

# Winning the Cycling Ireland eRacing D-Cat League

...or...

## A Septic Tank, a broken leg, and a global pandemic – my journey to (D) League Champion

OK, so the broken leg wasn't actually *mine*, but I'll explain all that shortly.

I've always dreaded the thoughts of indoor cycling – just couldn't take to it! I would avoid it like the plague, and as it happens, I pretty much *could* avoid it...

In my job as a Healthcare Worker, shift patterns mean I have every other day off duty, as opposed to being in work all day long, all week long, and only having the relatively few daylight evenings, and those precious two short days each weekend to choose from. This sort of flexibility meant I've always had the luxury of being able to get out on my bike, all year round – not have to worry about an icy morning, or rainy/windy day, because I can get out later in the day, or just get out the next day if I wasn't in work.

Not **having to** rely on the Turbo Trainer meant I really only had to use it in extreme circumstances, such as the infamous 'Beast From The East' for example. Even then, I struggled to haul myself out to the shed to use it, while watching video footage of Sportives from my bike cameras that I gathered over the past few years to alleviate the boredom.

Anyways...the broken leg and septic tank connection came into our lives one dark night last September – my husband burst into the house having had the awful experience of falling into...well...y'know....yuck! Some cracked ribs and a leg fracture meant he was off the bike for a while and so we invested in a good 'Smart Trainer' to help with the whole rehab process. No sooner had the doctor said 'ok', he was pedalling away in the shed every day.

### What on earth is 'swift'?

So he 'mansplains' the whole process, and how he was using the different events to get fitness back again, without any risk of a mishap while his poor old bones were healing. To be honest I hadn't heard of Zwift, as I never had any need to know of it. I thought to myself, this might be fun...but I'd still rather be actually outside on the roads.

Turns out, it wasn't exactly the best winter we've ever had – and then along came the whole Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown – followed very quickly by the complete sell-out of every Smart Trainer, everywhere! "Bet you're glad I broke me leg now, eh?" said my husband!

So through the winter, when the weather was either too wet or too windy, I was taking part in some of different Social Events on Zwift. Absolutely struggling to stay in contact with the 'beacon' group on even the more leisurely events, and having to rely on the very kind 'sweepers' to help me round to the finish from time to time. As I'm burning up in the shed

on a freezing cold day outside, I'm thinking.... "how is this only 1.3 to 1.5 watts per kilo? I'm flat out here!!" I'm guessing the organiser weighs a lot more than I did, so I really had to dig in to keep up. But, as time went on...I got stronger and stronger, and eventually found some of the D social-spins a little on the easy side. Now I was looking for spins up in the 2W/KG range. Then out then on the roads before lockdown, my average speeds were increasing too - a sure sign I'm improving.

## **Covid-19 and eRacing – who would have thought?**

I'm classed as a Vulnerable Healthcare Worker thanks to some underlying health conditions, so I was quarantined (not going to use that silly term from Leo) at home since mid March. Covid-19 for me is potentially life-threatening – literally deadly serious.

Living in quite a remote rural location, the 2km, 20min limit to outdoor exercise meant that apart from walks up and down the bohereen here, I had no bike options really. Not being able to go to work meant I was a lot less physically active each day, so then thankfully I had the Smart Trainer to use so that I could get some decent exercise sessions!

Not that either of us race anymore, but my husband was doing the main CIZL races every Saturday morning – they were a bit too difficult for me (and we've only one Trainer), so when I saw there was a Women's League starting every Wednesday evening...well...I set my sights on that!!

I have to say that it was a great initiative from Cycling Ireland to have our own CI-branded Leagues – and then to have a women's-specific one too was just fantastic!

It was so cool to see the other Irish Women in the higher categories in action. The speed and power they were pushing out was incredible. I sometimes felt like I was standing still as the A's and B's whizzed past after the start! You can tell they are serious athletes dedicated to their sport, and must be training so hard.

I recognised *some* of the names such as Kiera in the B group, a fantastic athlete who helped and encouraged a whole group of us in a sportive while battling a cruel headwind, but most of the names I didn't actually know - my guess is that they would probably all race regularly, and so, to have your season torn from under you after a tough winter of hard training must have been gut-wrenching for them.

To have the CIWZL races, helped them to really keep sharp, and keep their fitness up, and have something to aim for while we're all in the middle of this awful pandemic. Racing against their familiar competitors, and against women from all around the world too!

Even for myself, just in the D-Category, it really helped me keep focused in these difficult times. I couldn't wait each week to see what the next course would be like... all over zwiftpower's website, and checking out the route profiles, and where the climbs were, and how difficult they were – who was taking part, what were they like as opponents.... there's someone from Canada, or there's someone from the USA... and will Maria or Claire be here this week... all this was very new and exciting to me!

And now, as we go forward... as restrictions begin to ease, and people begin to dare-to-dream of returning to racing (or sportives in my case) sometime soon, we still have weekly eRaces available to us. Hopefully through the next winter, and beyond, we might see more of these – I have to say that fitness-wise I'm in better condition now, than in previous years! Even though we didn't get our little trip over to Spain in March for some lovely warm-n-dry hilly miles – I'm pretty sure the CI eRacing has got me here.

Thanks to everyone in Cycling Ireland involved in setting this series up. I know it can't have been too easy given the conditions we were all under, and Zwift must have been inundated with similar requests all of a sudden from all over the world.

Happy Cycling everyone!

- Sandra