

The BCTC

The British Cyclist Touring Competition was held throughout the country with local heats organised by the DA (district association as they were then). There were categories for men, women and juniors and the scores were collected at the end of the day and positions awarded to the highest overall, highest woman and highest junior. The highest scoring man and woman went on to the national final which was held in a different part of the country each year. Trophies were awarded to the highest places in each category at a national dinner organised by CTC HQ later in the year. I first rode the BCTC as a junior, the only difference was that you had to show your afternoon route to one of the organisers before you went so at least someone knew where you were

Mornings

The route was pre planned for the contestants and you were given a printed copy for you to follow. Contestants were set off at 5-minute intervals.

There were several checkpoints on the route, partly to check you were approaching and leaving in the right direction but at each checkpoint there was a challenge. You could be given a sheet with pictures of wildflowers or birds to name, road signs or OS map symbols to identify or general knowledge questions relative to cycling or the countryside. At some of the checkpoints you may have been asked to produce a first aid kit, tool kit or even a specific tool. There were also marshals who watched as you rode a section of rough stuff to assess your bike handling skills. You may also have been asked to assess how long it would take you to ride between two specific places, your watch was sealed in an envelope. Your start time and estimated end time was recorded and there was another marshal at the end point who recorded the actual time and checked your envelope was still sealed!!

The morning route ended back at the start point and you were allowed a short break for lunch.

Afternoons

You were not given a written route for the afternoon, instead you were given a list of four or five map grid references which you had to pass in order. In addition to the grid references was a list of instructions which you needed to help you plan the right route. The instructions were very specific and if they were all used correctly there was only one route possible but it was very hard planning it. It may have included things like pass one church with a tower, two churches with a steeple and a church with no tower or steeple. Pass under a railway line twice and over a different railway line once. Pass one PH (pub) on a minor road, a school on a B road, two public phone boxes and a small lake. Travel for no more than 1/2 mile along an A road in a northerly direction and only 1/4 mile in an easterly direction but no other A roads. Coniferous/deciduous woods, lines of pylons, contours, bridal ways and canals could also have featured in the list.

There were marshals along the way who were often hidden so you had no idea if you were on the right route or not, but they marked you on arriving from and leaving in the right direction.

Sometimes you saw another contestant going in a different direction and you wondered which one of you had it right.

I remember the BCTC as a really fun event, my mum and my sister competed too so there was some friendly family rivalry going on as well. My mum often got through to the national final by being best lady in the heats. In 1969 (the year before my dad died) both my parents were in the final, dad finishing in 8th place and mum in 6th place. Mum was also the highest placed female that year so came away with a trophy.

In 1987 I qualified for the national final and represented our DA, I didn't manage to bring a trophy home, it was a bit more seriously competitive than the heats, but I enjoyed the experience anyway. I understand the first ever BCTC was won by Harry Tope from the Coventry and Warwickshire DA

