

Brian Smart

A life in cycling

At the age of 17 in 1954 as a member of the Handsworth Venture Play Group, I was asked to start a cycling club for the young members. As I was a member of the Birchfield CC and always on my bike, I could only say yes. This was a way I could help the youngsters have fun on their bikes. So on Monday 2nd May 1954, I organised the first club run to Lichfield and back, some 24 miles with 14 kids, a good start to the Venture Cycling Club. After 4 weeks it was back to Lichfield, this time to stay at the YHQ hostel for 2 nights and the youngsters had a great weekend's cycling. With things going so well, it was time to do something a little bigger and after talking to the youngsters, it was time to try a 14 day venture down to Landsend. 11 members averaged 60 miles a day.



I continued to organise trips until 1956, when I was called up to do my National Service in the Army. Following my initial training I was shipped out to Germany for 2 years. The first thing I did was have my bike sent over. Whilst on a ride with the officers, I was asked if I would start a club for their children, 37 in total. This was the start of the Bielefeld Cycle Club. The first club run was to Dortmund. As with the Venture CC, the next move was to start touring, so I organised a 10 day hostelling trip covering some 460 miles from Lemgo to Dortmund. Upon our return to camp a number of the riders asked if they could start racing, to which I replied YES.

The first race was a cyclo X, so we started training round the Army Camp grounds. On the day of the race, Bielefeld fielded 9 of the 26 starters. The flag started the race and off they went. They entered the wooded area and upon exiting these woods the club had 3 riders in the top 7. At the end of the race we came 2nd and 3rd. That season we attained 4 1sts, 6 2nds and 5 3rds and 2nd in the 'BAOR' (British Army of the Rhine). Following the 1st year I was informed I could take time out to help the boys with their cycling and racing. They raced most weekends and twice on weekday evenings. At the end of the 2nd year they attained 1st place on the 'BAOR' out of 14 teams.

With 3 months of my National Service to go, I was asked by the Commanding Officer if I would race as a Professional for the Army Racing Team 'Naffi Cola', I would be paid and get out of the army a little earlier. Of course I said yes. I gained a win and 3 3rds . My most memorable being the 5 day Rhine Road Race.

After being back in England and back at work for a while, in 1961 I found I had a lot of time on my hands, so I restarted the Venture CC. After 5 years I changed the name to Oakland after the Youth Hostel which later became Team Oakland. I was fortunate to meet with John Pettit of Pettit Tropies in Birmingham. We talked about the club and cycling. Some hours later he asked if he could sponsor the club, offering the use of a mini bus, clothing and of course £500. So with a sponsor it was racing all the way. Over the 20 years we dominated the Midlands Cyclo Cross. The proudest moment being when the club won the National Team Cyclo Cross at Sutton Park. During the club's history we also gained 2 national championships, 7 Midland Championships, 42 ESCA medals, 7 overall wins of the Salford track league and 7 medals in BCF Championships.

In 1986, I was spending 4 or 5 evenings coaching at Salford park. I started Freewheeler racing and it wasn't long before the Freewheelers outnumbered the seniors. Unfortunately Birmingham City Council closed Salford Park. I was asked to come to Halesowen to help bring in and advance the younger riders. We started with 6 Freewheelers and after 3 years we increased this to 83 riders.

- ▲ In 1979, I was honoured by the Lord Mayor of Birmingham for 25 years helping children.
- ▲ In 1997 I was awarded the Birmingham Division Gold Badge of Honour for services to cycling.
- ▲ In 1999, I was given an Honorary Membership to Halesowen A&CC.
- ▲ In 2000, I was awarded the HA&CC Chairman's Trophy for valuable work.

This is my 53rd year and on 1st May 2008 I will have 54 years working with children in the sport. Freewheelers keep me smiling.

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