



## Another LEL tale - Dave Minter

I've been living in London for several years now and Audax UK pivots around the big brevets, PBP, LEL and so on. LEL17 was another opportunity to meet up with old friends and to make new ones. I like long brevets and I'd rolled around LEL05 and LEL13 without too many dramas, so in went my entry and bang went my plans of keeping fit over the British winter.

I broke my pelvis during a 300 BRM in Thailand while flying back from visiting my folks in Oz in August 2016. Three weeks in traction in a Bangkok hospital and lots more time on my back and eventually on crutches as a result. Eventually allowed back onto my bike at Christmas, there began a long slow recovery process with plenty of boring physio.

I didn't manage to complete a 100km ride until March and my first utterly flat 200 brevet was at Easter. Work, life and other things got in the way of many plans (so no Bryan Chapman 600 through Wales) but I squeezed in a 200 brevet in Pune, India in May. "It ain't half hot" for this England-adapted bloke but I got round the overnight brevet in better shape than I expected.

After some British 200s and 300s, Judith and I lined up for the Gien-Le Galibier 600 UAF at the end of June. The ride itself went pretty well but a combination of heat and my poor climbing meant my ascent of the Galibier was excruciatingly prolonged. I drank five bidons of water in 17km between Valloire and the summit! Despite that, the 1000 UAF brevet in the Loire Valley a fortnight later was fine and, together with a couple more British 200s, finally I felt ready for LEL.

Starting at 1pm Sunday, my plan was simple. Ride 244km to Louth, shower, sleep, fresh clothes from the drop bag. 316km to Brampton, ditto. 325km to Edinburgh and back to Brampton. 312km to Louth, then 264km to the Loughton finish, an evening train across London and sleep in my own bed Thursday night. As with most battle plans, it didn't survive contact with the enemy.

Sunday went fairly well with tail/crosswinds speeding us through the Essex lumps and across the fens. Arriving at Louth, there was a 45 minute queue for food (words cannot adequately describe my annoyance) and we early arrivals were turfed out of our beds at 03:00 with basically no food for breakfast. More than a little grumpy, after a shower I wandered onto the road to the next control Pocklington around dawn. They were being swamped by hungry cyclists recovering their calorific deficit.

After that were annoying hills, pretty views but lots of the buggers; gradually skimming away the hours I'd salted away yesterday. My digestion was a little upset at my lack of sleep and that took the edge of my legs and enthusiasm for the next few days. I kept finding excuses to stop, trying to settle my stomach. Riding over the

Humber Bridge was pretty memorable in the morning sunshine, though the roads each side were a bit uninspiring.

I think it was before Thirsk where I noticed my front mudguard rattling and it turned out the mudguard was progressively cracking. LEL roads are rough! I'd broken my Moulton's mudguards during the last LEL in Scotland, mere hours before heavy rains set in - grim riding ensued! I knew that heavy rain was on the cards for Wednesday and Thursday, so I spent a considerable time at the control strengthening my mudguard. I'll just leave you with the thought that it is quite difficult to drill out a rivet when you don't have a drill. Unfortunately my sleep time just kept leaking away.

By Barnard Castle, I knew I was done for Monday. With the drag over Yad Moss and lots of smaller climbs to come, I wasn't going to make the 86km to Brampton before needing sleep. Food, some sleep and some more time disappeared before I rolled out onto damp roads at 12:30am to climb Yad Moss. More cross/headwind than anything else, it was never more than damp-ish and being adapted to English weather, I didn't need to dress up like Nanook of the North, unlike the Indian, Thai and other hot-climate LEL riders trudging northwards. Skittering down Alston's cobbled main street, I completely missed the AUK food/ sleep stop and rolled on towards Brampton for a shower and clean clothes. I was hopeful of getting back on schedule with a long day but more hills (not unexpected), heavy rain showers and an uncooperative stomach meant I didn't get to Edinburgh till late in the afternoon. Part of the fun of these long brevets is the socialising and I was doing a fair bit of chatting over meals and suchlike. The best part of the whole route was the road between Edinburgh and Innerleithen through the golf course. The sun, clouds and spectacular view were well worth the headwind and climbing.

By Eskdalemuir, I'd had enough, as had seemingly half the field. The small village hall was rammed with sweaty bodies. Like me, after a hot meal, many just crashed out on the floor. Other headed out into the cool of the night but I stayed inside until just before Wednesday's dawn. Rain started almost straight away, of course.

I'd settled into the event by then. There was the normal tiredness from several days on the road but I kept an eye on the time limits through the ride, making sure I was never too close to timing out. Some gunge had worked its way into the rear derailleur cable a day or two before, which meant I was inclined to treat my bike as a three speed but I was riding slower as the hills got nastier. A flat tyre before Alston involved a bit of swearing and it seemed that I needed to visit the toilet every control at least. I rewarded my labours to that point with a decent coffee and some hot food in Alston.

Just over Yad Moss and the steady drizzle became something biblical - I got my waterproof on with seconds to spare. It didn't let up till after I wrapped myself around a hot meal at Barnard Castle. I managed to get a massage just as I was about to roll out the door, trying to to correct a problem I'd never experienced before. My lower

back was pins and needles whenever I got onto the drops. Not ideal in a headwind. Perhaps it was the combination of brutally steep climbs, steady wet headwind, lesser fitness than hoped and my reduced joint movement from my broken pelvis but I was going to finish regardless. It was just going to be a bit more difficult than planned.

By Pocklington, I wasn't interested in the near-100km leg to Louth and my drop bag. Sleep and a couple of good meals finally reset my body after the hassles of the first night. I lined up with a good bunch to plough through the flatland headwinds together but discovered a flat tyre that must have occurred while I was inside for 10 minutes waiting for the group to collectively remove finger. It turns out that those rough LEL road surfaces had worn my rear tyre down to canvas. A swap with the folding tyre in my seat bag and I was chasing them through the dawn light. Not too far down the road, I was chatting with a couple of old friends and teaching a strong newbie how to roll turns in a headwind. The day was going pretty well. It didn't last, it never does but that is ok too. The legs went on strike and an afternoon nap on the front bench of a village butcher meant I was immortalised on their Facebook page, apparently. They sold some bloody good food though and were very enthusiastic about the event and the riders coming through. Some sharp storms and headwinds after that but the miles kept ticking over.

I'd realised that I'd be finishing on Friday morning a day or two before. It was just a question whether I'd be sleeping Thursday night. I was keeping an eye on an Indian rider who'd never climbed a hill out of the saddle before (literally!). Indian brevets tend to be along highways on the plains. The Indians had been taking photos of Scottish and English roads to show relatives back home how bad the surfaces were! At the same time, another friend managed to mess up his rear derailleur, so some more time in the rain and darkness to sort that out. All that, and the ever-present time limit, meant that Andy and I would be riding straight through to the finish. No dramas to report; we just toddled our way gently through the night and early morning to hand over our cards and pick up our rather nice LEL medals.

I was glad the rush hour only started in earnest after we finished. Speeding English drivers on narrow lanes with poor visibility is no fun for anybody. Too much time spent swapping war stories and collecting drop bags for the trip home. Shades of LEL13, some sod had taken my shoes in place of his own, again! A pair of give-away hotel flipflops and I could gingerly pedal off to get my train home. As half-expected, I slept through my connecting stations, taking a couple of hours longer to get home than planned. No matter, home, shower and bed, job done!

Three LELs is probably enough for me. It is probably time to let another newbie have a go, given the frantic demand for places on the start line. There are plenty of other 1200s that I haven't ridden yet and I think volunteering at LEL would be fun too.