh-
London



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› optional 'prologue' ride taking in the sights of central London early on the morning of the start from the north eastern suburb of Loughton. There's also a new turning point slightly nearer the centre of Edinburgh, and the grandeur of a crossing of the Humber Bridge.

PUSHING YOURSELF FURTHER

If you're tempted to try LEL this year (and there are still places available at time of writing), you need to start planning now. All you need do by way of training is get out and ride your bike. The knowledge that a big test is coming puts you out on the road when, without the deadline, you may be tempted to draw the curtains.

It's good to ride at least one 600-kilometre audax in the run-up to the event, to investigate how you react to little or no sleep. If you're lucky, some of your preparatory rides will take place in 'bad' weather. Anyone can do it when the sun is shining. Cold, rain, or howling headwinds are chances to test your reliability.

If LEL is already booked-up, or you're not sure you'd enjoy that kind of challenge, or you don't think there's enough time to get yourself seasoned for such an epic, why not sign up to volunteer at a control? You'll get to see the excitement, the drama, the comedy of the event from the inside and get a better idea of whether to aim for LEL 8 in July 2017?

The point of an abstract challenge like LEL is that, aside from being a lovely ride, its discipline takes your riding to a new level. Your entry represents a contract that can only be fulfilled by physical effort, mental fortitude and skill as a cycle-traveller, not just riding but managing your welfare throughout. In the words of Paul Fournel, author of *Need for the Bike*: 'When the decision to speed up or slow down doesn't belong to you any more, you become a different cyclist.' ☼



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In the photos

7 Near the Samye Ling temple (a control) at Eskdalemuir

8 On the road between Thorne and Coxwold, enjoying some sun

GOING THE DISTANCE

Fail to plan, plan to fail. A little preparation will go a long way.

TRAINING

The simplest programme is:-
1. Go for a bike ride.
2. Rest and recover.
3. Go for a longer ride.
4. Keep repeating steps 2 and 3.
5. Get plenty of rest and sleep in the fortnight before the big ride.

works for you. If you're in racing condition, you'll need to keep eating all the time. Comfortably upholstered riders can go further between feeds. Even if you plan to eat at all the controls, carry enough food to graze from in your pockets.

PLANNING

The secret of a successful and an enjoyable ride is preparation. Draft a schedule: when you plan to ride and where to sleep. You may need to be flexible – there are plenty of things you can't control – but if you've got a plan, you can change it.

ON THE ROAD

Resist the temptation to set off too fast, burning energy you may need later. If you find yourself struggling to stay in a group going faster than you can comfortably manage, let them go. Drink before you're thirsty. Eat before you're hungry. Take clothes off before you get hot. Put clothes on before you get cold. Monitor your condition closely and treat any developing problems – blisters, sores, sun-burn etc. – at the first sign.

BIKE

Use exactly the same bike and set-up on which you rode preparatory events. Then you'll be sure you can sit on it for extended periods. Get a full service, new tyres, brake pads and transmission before the ride, allowing time for a final shake-down of at least 50km. Some of the roads are rough and you may be riding them in the dark, so touring wheels – with at least 32 spokes – are preferred to super-light racing kit. It's worth carrying small non-standard spare parts; a gear hanger, for example. You can get mechanic service at most controls but they probably won't be able to replace anything too specific.

OFF THE ROAD

Approaching controls, make a mental list of what you need to do: mechanical checks, eating, washing, filling bottles, etc. Set a target departure time and try and stick to it. Early on, when riders are still concentrated in larger groups, it may be worth putting a bit of extra effort in during the last few kilometres before a control to creep up the food queue. If you arrive somewhere very busy, consider getting your card stamped, filling your pockets and bouncing back onto the road.

LIGHTING

A system based on a hub dynamo is the most reliable and requires least thinking. A compact battery rear light is a useful back-up. A head-torch is useful for reading directions or road signs, or nighttime punctures.

BAG-DROP

A bag-drop is included in the entry fee. This allows you to send a parcel ahead to a distant control and extract and replace gear. Picking up clean clothes and spare batteries, dropping dirty clothes and exhausted rechargeables means you can carry less.

LUGGAGE

Memorise where everything is stashed. Make sure you've got enough capacity to carry all the clothing you might take off if the weather turns hot.

SLEEPING

It's a mistake to stop too soon, while still too excited, and spend time trying to get to sleep in an unfamiliar and less-than-ideally comfortable environment. It's probably worse to keep going too long, getting slower and slower, when a few hours rest would get you back up to a more useful speed. Make sure you put on enough clothes to stay warm before you fall asleep. Ideally, time your sleeping to coincide with the short hours of darkness. You'll always ride faster in the daylight. Carry an alarm so you can nap without oversleeping.

CLOTHING

You need to carry enough to meet any conditions, including taking a roadside cat-nap. Being able to adjust your temperature without stopping is useful. A clean set of socks and underwear each day is good for morale.

EATING

Use your training to find out what kind of fuelling strategy