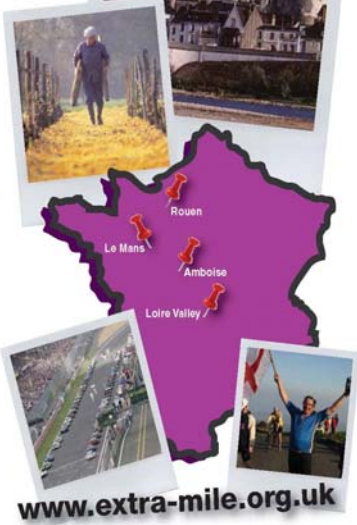


3 days' cycling on the
25th - 27th September 2009



And so the Great Extra-Mile Adventure has been completed. Team Mechline hauled itself through the high roads and low roads of the Loire Valley to complete the Extra-Mile 2009 challenge and in the process raise nearly £5000.

The escapade started tamely enough with a road trip to and through Eurotunnel in glorious sunshine. Then, a shortish journey to our first nights stay in *Rouen*. The only interesting incident was the meeting up of another team at a petrol station, who rather regrettably had the misfortune to forget that they had bikes on the roof of their car and went through the 'Fast' but 'Low' lane at the tollbooth. Amazingly the bikes survived – not so the bike rack or car roof.



Friday – the 1st day. We were eager souls, and at 7-00am set off Ged, our 'Night' rider specialist [on the basis that it was pitch black, foggy and only 4oC] to set the early pace. During the car journey to support Ged, the driver got us 'Lost' – and so began what was to become a depressingly regular experience - and a legend was born – Andy '*Lost*' Coulthard.

10 miles up the road we launched Mr Sage-Passant who was very keen to show off his biking skills, fitness, and pace, with battle cry of "*They're all Toast*" as he headed off to catch and get to the front of the peloton. True to his promise, having negotiated his way around a number of pavement pizza's left by less fit souls, through the high valley Loire mist 20 miles later emerged a panting '*Toast*' Sage-Passant, having skinned quite a number of the other teams riders.



3rd out, was our very own homing pigeon, so we thought, Andy. All seemed to be going well, until after about 10 miles in the middle of a very pretty village we found Andy '*Lost*' Coulthard, going in the wrong direction and on the wrong side of the road ! He had once again proved that life without satellite navigation really is impossible, irrespective of the number of highly visible fluorescent signs on display, [which all 180 other Cyclists clearly spotted].

4th to go, Mr Galliford, who was eager to prove his athletic credentials and give *Toast* a run for his money. Sure to his predictions, a scorching pace was set, which somewhat surprised everyone else in the team! On closer inspection by the other team members of the route map, and more importantly the elevation guidance notes provided, it proved no coincidence that the intense studying of the course notes the night before by PG, and the picking of which leg to ride [which included only flat and down hill sections] somewhat aided the incredible speed and time posted. So *Pancake Pete's* plans were exposed, and he was banned from looking at the course notes ever again.

The day carried on in glorious sunshine through wonderful countryside, and suddenly we found ourselves with not a little effort and slick rider changeovers at the front of the field. *Sacre Bleu*.





With **Toasts** words "Remember Pancake, there's First and then there are just other positions" as his send off message, **Pancake Pete** picked up the last leg, towards the home of long distance motor racing, *Le Mans*. With little regard for his own safety, or unsuspecting French pedestrians, **Pancake** hit *Le Mans* like a steam train with flatulence [which by the way, we all had, courtesy of gorging on High Energy bars]. **Pancake** duly crossed the finishing line and Mechline were first team in. Hurrah! What a day.

We met a great bunch of great guys from Axis Electronics at the Friday night dinner. Great company. Of note, was the passing on to **'Lost'** of some sound advice, courtesy of previous experience, about the first leg out on the following day. The advice went along the lines of "Andy, it's really worth reading the directional notes before you set off tomorrow from the Hotel. It'll really help" ! Famous last words.

During dinner, we were also treated and charmed to some fine translation and pronunciation of the French Menu, by Ged 'Mushy Peas' Mowatt, our newly discovered Francophile – Ged, **'Spoken like a Native'** Mowatt provided a recital that went something like Coronation Street / Ecky Thump meets Victor Hugo - Quite a listen.



Day 2, saw the start in *Le Mans*, with the first leg actually taking in the great track. We were going to be riding down the *Mulsanne* straight, and taking the *Arnage* corner at break neck speeds. **'Lost'**, with his motor racing petrol head on, insisted on taking the lead leg. So, off he departed.

Suffice to say, at the agreed changeover point on the famous *Arnage* corner, the pick up team waited, and waited, and then they waited some more. **Lost** was once again.....

Lost ! It appeared that at the very first roundabout out of the hotel, where everyone else managed to see the sign and turn right, **Lost** was busy looking elsewhere and went in

completely the wrong direction. Oh dear, oh dear.



"Where's Lost ?"



Pancake Pete who had set off on schedule, simply had to keep on, and on, and on, and on. Still, the scenery was very nice, even through the mist.

Having managed to convince the organisers not to promote the Mechline Boys to the professional 'Fast as whippets on steroids group', on account of us promising to stop for a lunch break, our main ambition that day, was to ride like the wind and then to find

a picturesque French village with chateau and fine Auberge to rest and enjoy some local hospitality.

We suffered a further delay, inevitably courtesy of **Lost**, who missed yet another large sign at a roundabout on the outskirts of *Bourgueil*. This time a friendly poorly sighted French farmer managed to re-direct him back to the route.

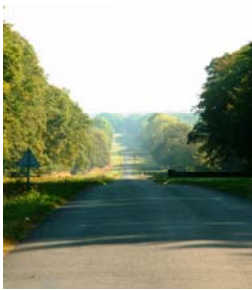


Lunch Stop was found with no little help by our navigator **'Native'** trying to guide us to the Promised Land. Unfortunately some confusion existed with the outriders who were contacted by **'Native'** via mobile phone telling us to head for "*Wiggkneeh Oussieey*" - which turned out to actually be *Rigny-Ussé*. Eventually we found our sun-blessed destination. Cold beer, good food, and a decent rest before we set off to complete the last 60 miles to a very pretty town on the Loire, Amboise.

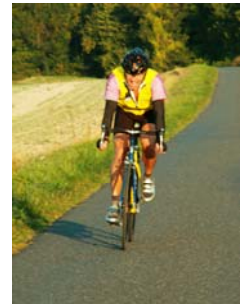
The only injuries that day were **'Lost'** complaining of a very sore derriere, and another rider from another team who pulled several muscles he didn't know he had, when he was chased for nearly a mile by a rabid farm dog, who still hadn't forgiven *'Le Ros Beef'* for Crecy, Agincourt, Waterloo or knocking them out of the last Rugby World Cup semi finals. **'Pancake'** nearly pulled something from laughing so much, whilst riding at a discreet distance behind.



"Where's Lost ?"



Another fun evening, although early retirements were the order of the day. **'Lost'** actually managed to find his way back to the hotel room to rub some Deep Heat into his sore aching derriere. It's always a good plan most people find to wash your hands after handling Deep Heat. Alas, poor **'Lost'** was at a loss, when he went to the toilet after using the Deep Heat, to discover the effect on the 'sensitive' areas of your skin quite uncomfortable - a disturbed nights sleep followed.



Day 3 – the last 170 Miles. Another early start, and **'Native'** once again led us out into the dark countryside. **'Toast'** was keen to do the complete days riding by himself, but seeing how much air he sucked in whilst riding, we were genuinely concerned about local oxygen depletion. **'Toast'** did get some big rides in, whilst the rest of us argued over the correct route with **'Lost'**, various pronunciations with **'Native'**, hill avoidance with **'Pancake'** and how funny it would be if we rubbed Deep Heat into **'Toasts'** cycling shorts – could he go any faster ?



Another fine Lunch spot was found, where we could cheer on the bemused Peloton, who couldn't believe we weren't taking it seriously. A ridiculously strong local beer was served - which it was suggested by our chums at Axis, when asked, "If Stella is described as Wife Beating Beer, what the hell is this ?" – the reply came, "Boss Beating Beer." More Boss Beating Beer duly ordered.

Lost remarkably didn't get **Lost**, on account of being picked up by the Team Trek guys, who fancied some easy riding, and spent the ride trying to get **Lost** to keep his arms and knees tucked in, rather than looking like he was riding a horse.



A last surge of activity and heavy cycling took us along the Loire valley and river, through *Blois* to *Amboise*. Very hot, but good riding country – fast and flat along the banks of the Loire.



The finishing line was in site, at the end of another long hill to the hotel. The hotel car park was full of aching bodies, discarded bikes and beer. Much needed beer. A very pleasant evening followed with great fellowship amongst the riders and the organisers in a local restaurant.

And so the adventure was over. Great fun, great hospitality, new friends, good exercise, wonderful scenery, an appreciation of different language & culture, new skills learned in terms of following road signs **and most importantly valuable money raised for our dedicated charities.**

Please accept all our considerable thanks for the support that you have provided. It's really valued and appreciated.

So, until next years adventure,

as **'Native'** would say, *"Mersea boocoup, 'ey Ooo Revwah mon amee's."*



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