

Ray Hudson 1927 - 2004

Ray had been a member of the CTC since 1948. His was the one face you could almost guarantee to see at Starley House on a Sunday morning. That's why the Attendance Trophy was an almost permanent fixture on his sideboard. Jim Willis was among the first to meet him when in 1951 a group of them rode down to the Festival of Britain in London. They stopped at Towcester for a cup of tea and then on to St Albans where the first words Ray spoke to Jim was 'I know a good transport café here'. Even then he knew the true meaning of cycling and of the letters CTC, which as we all know, stands for coffee, tea and cakes. Ray became a great friend to Jim and Janet and was best man at their wedding in 1959.

Amongst other early friends were John and Helen Crighton. When they moved back to Scotland in the sixties Ray would sometimes drive up to see them in his famous Renault 16, which has been sitting unused in his garage for the last 20 years. Or sometimes he would get on his bike and cycle up to see them. One of his last visits was to their daughters wedding a few years ago. On the day after the wedding there was a family party. After a while John realised that Ray was missing. He wasn't resting in his room, he wasn't out playing cricket with the children, he hadn't gone to say hello to the horses. However, on checking the outhouse it was discovered that a mountain bike had also gone missing. It was Sunday, Ray had taken himself off for a ride. I know how much Ray enjoyed his trips to Scotland and how much he was looking forward to the next one.

In the early years Gordon and Ray toured extensively together. Gordon says that Ray never wanted to get involved in the organisation of the trip, you told him where he was going and he went. I think a few of us recognise that trait. He describes them as not so much holidays as experiences. They were sunburnt in Portugal, frozen in Norway, soaked in Spain and apparently faced gunmen in Serbia and Cyprus. You'll have to ask Gordon for the details.

Gordon and Ray held the club together for many years throughout the seventies, often with Tom being the only riders out on a Sunday. If it wasn't for their dedication the club could well have folded. In 1991 Ray was awarded the CTC Certificate of Merit. This isn't an award for 'time served'. Ray was only the eighth member of the Coventry Section to receive the award since the Section's formation in 1921. The award was for services above and beyond the call of duty. I'm sure we can all agree that it was well deserved.

A surprising number of us seem to have memories of Ray turning up at unexpected locations. There was Tony Benn's trip to Youlsgreave Youth Hostel, of Gentlemen's Underwear fame. Ray hadn't come with us on that trip, but at 9 o'clock in the morning he turned up at the hostel having set out from Coventry in the early hours of the morning with just a banana to sustain him. A swift cup of tea and he was ready to turn round and cycle back home again. Or the Easter trip to Corris. Roger arrived by car on the Saturday afternoon and was strolling down to the village when he bumped into Ray, wheeling his bike towards the hostel. I think he'd woken up early in the morning and on a whim decided to join us. The hostel was full, but this didn't seem to worry Ray, who was happy to settle himself down with a cup of tea and leave Roger with the warden to phone round the local B&Bs to try to organise some accommodation. Eventually a group from Birmingham arrived minus one of their members and with his usual luck Ray got his bed for the night. Jim and Janet can confirm that he'd done this on a number of occasions in the past.

This was in the days before mobile phones, so when in 1982, David Hearn set out in a group of six to ride 240 miles in 24 hours, he had no idea that Ray had decided to offer encouragement, and probably Mars bars, by meeting the group somewhere near Gloucester. Unfortunately on this occasion he failed to find the group and it was only the following weekend that David found out about Ray's fruitless journey around the Gloucestershire lanes.

Ray was a keen rough stuffer in earlier years, although he had lost his enthusiasm by the time I met him. I remember one trip in Wales where Bob Tinley was, as usual, leading us astray along a line of imagination on the map. Ray was heard to remark 'I don't think this is the A road to Ffestiniog'. If the track was very rough his language could get more colourful.. But, despite the grumbles, he would always ride with us, he hated to miss out on anything, he wanted to be with his friends and he appreciated the importance of supporting the club in all its activities. On a couple of wet Geoff Collins rides he even turned up in his Wellington boots, although he never managed to work out how to attach the cleats.

Ray was an exceptionally strong rider with a grace and style on the bike which made it all look really easy. But when Lew asked him for techniques for improving his hill climbing Ray said 'you need to learn how to suffer'. He was keen on Lance Armstrong's quote 'Its not about the bike'. That was certainly true with Ray, although he'd hate to hear us criticise his bikes. Bob Tinley once saw him try to change gear climbing Rosedale Chimney. He couldn't understand why everyone else had slowed down, probably something to do with the one in three gradient. As he moved the lever forward on the front changer a huge loop of rusty cable swung out from under the down tube. Nothing else moved and probably hadn't for the previous ten years. He looked at it and said 'these things never work when you need them,' huffed twice and just pushed a bit harder on the pedals and sailed up the hill.

But it wasn't his style to race out to the front. He was most happy sitting at the back of the group. This was especially true when we had newer or less experienced riders in our midst. Barbara and others appreciated his quiet encouragement, he would set a reasonable pace, tell a few corny jokes, sing some little ditties and, on one Arden Ride provide a helping hand on the back to push her up the hill. Barbara wasn't the only one to have had a push from Ray. Keith Robert's children were helped in this way and even Dave Hearn once needed a push to help him get from Wellesbourne to Husband's Bosworth.

On one trip to Majorca Ray managed to break his finger on the first night when he slipped on the hotel floor. I'm not sure of the details, but I believe that a bottle of Spanish brandy was involved. Most of us would have been happy to accept a week sitting on the beach, but not Ray, he wasn't prepared to miss out on his cycling. He set out to prove that he could still beat us up the hills even with effectively 'one hand tied behind his back'.

Off the bike Ray loved to listen to music, he really enjoyed a number of concerts where Paul Godman was playing or conducting. But his favourite music was jazz and once the rhythm started and his feet began to tap it was difficult to keep him off the dance floor, as the Bobs can testify from a trip to Poland. Being a true cyclist he also enjoyed barn dancing. Unfortunately his deafness sometimes meant he couldn't follow all the calls, although he tried his best. I remember one square dance where after working his way round the other dancers he was always delivered back to me facing the wrong way.

Ray was a member of the Friday Night Diners Club, a group of us who take turns to cook on a Friday evening if there's nothing else going on. It took Ray a little while, and I'm afraid some bullying by myself, before he realised that he had to take his turn at cooking, as well as eating and drinking. As Ray hadn't entertained much before his first shopping list included plates, table mats and cutlery as well as the food. But it was worth it, we all enjoyed his culinary efforts, my particular favourite being his chicken curry.

The club is going to miss Ray. We are all going to miss Ray. We should remember that he died doing what he loved best, looking forward to the ride to Leominster, a weekend of touring through the Herefordshire lanes, a bit of rough stuff to grumble at, Lew's home grown rhubarb and custard for tea, and, more immediately, a hot chocolate and a slice of fruit cake at the Heron's Nest.

And we have to get used to the fact that, when we stand outside the pub after enjoying our Sunday roast and somebody asks, 'Who are we waiting for?' it's not Ray, he's not still in the pub, faffing around as usual.



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