

YOUNG AT HEART

Age itself is no barrier to riding a bike.
Joan Green, Keith Giles and Jean Bolton –
combined age 243 – describe their cycling

Feature



WORDS JOAN GREEN, KEITH GILES, & JEAN BOLTON

Cyclists live longer. Life expectancy is two years greater than average. But the bigger benefit, arguably, is not quantity but quality of life. Cyclists enjoy a level of health and fitness equivalent to someone ten years younger. Keen cyclists can exceed

that, and often remain very active into their 70s and 80s. While sedentary pensioners may find their horizons drawing closer, those who keep pedalling can keep exploring and touring – as CTC members Joan, Keith and Jean demonstrate.

Joan Green

75

IT USED TO be the joggers who overtook me uphill. Now it's the walkers. But I don't mind: having enjoyed 60 years of cycling, I never want to give it up. The time came recently when the hardest part of the day was swinging my leg over the saddle to get on and off. I've got arthritis in the hips and knees, old injuries in the spine and neck, but have no plans to stop pedalling. With either physical or mental activity, it really is a case of 'use it or lose it'.

Declining agility just means finding a different way to cycle. After 52 years on the same machine, I am considering a different kind of bicycle. I use lower gears, higher and wider bars, choose flatter terrain, and cover fewer miles at slower speeds. When I want to cover extra miles, I take the car and put the bikes on a low rack at the back.

I use Sustrans routes, which show the terrain and severity of the climbs. I study the map and find detours around hills. Thanks to very low gears I don't have to walk much, but I do take a breather from time to time and look around me to admire the views.

WISER ROUTE PLANNING

I now have the time and the insight to really appreciate the ride and discover all the things I missed in my youth, following a back wheel in a group. The experience has been a revelation, and I make no bones about stopping to talk to local people. I've also developed an interest in history and architecture, hobbies compatible with easy cycling.

I plan rides a lot more carefully than I did. If it looks like rain, I make sure there's a stately home, a garden or a museum on the route for the afternoon. If there's a strong wind, I check I can get at least part of the way home by train or bus.

Bus is best because of the free pass, and bus companies are increasingly willing to carry bikes inside – very few will charge for the bike.

Trains can be more problematic, but if the booking office clerk won't sell me a ticket for my bike I just get on the train anyway and wait to see what happens. I have never yet been turned off, not even on a TGV in France!

Canal paths can be a godsend to an elderly cyclist. Their surfaces are improving all the time, they are

**“I USE LOWER GEARS,
HIGHER BARS, CHOOSE
FLATTER TERRAIN AND
COVER FEWER MILES”**



Opposite Jean Bolton (far left) on a CTC tour in France

Above Joan Green plans routes using cycle paths and river valleys

Right 'I have the time and insight to really appreciate the ride'

Right & top: by Robin Bridge-Taylor; Opposite: by Bob Norton



flat, interesting, and often very scenic. My favourite is the canal out of Llangollen with the aqueduct, several hundred feet high. Another good one is the beautiful Tiverton to Taunton canal, and for sheer variety and interest the canals in and around Birmingham take a lot of beating. One day I plan to ride through London on cycle paths, from Greenwich to Richmond.

Other countries are far ahead of our own in the development of cycle routes. I am always looking for gentle routes, and there are plenty of them that follow river valleys in Germany, Denmark, France, Austria, Switzerland and, of course, all over Holland.

Some of my cycling friends are still very fit and ride regularly with their clubs. I haven't been able to do that for some time and I miss the companionship. It is sad that many riders give up altogether when they can no longer keep up with others. Don't do it! With a few changes to your riding habits, there's years of riding in you yet. See you a-wheel! ➤

Keith Giles

86

I FELL IN love with cycle touring on my very first tour back in 1978, when I was 49. I'm 86 now. Each year for the past 30 or so, I've cycle toured in Europe (including the UK), mostly solo. After I retired, I met some German relatives on my mother's side. They let me keep a bike and equipment in their basement. Since then, my journeys all start and stop there: I pick up my bike, take the train to wherever I'm going to start my tour, do my tour, return the bike to my relatives in Germany, and fly home to California.

I've lost strength the past few years and can no longer climb – especially with luggage. For a long period of time, commerce was moved by water and so many famous cities are located on rivers. And since rivers have a tendency to flow downhill, I've been finding routes that follow them. Voila – I can still go touring and can visit interesting places along the way.

In 2008, I followed two German rivers from their source to the end: the Altmühl and the Main. I took the train to Rothenburg then rode to the river's source, a little spring flowing out of a pipe in a farmer's field. For the two river routes, I used German publications – the Bikeline series published by Esterbauer: Altmühl-Radweg and Main-Radweg. Normally, I use a 1:200,000 scale paper map. I also have a GPS mounted on my handlebar.

TRAVELLING LIGHT

I followed the bike path to where the Altmühl empties into the Danube at Kelheim. I rode 179 miles over five days, an average of about 36 miles per day. I'm pretty slow now and have always stopped frequently to take pictures, which end up as slide shows – PowerPoint presentations now.

From Kelheim, I took the train to Bayreuth. From the Main-Radweg book I was able to figure out the German enough to know that it was quite a climb from Bayreuth. So I followed the book's advice and took the train to the nearest station, about four miles from the source, leaving my panniers at the B&B.

I used to try to stay at Youth Hostels. But the past few years I've found that, most times I arrive at a hostel, they tell my they're sorry but a school has booked the entire hostel. Also, hostel prices are not much cheaper than B&Bs, so now I usually find a tourist office and get a B&B or hotel through them.

There are lots of references to biking along the *radwegs*. You're biking in valleys and the way is quite flat. And you see groups of other riders. You also see



Above Keith limits his luggage to make riding easier
Right Since European cycle routes attract so many cyclists, there is plenty of accommodation en route



Photos: Keith Giles

a lot of B&B ads aimed at the many cyclists. I tend to tour in June – before the huge tourist season starts.

I travel fairly light, with only two sets of normal-looking clothes (wear one, wash one) for use on and off the bike. They dry quickly because they're synthetic. I used to listen to the BBC news on a short-wave radio, but they don't broadcast news in English to Europe now, so I may have to take my iPod instead.

The Main bike path ends about 25 miles west of Frankfurt where it joins the Rhine. I ended my cycle tour there. I had ridden 358 miles in eight days, about 45 miles per day. That's a bit faster than the Altmühl trip; maybe I was starting to get anxious to get home.

I won't stop touring, however. I intend to be like the Energiser bunny and keep going and going...

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Alternatively, you can fax the completed form, with a document giving proof of age, to 0844 736 8455. Or you can email the form, with a scanned document giving proof of age, to membership@ctc.org.uk.

For any help with your application, call 0844 736 8451.



Photos: Bob Norton

Jean Bolton

82

Top left 'It hadn't occurred to me that I would be the oldest on the tour'
Top right Jean says that she is happy tackling hard climbs as long as she has time to warm up

LAST YEAR, at the age of 81, I joined CTC Tour 1017, 'Atlantic to Mediterranean'. Being a regular club rider, it hadn't occurred to me that I would be older than the other tour participants, so with some trepidation and excitement I boarded the European Bike Express. There were 12 of us, plus leader Bob Norton and his deputy, Stephen Kane.

We left the Bike Bus at Bordeaux at 6am and set off for the coast: Arcachon, 95km away. We crossed the Garonne on a cycle path on the Pont d'Aquitaine suspension bridge, whose height made me shiver like a jelly. But then the way was flat and easy. We experienced our first rain shower and as it was very dull we donned the fluorescent waistcoats you have to carry in France. After dinner, we strolled to view the Atlantic. It was a beautiful evening, and with affable companions I knew the holiday was going to be good.

Each morning the routine was: breakfast; load the bikes; shop for picnic lunch; then off by 9.15. Each day's ride was about 90km. I was fine, although I began to feel tired after 60km on the road to Condom – continuous flat riding does that, I find. And I need to 'warm up' before tackling hard climbs.

One stop-over on our route was Lamalou-les-Bains, a town that was obviously a mecca for health treatment: there were many invalids on crutches and in wheelchairs. It was quite sobering and made me feel very thankful that I was able to be cycling.

On one of our 'rest days', we were due to ride out to Cirque de Navacelles. We set off early at 8am. It was very hot and I was struggling on the climb, so told Bob I would turn back. I stopped at a bar in a village square and watched the world go by over coffee and croissants.

On our last day, we made our winding way to the Mediterranean where we swam and paddled. I was elated that I had achieved what I had set out to do. I wanted to do it all over again! ☺

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