



If you find yourself riding alongside **Dan Campbell**, a recent convert to Audax events, don't expect a long conversation. He's a self-confessed cycling hermit who loves to ride alone... preferably at night. Here, the solitary cyclist describes his impressions of the Audax universe after his first full year in the community...

Dan Solo... far, far away in a galaxy of his own

Lake Vyrnwy Dam

At the start of 2017 I was getting bored with the same old rides, so I searched around for new cycle routes and I came across blog after blog about Audax rides. This led me to the current Audax website and I completed a couple of John Hamilton's 200km permanent routes around Shropshire and Wales over the summer.

This was my first experience of Audaxing and I loved the peace and quiet of solo, overnight cycling. John was fantastic. He was always open to questions, and helped me to understand what I needed to provide to have my ride validated. At this stage I did not really understand the full implications of having my ride validated. I naively assumed it was someone checking to make sure I did the ride.

To be honest I was more interested in riding the route than having the ride validated and for the few pounds it cost, it was excellent value for money. However, it made me realise how the ride organisers are ambassadors for the Audax community and John was excellent at fulfilling that role.

MY FIRST CALENDAR AUDAX

I decided that I wanted to achieve some tangible outcomes in 2018 so I signed up for some calendar events. Having learnt from my permanent route experience, any ride which I opted to undertake needed to have a GPS track on a website like RideWithGPS. I also wanted something close to home in Staffordshire as I didn't really know what to expect. I opted for the Moneyash calendar event through Peak Audax.

To be honest this was a bit of a last-minute decision as I was a little hesitant turning up to my first calendar event on my own. It was the thought that I would not be fast enough, rather than having to ride on my own.

For those who have not met me, I am the very, very fat lad at the back or, in Audaxing terms, a full value rider. However, Chris Keeling-Roberts, the organiser, was excellent and the reward of a free sandwich at the finish line clinched the deal.

Having caved, kayaked and mountaineered across Europe in my

younger days, I have experienced many epic and challenging situations and I can wholeheartedly say that this ride is up there in my top five rides. It was a mix of caving (dirty), mountaineering (hilly) and kayaking (rainy most of the day). I was in heaven and I wanted more.

However, an error I made was missing the pre-ride briefing as I popped the toilet. So far this year I have only managed to listen to one pre-ride briefing... to quote my school reports, I "must try harder". I also quickly realised that it was in my own interests to take photos of the receipts and controls because water, wind and paper do not mix.

I want to highlight some observations: I'm not a talker. I suspect that I am unique from the point of view that I try to ride most of my permanent routes overnight, due to work and family commitments. It also means that I do most of my riding alone, except for calendar events, but even then, I tend to cycle alone as I like the peace and quiet of the road.

When I rode the Three Coasts



St Christopher's Church, Pott Shrigley

(organiser: Chris Crossland), Steve Swabey introduced himself after the first couple of miles and asked if we could cycle together as we were about the same speed. I said yes, by all means, but please be aware that I am not a talker as I like the peace and quiet of the road. It was great to share the road with Steve as we cycled 230 miles having mini chats along the way.

PASSING RIDERS

It is amazing the emotional difference a passing rider can have. A simple "Hello, how is it going?" can lift spirits and open the door for a quick conversation. When I rode the Moors and Wold (400km) this year; the night had drawn in and a rider from a passing group asked if I had overnight clothes. I thought it was strange that he would ask that question then I realised that I still had my short-sleeved summer top on and they were wearing windproof jackets and leggings. I realised a little later that I was sunburnt (no sun cream) which was giving me a false perception of the temperature. Also, chatting to other riders at the controls provides insight about the route which you may not know, such as sleep points or a shop/garage just off the route.

OTHER AUDAXERS

It is surprising how quickly you recognise the same faces, but I usually have no idea who they are! However, on three rides this year I have seen Katie Butler talking into her camera. In fact, I became so used to Katie talking into her camera that I was a little disappointed when I missed her camera routine on the Three Coasts. It is interesting how little things can make your ride.

FRIEND IN NEED

While I love solo riding, there are definite benefits of riding in a group. On the London-Wales-London this year, riding with a friend (Sarah Roberts), I failed to drink enough water and by the time I

reached the top of the Symonds Yat climb I was in a bad way. I spent the next 12 hours drinking litres of water and following a little red light. Unfortunately, this resulted in Sarah not finishing, but I am very grateful to her for setting a steady pace and keeping me going.

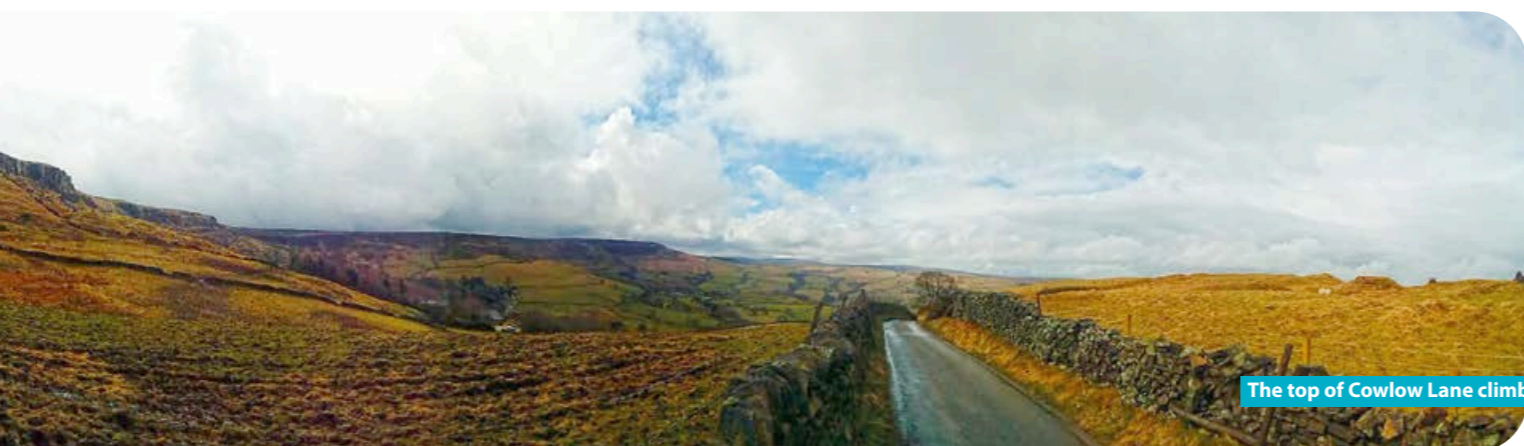
VIEWING MY ACHIEVEMENTS

As a newcomer to the Audax community my first impression was that all Audax riders were targeting two outcomes – Super Randonneur and Paris-Brest-Paris, and nothing else seemed to matter. In fact, it was not until February 2018 that I realised that Audax UK offered many more awards/medals for members to target.

However, when you look at these awards it states that your ride must be a BP, BR or a BRM. It took me some time to understand the difference between these terms and how they impact on the awards and thus the rides/events which you need to sign up for. I found the best place to visit when trying to understand AUK awards is Allan Taylor's medal website <http://audaxmedals.southportcc.co.uk/>. What I discovered, for the most part, is to ignore the BP, BR and BRM rating and look at the ride distance value and allocated ride time.

After completing my first permanent ride, in 2017, I visited the results page and to be honest I was not sure what I was looking at - it was very difficult to understand how the Audax system worked. The interface is aimed at consumers with some knowledge of the AUK award system. However, now that I understand the AUK awards I can visualise how the interface works.

Because I have not been around for long, I do not know what the results interface will look like on the new website. However, to help newcomers to Audaxing, I would suggest that there is a page which very simply lists the awards and indicates what needs to be completed to achieve that award. ■



The top of Cowlow Lane climb



My personal top tips for riding Audaxes

- Drink more water than you think you need and eat little but often
- Don't change your food routines on the day – your body will not like it
- Don't procrastinate at controls, but do rest and stretch
- Not losing time is better than having to gain time
- Maintaining a light, comfortable pace is better than a heavy faster pace
- Lift your speed on the flats and conserve your energy on the hills.
- The distance between controls is better than the whole
- Don't be afraid of cycling alone.
- Enjoyment and success are the best motivators
- Self-belief is the best indicator of success
- Take your lights as anything can happen
- Always assume that you will be alone, it will be dark, raining and isolated when you have a mechanical
- Consider your clothing – it gets cold at night
- Thirty minutes of sleep is as good as two hours
- Sunburn keeps you warm at night, even when it is freezing.