

End to End champions

CTC Tour Leader **Dominic Irvine** & **Charlie Mitchell** are the new LEJOG record holders. *Ruth Hargreaves reports*

On 7 May 2015, Charlie Mitchell and Dominic Irvine set a new tandem record for Land's End to John o'Groats, covering 842.6 miles in a (to be ratified) time of 45 hours 11 minutes and 2 seconds. They beat the previous record, which had stood for 49 years, by over five hours, spending just 30 minutes off the bike and averaging 18.7mph.

This was Dominic's third attempt at breaking the record and Charlie's first. 'My day job as a management development consultant is helping individuals and teams improve their performance in business through helping them work more effectively,' said Dominic. 'I wanted to see if I applied the lessons to myself, as a very ordinary cyclist, I could achieve an extraordinary performance.'

On a tandem, performance is as much about teamwork as individual strengths. Dominic's friend Charlie is a veterinary surgeon and keen time triallist. 'Having trained with Dominic over the years, and knowing his determination to succeed and willingness to learn from his previous experiences, I believed we could make a great team.'

At the peak of their training, they rode almost 50 hours a week, with the average being a shade over 20 hours. 'Some of the hardest rides were overnight in the depths of winter in sub-zero temperatures,' said Dominic. 'These were as important for helping us develop mental toughness as they were in developing physical fitness. Coping with the many problems we experienced – from broken chainsets to seven punctures in one

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ride – gave us the mental resilience to cope better during the attempt.'

Their tandem was a custom-made one from specialists JD Tandems. 'We had an Orbit Lightning made from Easton Ultralite tubing,' said Charlie. 'The angles were adjusted to get the right balance of comfort and aerodynamics.'

Unusually, the riders are the same size and have identical positions on the bike. This meant they were able to swap places throughout the record attempt, enabling the front person to stay low on time trial bars whilst the stoker could get a rest from such an aggressive position.

The weather for the attempt was mixed. They had a useful tailwind for the first part of the ride, then had to battle a headwind, sleet and heavy rain riding over the Cairngorms. 'Having to pedal to make progress going downhill onto the Cairngorm Plateau was the lowest point of the whole ride,' said Charlie. 'We'd worked so hard to get ahead of the schedule and we started to have serious doubts we could break the record, given the way conditions were developing.'

As well as getting the record, Dominic said his non-competitive cycling has benefited.



● Dominic (below right) and Charlie (below left) swapped places during the ride to rest from the TT position



He leads an annual European cycling trip, and this year qualified as a CTC Tour Leader. 'From the three record attempts, I have learnt so much about nutrition, pacing and training, and this has enabled me to better support riders on my trips.'

What next for them after the LEJOG record? 'It's the one question everyone wants to know,' said Dominic. 'I'm participating in an ultra-distance race in the Dolomites in September. And I want to develop my skills as a Tour Leader through CTC.' For Charlie, the focus of the rest of the season is on time trials. But from the obvious warmth of their friendship, I suspect we'll be seeing them both on a tandem sometime soon. ●

Ruth Hargreaves is from JD Tandems (tandems.co.uk), who supplied the Orbit tandem that Dominic and Charlie rode.

Photos: Joalze Dymond

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