

PBP '87 : 2597 starters : cool, showers, strong westerly wind :

Fliiss started at 04:00 and did a 70 hr ride

Paris-Brest-Paris 1987 on Three Wheels



Fliiss Beard

I've wanted to ride the PBP ever since Sheila returned full of enthusiasm in '83. At that time I thought anyone who could ride 100 miles without stopping was super-human. I just managed to qualify for the '87 event by riding the wettest, windiest Windsor-Chester imaginable and sent in the PBP entry form choosing the 04:00 start as I do need sleep every night.

We took our caravan over with Jim and Mary Outram and camped on the official Audax Club Parisien site - which we eventually found with the aid of a police escort!

The bike check was from 13.30 to 17.30 on the Sunday and my time was 14.30. It was super to see everyone, new and familiar faces. Bry Ferguson gave my trike a very thorough check - I had dynamo and battery lights. After collecting brevet card, super-randonneur medal, route sheet, PBP bottle, and hat, and making sure we knew exactly where the start was, we went back to the campsite for evening meal and bed at 21.30.

At 23.00, I woke with rain bouncing on the caravan roof. I ran out and fetched my saddlebag off the trike. It looked like another wet start and at 02.00 it was raining still. Dave took me up to the start in the car and at 03.15 it stopped, thank goodness.

I've never seen so many cyclists, 1500 set off at 04.00. Tandems, tandem trikes, and trikes set off first, after the police escort. The tandems soon dropped me and I rode alone for 11km before the first bike bunch caught up then hung on but it was nerve racking racing through the lanes out of Paris in the dark.

Belleme (162km) is the first control. Talk about a 100 mile road race! Cars had a job to get past in either direction. I arrived after 6 hours as the main bunch was leaving and stopped 20 minutes for a big breakfast - coffee and croissant - then continued to Villaines (233km) where I met Wally Wright. We chatted over omelettes and cakes and set off together.

I couldn't keep with him and soon discovered why, when he disappeared over the hill - two broken spokes, the wheel wouldn't go round. An American came to my rescue, releasing the brakes to get me to the next control.

Alone again, the wind quite strong, three French men caught me and we arrived at Fougeres in the late afternoon (323km). John Brooking informed me that there was a mechanic and he got my wheel sorted out while I had a good meal - 5 francs for 2 spokes, very good I thought.

Only 50km to the next control, Tinteniac, and this is one of the flattest parts of the ride. It was still windy so I elected to ride alone only 'cos I couldn't keep with the groups I passed. I arrived at 21.30, just as it was getting dark. This was the worst control, not much food, so I only stopped 15 minutes and set off with some Americans including

the Mother & Daughter 24 Hour Champions on tandem.

This night leg seemed to go on forever. I was doing my usual falling asleep (possible on trike) so promised myself a bed at Loudeac - if ever I got there! I did. At 02.00 and booked a bed and an 05.00 call. I slept well and after a good wash met Wally Wright again. After breakfast I felt OK 'apart from the legs. A massage might help - it did, and I set off at 05.30 feeling much better.

Out of Loudeac I took the wrong turning, missing the arrow in the dark, but only went 3km off course. I didn't see another rider on this leg (75km) but it was a lovely morning and the wind wasn't strong at this stage. Arrived at Carhaix (521km) at 09.00 and, after two coffees and gateaux, set off on the last leg to Brest 80km away.

The wind was increasing and my massage was wearing off, it seemed to be uphill all the way - the worst being the Roc Trevezel, it was so steep and exposed I could have crawled faster. 40km from Brest I caught a Frenchman and we rode

together into Brest. He said his name was Rattae, what he didn't say was how many mountains there were going into Brest. Up, up, up, I thought we would never arrive. But we did, at 13.30 to a super chicken meal. I did enjoy it but couldn't rest - I must use the back wind.

We left Brest at 14.30. Rattae wanted to stop for provisions after 20km so I said 'bye' and continued with the wind and a group of French that had caught me. It was lovely riding out of Brest seeing familiar faces from the 10.00 start riding in.

Back to Roc Trevezel (660km) the control car passed us and informed us that the leader of the 16.00 start was coming. He had made 12 hours on me in 36! He finished in 44 hours - an American professional rider.

Carhaix (690km) at 17.00. Bernard Mawson was there with the Audax UK support car so I got new batteries and clean clothes. Also I saw Noel with the ACP control car. I had a quick snack and continued with my French friends. They were sleeping at Loudeac and I wanted to do one more leg so we parted company there.

I was pleased to meet Mark my Irish friend from the Windsor-Chester. He said I could ride the night leg with him. It was a really clear night, not cold, and still some back wind.

Tinteneac at 02.00, shattered. We booked beds which included a shower, so I had one before I fell into bed - no towel so I used my T-shirt, should I throw it away? No, it may come in handy!

I set off, alone again, feeling the need to get going slowly. The thought of another



What was the biggest surprise you had on PBP?

Most of the American riders report that they were surprised by the hills - the continuous number of short, tough hills. Riders were also surprised by the cold, the fog, the rain, and the generally miserable conditions in '87, and the cold and the heavy rains in '83.

Zabielski: "Truck and bus drivers knew the route and got me back on it when I strayed for a block or two. Also, the French riders drank beer at the controls.

The French Red Cross didn't have cobsnuts, but they did give good leg massages." Reensstra: "The French cheering for me as I rode by little towns at 11 PM or later." Brehler: "Having to start up front because of being a tandem." Voge "Being able to do a five hour century due to such a large group, and always having someone to ride with."

Dobies: "Comparing bikes: Americans - new, expensive, state of the art; French - old parts from all over." Wolf: "That it was actually fun to climb hills in the dark - you shift when you need to, not when you think you should" Bertrand: "That I'd forgotten my tights." Several Americans were surprised that each control has its individual closing time; that it is not just the Paris control at ninety hours that must be met. This illustrates how not all Americans had their minds focused on the event, for the closing times were mentioned in the IR newsletter, were discussed at the group meeting at the FIAPAD, and they were very clearly noted on each randonneur's route card. Still, some riders rode slowly, or slept the first night, and were defeated by paying insufficient attention to the rules.

Another rider mentions being surprised at how long everything took off the bike: checking through the controls, obtaining food, and just getting organized. Another unexpected event was being escorted through towns by gendarmes on motorcycles.

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Just Another Control

Francis Cooke

Was your actual time faster or slower than your predicted time?

Most riders had a slower overall time than they had expected. Many are happy enough to complete the event, and had no initial target finishing time. It's probably not useful to do too much predicting. Several riders figured twenty minutes or so per control, but usually didn't get out in less than an hour.

Carhaix on the return leg was the control I had decided on for my first sleep - it was one control too far really. In '83 and later, in '91, I had more success sleeping at Brest, but this was '87, we had had a really gruelling outwards 600 into the wind and had turned round immediately for fear of it dropping. By midnight when we reached Carhaix, I had gone through the stage where I really wanted to sleep and started to come out the other side.



massage at Fougères was the only thing that kept me going. Here, after coffee and croissant, the masseuse was really good - she gave my knees the full treatment.

Feeling much better, and glad to speak English, I set out from here with Mark and Ron Sant. This leg was 90km so we thought we'd have a half way stop and found a superb cake shop which provided shelter from the first storm. Mark and I set off, not realising Ron wasn't with us, and continued into the rain that got heavier so by Villaines we were WET and cold (980km, 12.00).

I went to the loo and put on my T-shirt-cum-towel, all the dirty clothes from the day before, but was still cold. We reassembled in the canteen, Mark, Ron, and myself, trying to cheer ourselves up. I had a big meal and we set off, plastic bags in our shoes and newspaper under our waterproofs.

It stopped raining but we were all feeling rough and took it steady at first. The sun came out and we started to get going but the meal objected and I was sick every 5km until we reached Belleme (1052km). It was wonderful to arrive here. I went and had a good wash and a massage but didn't want much food. Mark had a massage and he was saddle sore - they saw to that as well!

Whether it was that we only had 100km to go, or the massage, we made great time from here to Nogent (1137km). The heavens opened as we walked in and the storm lasted half an hour - just long enough for a meal and MASSAGE!

80km to go, we set off in a big bunch of 30 and the pace was brisk. I started to recognise places and was sure we were nearly there when I saw a sign 'Paris 45km'. It was the longest part of the ride. We arrived at the finish at 02.00 with a police escort. I couldn't believe I had arrived in 70 hours with no saddle sores, blisters, or other ailments, just sore knees. I would recommend anyone who enjoys distance cycling to try the next PBP in 1991. I hope to be there.

I had a light snack and, while Sheila went off to enjoy the privilege of a couple of hours' sleep in a support car, sank a second bottle of beer to induce drowsiness.

Gaining entrance to the dormitory was a farce. First, money had to change hands before the bouncer on the door would let me pass, then I discovered the 'dortoir' was in the attic of a tall building, several storeys high. The stairs were covered in debris and spilt liquids so I kept my shoes on, but after 600km into the wind plus another 80 and two bottles of beer the last thing I needed was stairs. Eventually I crawled into the attic which contained 100 'dead bodies' and where 'bed' consisted of a sheet of cardboard on the floor. I was pretty disgusted with the whole arrangement which was not at all sleep-inducing, and wanted my money back.

Most of the bodies were wrapped in space blanket, and were either shivering or shuffling restlessly. I think some of them were still pedalling. The din was appalling, and totally drowned out the few peaceful snorers. I was now wide awake, and rapidly getting violent. Space blankets are definitely extremely antisocial in dormitories, so please PLEASE don't use one on PBP, unless you're planning on sleeping in ditches.

Did I say wide awake? As I stood up I nearly passed out, and stumbled, brushing the outside of my thigh against a sharp splinter of wood. The skin, tight as a drum after 600km into the wind then 80 more, split like an unpricked sausage. The wound wasn't deep, but it was long and messy. Needless to say, I couldn't feel a thing, my body had far more serious pains at the time, to do with 600km into the wind then 80 more.

Dripping blood (mingling with the other spilt liquids), I lurched back down the stairs, killed the startled doorman with a look, and stumbled across to the Red Cross tent. Walking wounded were thin on the ground, and they were pathetically pleased to see me. A pleasant half-hour later, with my jangled nerves considerably soothed and an impressively bandaged leg, I was ready to face my bike again.

I limped over to the food hall for another light midnight feast. Now nearly two hours had passed, doesn't time fly when you're having fun, Sheila turned up looking no better for her rest, and we were soon back on the road, wind behind, enjoying one of the best PBP games, chasing down distant red lights along the inky N164.