

The ramblings of a Bike for Life programme organiser:

So it's now week 3 of our 7 week plan. Things are settling down nicely so much so that I was able to spend some time at the weekend helping out at the excellent multi stage 3 day race, The tour of Omagh. Having spent the last few weeks in the excellent company of beginner cyclists I was once again immersed into the world of cycle racing. It struck me just how different but at the same time how there were so many similarities between the levels in the sport.

The differences were plain to see, the humm of carbon wheels and frames rather than aluminium, the click of cleats, the lack of crunching gears, not a straight bar in sight. The riders dressed head to toe in their latest club jerseys and shorts rather than the mishmash of bargain clothing on show at our beginner sessions. And yet for all the professionalism and shear expense that was on show there was the same banter, the same willingness to support each other despite the racing and the desire to be out there pushing themselves to the limit. From the window of the Commissaire's car I witnessed on multiple occasions different riders from different clubs, encourage each other on, to stay with the others, to push that bit harder, to make it over that hill. That same support is there on every group session that we have in our beginner programme.

At the end of race presentations, the race director spoke of how it was so important to encourage cycling at all levels and it suddenly struck me that if one of our beginners had arrived to the start of the Omagh race they might well have felt apprehensive and out of place.

I have been pondering over the last few weeks why our event has been so popular, now 130 participants, rather more than the 16 I had initially planned for and it struck me that there are a lot of cyclists out there doing 5 -15 mile runs on their own but for some reason they seem to be apprehensive about approaching a club. Perhaps their perception of a cycling club is that you need to be a racer, spend £5k on equipment and live for cycling. Maybe they saw our programme as an approachable way to take part in group.

Of course any cyclist who is a member of a good club will know that usually there are at least twice the amount of members who are Leisure cyclists rather than racers and that club cyclists come in all shapes, sizes and ages. Our programme is being delivered by excellent volunteers from 2 of our local clubs and because of this the participants are able to see that maybe club cycling could be for them. Thus their initial perceptions are being overcome.

For cyclists who are out there on their club runs or training rides, don't discount the straight bars on a riders bike or the slightly knobbly tyres or the slippers on their feet as you fly past them! Remember we all had to start somewhere. Help to break down those perceptions and encourage new beginners.

For all of our beginner cyclists, take the plunge. Make that first step towards the clubs. You will be surprised how welcome you will be made and who knows where it might lead? Perhaps a yellow jersey in Paris in the future. We are all the same at heart, we love cycling in all its forms and it all has to start with those first positive experiences.

*Beginners – on the road*



*A4 racers in the Tour of Omagh*



*The same love of cycling just different jerseys and more expensive bikes!*

A big thank you to our excellent leaders from Apollo CC and Trail Demons CC. You are all helping to break down the barriers and spread the word of cycling!

But enough of the philosophy, it's time to just get out there and enjoy riding your bike!