



## The 24 Hour Fellowship

founded 1960

# 24 Hour Manual



## Introduction

This manual has been a long time coming. For years I have felt the need for such a work and have tried unsuccessfully to persuade various well-qualified people to undertake the task. In the end, it was probably the late Ray Page who encouraged me to consider doing the necessary work to make it all possible. Ray was one of cycling's super enthusiasts and a respected long distance expert. He must have introduced many to our sport and pastime, willingly passing on the skills he had accumulated over the years to young and old alike. I am sad that he is not around to see the end product of my endeavours, of which I know he would have approved.

Although I may not be the most suitable person to be entrusted with this valuable task, I hope it will serve its purpose, and if need be it can be expanded and up-dated at some time in the future. I have set out with the intention of producing a concise source of readily accessible information for endurance cyclists and their helpers. It is by no means a comprehensive reference (that may come later), but at least it should provide answers to most of the questions distance riders might ask.

Since the days of the successful Mid-Shropshire Wheelers '24' hour team in the fifties and sixties, this type of event has been of fascinating interest to me. Writing this manual has meant sifting through all my old notes and files, evaluating their contents and comparing them with modern theory and knowledge, gained since achieving an International Diploma in Sports Therapy in 1978 - apart from which, I have been an avid mile-eater for more than 40 years and have been involved in cycle-sport at all levels and aspects during the whole of this time.

As a member of the '24 hour Fellowship' I have had access to much useful information and have been able to consult various members about their individual thoughts and skills. Preparation, style, feeding habits and motivation will always be individualistic, indeed it has always been my belief that self knowledge is the key to great performances. Learn as much as you can about your inner workings by consulting good text-books and knowledgeable people, to add breadth to your personal reference file. Test yourself, prove your capabilities and then move on to greater things. If things don't work out the way you intended, don't give up, sift again through your data-base to get to the bottom of the problem. Accept this as a challenge!

My efforts will hopefully go some way towards helping you to achieve this primary objective. The text is as practical and non-technical as I can make it! I hope you will understand my simple logic. Wherever necessary I have tried to explain reasons for my instructions.

With having to cater for such a variety of individuals from champions to complete novices, it would be impossible in such a restricted work as this to give specific information about levels of training, aspirations or nutritional requirements, except of course in a very general way. Most of these you will be able to work out for yourself after reading the text. Hopefully you will approach both your

preparation and the actual ride with much more confidence than previously, and will happily reach your objective, gaining the great satisfaction that you will deserve.

Let us hope that we can encourage lots of people who have never quite had the courage to ride, or those who feel that it might be beyond their capability, to give the matter serious thought and perhaps achieve an experience they will be proud of and one that they will never forget.

We know that there are lots of people out there with what it takes, especially the hundreds of people who regularly ride long distance randonnees. With due respect to these people, a '24' is in many ways a much more refined and organised event, and wouldn't it be great to find out just how far you can ride in the span of a day and a night by using the best physical and mental preparation we can muster for you and using the finest mechanical equipment available to modern cyclists. Imagine the satisfaction of finding yourself in the somewhat elite club of people who have ridden twice round the clock who can then make a direct comparison between themselves and the best in the country.

A '24' is surely the ultimate test of a cyclist's skills and strengths, and a true assessment of his fitness and overall ability to manage himself.

*Brian Griffiths*

*September 2000*

## Considerations for Riding a '24'

Who rides 24 hour cycling events and why?

The simple answer is, just about anyone who has the courage to prepare and to start. Some people seem to have a special need for these events and soon develop an aptitude for long hours in the saddle. Whilst others would never even consider riding them.

There are characters, like Les Lowe and George Berwick, who have ridden more of these events than they care to remember, and in the days when there were four such events on the calendar there were those who rode all four of them. So one must assume that they got some sort of pleasure out of this.

After riding the Mersey roads event in 1965, Malcolm Jones was heard to say "When is the next one?" Asked why he enjoyed them so much he replied, "Where else can I get all the drink and 'nosh' I can manage, and get so well looked after for a whole day and a night whilst enjoying my favourite sport for a mere four quid?" Though things are a bit more expensive now of course!

Tall riders, small riders young riders, old riders, both men and women have all performed well. It is more a question of attitude and what could be called a cycling rhythm, rather than your physical attributes that will get you through. Some would say that it's all in the mind, and indeed this has always been a most important factor.

No-one should ever be pushed or persuaded to ride such an event - this would be a mistake. You have got to want to take part and then develop the idea from there. If you feel a sort of inkling that you could enjoy the experience or would at least relish the challenge, then read on and perhaps we can help you make an informed decision.

An all important factor is self knowledge, knowing your capabilities, knowing how to develop your skills and strength, knowing how to read your reactions in any situation and then making best use of all your physical and mental attributes.

Some riders discover the ability to ride long distances more easily than others. Most of the regular competitors seem to agree that it helps if you can feel a sort of magic rhythm when cycling - difficult to describe, but it's when the sheer joy of pedalling down the road is simply music in your ears, and you feel that your machine and your body are exactly in harmony.

Planing to ride a "24" is not a project to be taken lightly. For your first attempt it would be advisable to plan at least nine months in advance. There is much to learn and a lot of it is testing and building up the basic data that will get you through the actual ride. After the first one you will be able to make up your own mind more effectively.

At the time of writing there is only one such event per year, and so you only get one bite at the cherry, so to speak. Preparation must be thorough and complete in every way to ensure that you are successful in completing the ride and achieving the best possible result. Consider what a waste of time and money it would be to fail - something you would very much regret.

If you choose to take part, you will want to be sure that you are at your potential best and therefore you must be prepared to make quite a commitment of your valuable time. You must be prepared to spend a little money, too. Riding a '24' can prove quite costly. Equipment, food for you and your helpers, entry fee, possibly overnight accommodation, travelling expenses and the cost of running your helper's car.

Many who have only ridden the shorter distances, up to 100 miles, will shudder at the thought of a day and night in the saddle at speed. However if you do have good speed at the shorter distances and a few years of cycling competition in your legs, there is every chance that you can move up to the longer distance with a fair chance of success. The records show us that there are a reasonable number of short distance men and women who have successfully made the transition, achieving big mileages, even at their first attempt.

It has to be said that though huge training miles were thought to be essential in years gone by, it is not necessarily true that it might bring the right results for you. Some will always prefer to do big miles; if that is their choice and their belief we won't argue. However it could be said that they may be putting themselves at a disadvantage, especially in the final stages of their preparation.

We are told that the great Reg Randall in his hey-day was doing in excess of 500 miles per week, whilst at the same time holding down an energetic full time job. Roy Cromack, by contrast, was doing probably about half that amount in terms of miles. His methods are of course to be preferred in this modern age, and the instructions you will be given will draw heavily on them; they are considered to be a good example.

At an early stage in your preparation you may wish to try yourself out over long distances, to see how you react, to test out equipment and to check out your feeding requirements. Also if you have never ridden through the night you could find the experience useful and enlightening.

If possible, speak to, and ride with, people who have already done '24s', but don't accept that their experience and enthusiasm will be yours; you have to find that out for yourself. No-one feels quite the same and no-one can tell you what you will find when you eventually set out on your ride. Don't be persuaded against your will or by a sense of duty, especially if someone needs you to make up a team. Unless you are ready, willing and able to make the commitment, just wait a little longer until the idea is fully framed in your mind.

Perhaps you might try riding a few Audax events; these are available throughout the year and

range from 100 kilometres to 600 kilometres and above. They will provide a useful way of learning a lot about yourself and your chosen equipment, as well as providing an opportunity of speaking to people who regularly ride long distances. Any awkward physical condition such as painful knees or saddle discomfort should manifest themselves during such events, and give you a chance to sort them out before the ultimate test of the twice round the clock test in competition.

On the other hand you may already be an Audax rider - in which case, why not have a go at a '24.' Although quite a different sort of challenge in many ways, it should be a rewarding experience to see how far you can go, and to feel the undoubted thrill of real competition against the very best in the sport. However, if you are an Audax rider, you ought to forget riding it as a randonnee, and throw away your handlebar bag and mudguards so that you can begin to fully embrace the rather different skills of going for a maximum mileage.

If you have already ridden a '12', you will have some inkling of what is to come, but please, do not try to make direct comparisons. A '24' will not feel twice as long, or twice as hard. It really is a different sort of ride. If you have ridden the shorter one do give the longer one a try. You won't regret it.

Finally a lot of the feelings of doubt about '24s' are all in the mind, and it is up to you to try to dispel them. If you really do want to ride, but are put off by niggling fears about your ability, most of them should go away during the preparation period, when you can be trying out the bits that concern you the most and laying your doubts to rest. We all feel nervous as the big day arrives, and this is especially true about '24' hour events, but once a-wheel and in the thick of the action, you will soon feel that you are someone rather special even to have mustered up the courage to start, and the rewards for having ridden twice round the clock, it has to be said, are worth every ounce of your effort.

Whether you go for competition record or set out to achieve a self-determined target matters little. You should decide your own goals, and then you will be sure to get a lot of pleasure and a sense of achievement that will live with you forever.

## Initial Preparation & Planning

Preparation and planning for a '24' should begin in the Autumn prior to the year in which you wish to compete. There are several reasons for doing this: physiologically it is good practice because it helps you to prepare mentally - your body needs your mind to help it envisage what is to come and what will be required of it. It also helps to set a more gradual ramp towards your eventual goal: if your intention is to do well, there is a lot to learn both about yourself and about your capabilities, and also about the special skills of successful endurance cycling.

If you are the sort of person who can discipline yourself to keep a diary then you will find your entries very rewarding: something that records your efforts and your conclusions, something you can refer to in order to help you to evaluate your progress.

In your diary you should try to make a list of your priorities and commitments. What time will be available for you to train? Will it affect your personal situation at home, and if required can one or the other be adjusted? It is most important to arrange a regular pattern of training and to be able to accommodate it into your life without undue stress for yourself and others who might depend on you.

Now is the time to decide what equipment you might be using in the event, and to put it through the most rigorous tests, both for suitability and practicality. This is especially true of your lighting equipment.

Are you entirely satisfied with your riding position? Is it both efficient and comfortable? If not, or if you have any doubts, get good advice! Do you have any aches and pains, or any other medical problems? If you have any worries at all get yourself checked. Have a medical, see your G.P., a reliable sports consultant or someone well qualified and dependable.

There is a lot to be said for stacking in a few miles in the late Autumn, perhaps at the end of a normal racing season. This is usually quite a relaxed part of the year for most cyclists. You might like to ride some of the Autumn Audax events; you might like to ride on your own, or with a compatible or knowledgeable friend. So much the better if they too intend to ride, or have ridden, a '24'. In days past, a regular routine was to set out on a Saturday morning with a saddlebag and to ride 100 miles or so to a Youth Hostel or B & B.

Stay overnight and return home via a different route the following day. This allows you to get in the miles in a most pleasurable way, to test equipment, to test out your food and drink requirements, to sort out your best riding position and to discover any aches and pains. It is also a chance to think ahead, to discuss plans and progress with like minded people and to try to discover that magic rhythm that makes pedalling pure music in all conditions.

During this time you might well be getting in a few miles through the week and beginning to establish the pattern of regular and progressive training you will need as you move into the New Year and on toward the goal you wish to achieve. Dress well and don't risk going out in dangerous conditions. The last thing you want is any form of set back.

You should also be visiting your local gym to strengthen and tone the muscles that you don't always test in shorter events. The upper body muscles, the arms and shoulders, should be up to the job of supporting you without complaining for the entire event. Don't forget that stretching exercises are important to give you extra suppleness and to ensure that you are well balanced so that both arms and legs are a mirror image of each other and equal in strength and flexibility.

After a winter of initial preparation, during which you should have made every endeavour to learn whatever you can about your potential, your strengths and weaknesses, your equipment, and your nutritional requirements, make a realistic and practical plan for your training right up to the day of the event. In so many words, you should be focused and ready to set out your remaining objectives.

Do you want to go for competition record or just want to ride to finish? Probably neither - but the objective is always to use all your skills and potential to finish with the highest possible mileage.

Can you begin to work out the sort of performance that you might be capable of under good conditions? Be realistic, but at the same time don't under-estimate what you could do if everything went to plan and conditions were absolutely ideal. In other words there is no harm in visualising a super ride - these things really do happen. Though they are rare, we all do have days when things work out perfectly, and you might as well be prepared. Whatever the mind can conceive and believe, the body can often achieve.

Plan to increase your effort as the weather and time permit. If the weather is not so good, consider using a turbo trainer, if you don't already use one. They can be a very useful way to accurately monitor your progress.

Try to arrange a structured training programme that you find suits you: one that has variety, one that progresses at a sustainable rate and one that has specific targets – targets that are truly quantifiable and give you satisfaction.

Speed is important! Bear in mind that one extra mile per hour will add another twenty four miles to your eventual total. All the best distance riders are fast in shorter races. Take Gethin Butler as an example. During the whole of your preparation it is most important to eat a sound nutritional diet. This in simplistic terms means a wide variety of natural, unprocessed food, with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables included. Eat at regular intervals in a relaxed atmosphere, and fully masticate each and every bite.

Proper rest and relaxation are most important, in fact probably much more important than most people realise. SO GET ADEQUATE SLEEP.

As a footnote to this chapter I would like to outline the training plan of a champion as an example of modern training methods. Remember this was the regime devised and used by a super champion who was an expert in such matters. Don't try to imitate it, but work out the plan that suits just you and you alone. Clearly it shows common-sense planning, and demonstrates a fair measure of the refined techniques that have proven themselves with top riders over the last few years.

This rider's approach to fitness was divided into three sections: strength, suppleness and endurance. His winter preparation consisted of a fairly easy cycling programme but a good deal of hard work in the gym, building his strengths with weights, using three basic exercises with high poundages on the pyramid principle of increasing weights and decreasing repetitions for each successive set.

His basic exercises were bench press, trunk curl and power cleans. This he did until about three weeks before Easter. At Easter he completed a ride of 220 miles into a head-wind in about twelve and a half hours.

From this point his training consisted of 25-35 mile rides every morning of the week, going as hard as he could, a steady 15-20 miles back from work, and a further evening session of 15-30 miles depending on the weather and how he felt. Saturday morning was a 50 to 70 mile ride at about evens and Sunday was about 130 miles which might include a race. Suppleness was developed by using small gears and concentrating on fast, effective pedalling during the ride. He also used some yoga-type muscle stretching exercises.

Endurance came from a programme of intense hard work. Lungs absorb oxygen and the heart circulates it to the muscles where it is required. If heart and lungs are in top condition, then everything else is likely to be as well.

Interval training was considered important, and this consisted of flat-out efforts on a 90 inch gear of about two and a half minutes duration with one to two minutes recovery in between. He could usually manage about a dozen such efforts, so that even with warming up and pottering home, each session would seldom exceed more than forty five minutes. Interval training is the most effective way of conditioning the heart and lungs because they are forced to work at a far greater rate than they ever would be in competition.

Really long rides were kept to a minimum, and were used as a physiological boost and in order to check on back and saddle discomforts and the like.

During the whole course of your preparation you should remain in good health, feel fresh and keen and enjoy what you are doing. If not, ask yourself why! Perhaps you are overdoing things, perhaps you are not getting enough rest, perhaps you have a mineral or vitamin deficiency. Find out without delay - or to put it another way, nip the problem in the bud.

An often-used plan is to get into the habit of measuring and recording your body temperature and pulse each day on rising. If either vary by more than 10% upwards from normal, have an easy day. It is wise to have some form of checking your progress, and there are many sophisticated ways of doing this. However, it is probably better if you use a more simplistic approach.

Most of us have one or two favourite local circuits on which we train. A circuit of varied terrain with a minimum of traffic lights and junctions should be chosen. The distance could be say 30-40 miles depending on your level. Ride round it as fast as you can and record your time and average speed. Do the same check at intervals and try to go just a little bit faster each time - it doesn't have to be every time but there should be an overall upward trend. When you reach a point of no further improvement, try some more intense circuit training, more intense weights etc. In other words begin searching in other areas for some extra speed. Move forever onwards, upwards. Start riding time trials on a regular basis from April onwards. You may find it useful to ride out to these events and back again

## Notes on and for Helper

Really good helpers are like gold dust, and can add considerably to the success and enjoyment of your ride. Think about who you are going to use early in your preparation, and if possible put them to the test. It's not a last minute job or one that you would want just anybody to do for you.

Ideally you should find someone who has done it before and has been recommended to you. Otherwise this person should have some sort of qualification: a coach or someone who has good riding experience, someone who might be able to read the signs and symptoms as you ride along and someone who has a useful range of domestic skills.

Helpers usually conform to one of two broad categories: those who will perform exactly to your instructions, and those who will issue the commands and expect you to do as you are told. Either of these might suit you! Fortunately there are those who can work out a compromise. There are pros and cons with each method, and as long as there is not an uncomfortable conflict the choice is yours.

It is certainly useful to have two helpers. The job is hard work, and whilst for you there will be no let up, your helpers might benefit from a chance to take things easy from time to time. It's useful if one helper is good at preparing food and drinks, keeping things nice and tidy and generally organising the material things.

It is possible to find someone who will arrange everything most efficiently for you, leaving you with no responsibility other than to ride. However, it is wise to have an input into the system, and to know that your whims and fancies will not be ignored because somebody thinks they know better.

Although some people choose to ride unassisted, and this is possible in a well-organised event like the Mersey, it is now considered almost essential to have a following car. This must be reliable and one that will carry all your bits and pieces comfortably. Boxes as suggested in the Kit List should make it easy to find everything, but in addition keep a couple of plastic bags ready for soiled clothes and for litter. Make sure you carry plenty of water; you and your helpers will get through quite a lot.

A clip board and a folder should be provided for the start sheet, maps, lists of all night filling stations, note paper and other information (including this book), ready for instant referral.

**TO HELPERS!** Be familiar with all that will be required of you! Know exactly where everything is! Make certain you have access to all the information you may require and try to understand your rider's needs at all times. Remember you are doing a vital job! You can directly influence the quality of your rider's performance. He will have put in hours and hours of dedicated preparation

and training for this one event, so don't let him down.

Feed your rider according to his instructions but make certain he remembers to take sufficient nutrition at appropriate intervals. Watch carefully for signs and symptoms of a deteriorating performance and try to work out a solution to the problem. A stitch in time saves nine! Above all look after his well-being as a first priority, especially if he appears to be suffering in any way. Monitor the weather - and in particular the temperature - to see that the person you are in charge of is adequately protected against the elements. Offer plenty of encouragement and as much useful positive information as possible. Don't try to falsify facts as you will soon be found out.

Appear regularly at planned intervals and always park well off the road. Riders can quickly become demoralised if you don't appear where and when you are expected, so try to be as reliable as possible.

Make yourself familiar with any possible detours so that you do not lose your rider or fail to know his position in the field, but don't go questioning timekeepers for this sort of information when they are busy.

Hand up drinks at the correct temperature! Hot drinks can quickly spoil a rider's palate and make food tasteless, whilst cold drinks can cause stomach cramps.

Have a routine worked out for when your rider needs to stop so that an absolute minimum amount of time is wasted. It is useful to have a seat for when he stops to make clothes-changes easier, and it will greatly facilitate any work that needs to be done on legs and feet.

When your rider has completed the event let him warm down for a couple of miles if possible and provide him with food and drink. Make certain he is warm and comfortable and don't let him sit on the grass. He will probably benefit from a quick wash of his hands, legs and face. Then load his bike and other equipment on to the car and try to get back to the headquarters or wherever you are going as soon as possible.

Make certain that your rider is cleaned up as soon as you can and if possible try to arrange for a skilled massage to speed his recovery and to try to discover any tight muscles, chafing or other problems.

## Riding in the Heat and the Cold

It has been decided that this is a sufficiently important subject to warrant a special section, something that is often left to chance but that must not be overlooked because it can have a very marked effect on your performance if you get it wrong.

Although it is difficult to achieve in practice, your body should be kept at a comfortable temperature throughout the event - neither too hot nor too cold. If you can manage this, you are at a considerable advantage, and also you could well be protecting your health and well being.

Very few people seem to understand how important it is to maintain a correct fluid balance in their body. A loss of only 2% can cause quite serious problems. Loss of performance, dizziness, headaches and 'bonk' to name but a few of the more obvious ones.

If during your autumn, winter and spring preparations you have regularly monitored your weight during and after a training ride you should be well aware of how much you need to be drinking in almost any circumstances. Any weight loss you record will be fluid and certainly not fat. This is not an absolute guide but quite near enough for our purposes.

However, despite this knowledge certain conditions can easily fool you. On a hot day with low humidity you may well be perspiring freely without even noticing, because your sweat will evaporate almost immediately. Depending on your size, fitness and several other factors you may need as much as 1 litre of fluid or more per hour to balance your loss.

On a hot day with high humidity, you may notice that you are sweating profusely but actually needing rather less fluid. This is because the air is saturated and cannot absorb any more, leaving it damp on your body. You will feel hot and uncomfortable, and the best answer to this problem is a regular cold sponge. Fortunately this is not a common problem, but you should be aware of it.

The above-mentioned are two of the most extreme conditions and you will normally only encounter intermediate circumstances. It is of course important to be able to judge your needs with some accuracy if you wish to maintain your performance levels. Practice these skills of judgement.

Remember that your input needs could vary considerably during the course of the event. Over the 24 hours you will face a wide range of climatic conditions and you will need to know how to cope effectively with all of them to maximise your mileage.

If you take a sugared drink on a hot day the concentration should be quite low - only enough to give a steady release of carbohydrates. In colder conditions and during the night, the quantity of drink you take will drop with the temperature, so a slightly higher concentration will be useful.

Cover up exposed parts of your body, especially if you are not tolerant of strong sunshine. Be certain to use adequately-rated sun block, of the type intended for athletes. Your head and the back of your neck are important areas to be protected.

Cold conditions are not uncommon in distance events, even in the summer, and can creep up quite quickly and catch you unawares. The two most likely times for sudden changes are when the sun goes down over the horizon, and again when it comes up at dawn. Sudden changes can cause mists and condensation. So be prepared, otherwise you might feel an uncomfortable chill which will upset your rhythm somewhat.

If you wear waterproof clothing when it rains, you could end up with condensation collecting on the inside and seeping through your jersey to your skin. When you take it off, a cold wind on wet fabric can be very uncomfortable and in extreme cases can chill you. Leave it on until you reach your helpers and then get a brief towelling and a fresh jersey.

## Food and Drink

Always a highly controversial subject. It is a well-known fact that 'one man's meat is another man's poison.' What suits one will often react with another.

Food and drink is not a subject that will be dealt with in great depth because it can get rather complicated and is therefore beyond the scope of this book. Trying to deal even generally with all aspects as they apply to the individual could cause confusion. For those sufficiently interested there are many good text-books on the subject, even though some of them still tend to give conflicting advice. However, there are a few basic rules to consider, and if you ignore them you will probably not be going far.

As a cyclist your body tends to adapt to the way you treat it. Foods that might hamper one man would be perfectly acceptable to another. To some extent your choice of food and the frequency at which you eat it will be driven by some strange, self-regulating, internal mechanism. Riders have been known to ask for some pretty strange things at various times during the event! Our bodies tend to adapt to accommodate a certain kind of diet and, if you need to make changes you must do it in a very gradual way.

You all know the person who lives and seems to perform well on a very closely-controlled diet, and you will probably also know someone who appears to manage very nicely on chips and beans.

It is interesting to note that a leading distance man in the sixties, the late Eric Matthews, used to consume upwards of twenty tins of creamed rice to keep him going, amazing though this may seem.

Obviously, diet is important, and if you want to do the best for yourself you would do well to follow the regime of eating a wide variety of natural, unadulterated fresh foods, consisting of as much as 50% fresh fruit and vegetables. Only then can you be reasonably certain of getting a balanced supply of most of your essential requirements of vitamins and minerals, without resorting to the hit-and-miss process of using supplements which may help or hinder your progress.

If you are a big mileage person, you could easily deplete your reserves of the critical components of your diet and unbalance your metabolism. It is important to try to avoid this sort of deficiency set-back which could take valuable time and expertise to put right.

Supplements should not be necessary, but you may choose to use cod liver oil capsules in the winter and brewers yeast as you approach the event. Brewers yeast helps with the absorption of "B" group vitamins which are often lacking in modern diets. It is water soluble so any excess will be excreted.

In recent times liquid diets have become firm favourites with top competitors, and they do indeed have many advantages. If you intend to survive on such products, you should try a variety of what is available to find out what suits you best. Learn all about their use and be aware that there are certain dangers when they are misused.

Always follow the manufacturer's instructions closely and try not to overdose, or indeed underdose. Always use bottled water and wash the containers out immediately after use, keeping a special watch out for discoloration and growths of fungus. Recent evidence seems to suggest that these drinks can affect your teeth. Unless you feel confident that you fully understand and can manage a liquid diet it is best not to take a chance.

It has to be said that not many people can adapt to this type of feeding for 24 hours and so most will want some solid food as well. Remember though that solid foods require energy to digest them, and in particular, items with a fat content such as cheese and cake may take hours to prove of any use to you.

Having sorted out food and drink requirements as part of your early preparation, generally speaking it would seem to be best if you can consume small quantities of nutritious foods, mostly carbohydrates, at regular intervals.

If what you eat has plenty of bulk, you may soon begin to feel bloated and therefore uncomfortable. You may get indigestion with all its attendant problems, and of course you will have to find time to evacuate all the waste products that have been filtering through your system.

Eat carefully with your mouth closed so as not to swallow gulps of air. Chew and thoroughly masticate everything. Try to savor every morsel and try to imagine it providing vital energy and strength as it is digested and passes through your system. If you do get indigestion, which can manifest itself in many ways, from feeling bloated and lethargic to mild hallucinations, try a peppermint, some peppermint cordial, boiled rice water or, baby's gripe water as a good old fashioned cure. The general balance of your diet during the event should be aimed at keeping your stomach alkali, not acid.

Whilst a whole range of foods will meet this requirement, a couple of very useful ones which might be suggested are small bread rolls filled with ham or jam or with chicken and chutney.

Drink is most important, and small amounts at regular intervals are the key to the all-important correct fluid balance which provides consistent performance. During preparation you will have learned what your requirements are and so you should be able to avoid de-hydration and its unfortunate consequences.

Some people like to have soup handed-up, but be careful that it is not drunk too hot and that it

is not too spicy. Both hot and spicy soups can spoil your palate and make food a bit tasteless. Normally this can be put right by sucking a small sliver of lemon, which will usually do a remarkable job in restoring things and really freshening up your mouth. This is also a way of solving a seemingly unquenchable thirst.

Make sure your helpers have all the things they are likely to need with them, especially during the night, as there will be few places where you can obtain unusual requirements.

Fruit squashes are not recommended. A pleasant drink with useful properties can be made by dropping an effervescent vitamin C tablet into a bottle of water. Let it finish fizzing before fitting the lid otherwise the lid may be forced off under the pressure. These can be bought with a variety of flavours, and are not only a pleasant drink, but provide a useful time-release supply of vitamin C.

If you are a big tea or coffee-drinker it would be wise for you to cut down considerably on your intake of these things in the weeks leading up to the event. If you enjoy such drinks during the event, be careful to take them weak, in small quantities and at well-spaced intervals. Otherwise you could get caught for taking stimulants in after-race tests.

Eat and drink when you are going slowly, preferably on a slight upward rise. If you feel that fatigue is coming on, the usual symptoms are slight cramps, or feeling thirsty or lethargic; you should ease off, use a lower gear, and try to get some nutrition inside you.

Do not free-wheel on descents - windmill a bigger gear, or at least keep your legs moving to reduce the strain on your heart. Muscle action helps to speed blood on its way back to your heart for reprocessing.

## Lighting for the Event

An important consideration for your "24" hour ride is to have a good lighting system, which will enable you to see your way and of course help to ensure your own safety as well. With more than 100 years of bicycle development, one would have thought that the problem of providing reliable and effective lighting would have been well and truly solved by now, but regrettably this is not so.

The time to decide on your lighting system is the winter before the event, and it is also the best way of proving its capabilities and its reliability too. Many systems that work well normally, have been known to fail when using bone-hard racing tyres in an event, so check this out to your complete satisfaction beforehand or fit your lamps on shock absorbent mounts. Most battery lights rely on spring contacts. These have never proved to be very satisfactory because they are inclined to lose their tension very quickly, especially on racing machines. Also, corrosion is common with batteries that tend to leak chemicals. Why can't we have screw terminals?

Batteries are the only feasible source at the moment, but these have their limitations, of course. Battery - and indeed lamp technology is advancing nicely at present so that hopefully in the not too distant future we will have a new generation of lightweight, high capacity portable power. We all know that a dynamo would be ideal in many respects but unfortunately using one could consume up to one third of your energy output and slow you by up to five miles per hour. Therefore they are entirely out of the question.

Re-chargeable cells would appear to be the ideal solution, having high capacity and light weight, but beware - they have this unfortunate characteristic of maximum brilliance to sudden death in literally seconds, often before you would expect or even predict they might. Unless you are utterly familiar with their strange habits both in charging and discharging, they are best left alone. It is almost impossible for the layman to gauge their level of charge at any one time. Recently available Metal Hydride batteries are more expensive but better quality replacement for the usual Ni-Cads.

Though things are improving slowly, many of the best lighting systems consist of home-made or modified commercial units. Some of the commercial units are very expensive so make certain they will meet your requirements quite adequately before letting-go your money.

The best systems have two lamps, one of high brightness and one with a lower and more economical rating. If you don't have two lamps, and your only source of illumination fails, you could be in real trouble. Therefore if you do decide on one lamp for whatever reason you should carry a spare one in your pocket, which is a good idea anyway, if only to get you back to your helpers. Always fit new bulbs to your lamps prior to the event to ensure best reliability. Some modern high-output bulbs have surprisingly short lives of only 100 hours or so.

There should be no problem with back lights now that legal LED lamps are available which are thoroughly dependable, bright and long lasting. In fact it would be very easy and very sensible to fit two of these.

What are the requirements for lighting?

- 1) Reliability. It is most important that your lights are absolutely reliable. Nothing is more disruptive to your night performance than lights that flicker and fail. Time is wasted, tempers get frayed, and of course you could get stopped by race officials or the police, and you could also be placing yourself in physical danger.
- 2) Your front light should provide enough illumination to see with in any conditions - a tall order indeed! Everyone needs enough light to see their way and some need more than others. Bright lights need lots of energy, and this means high capacity batteries or frequent changes.
- 3) Lights should be easy and quick to fit, remove or replace. Why waste precious time stopping to fit lamps just before darkness, and again when day light returns, if you can clip lights on and off without the need to pull onto the side of the road. This is also an important consideration if things go wrong or you need to replace them during the night. Also, when daylight comes, you will want to be rid of them without losing any time.
- 4) The units should be light in weight. No one wants to carry excess baggage if there is no need to.
- 5) They must be legal. This should be obvious, but please do make certain that your lights conform to current traffic regulations both in design and in where they are fitted to your machine. The regulations state that:-

One front light is required marked BS6102/3, which should be positioned centrally or offside up to 1500mm from the ground, aligned towards and visible from the front.

One red rear lamp is required, marked either BS 6102/3 or BS 3648 positioned centrally or offside between 350mm and 1500mm from the ground, at or near, aligned towards and plainly visible from the rear.

One rear reflector is required coloured red, marked BS 6102/2 or with a European mark incorporating 1 or 1A, positioned centrally or offside between 350mm and 900mm from the ground, at or near, aligned towards and plainly visible from the rear.

Pedal or shoe reflectors or reflective ankle bands are highly visible and are well worth considering,

to enhance your safety provision.

If you fail to perform to your expectations due to faulty or inadequate lighting, you will only have yourself to blame. At the moment you can only ride one such event in the year and you will have gone to an awful lot of trouble to prepare yourself. You owe it to yourself and to your helpers that as far as possible your lights are well and truly up to specification.

Adequate lighting is important for reasons other than safety. If you can't see well you will probably be tense and keyed-up, and this could bring on cramp, stiffness and stomach upsets. If you can see well, you can be much more relaxed and confident too.

It is easy to get the impression that you are riding much faster than you really are during darkness. Modern devices such as speedometers and pulse meters can keep you reliably informed of your levels at all times, if you know how to use them. Some people get on well with night-vision glasses, and they are certainly worth a try if you have never used them.

## On the day of the Event

Hopefully you won't be a bag of nerves. Do try not to worry too much; once you are off up the road this situation usually resolves itself quite quickly. All your arrangements will have been made. You may want to do all this yourself or you may be fortunate to have someone who can take care of these things for you. Be familiar with their thinking and make quite certain that they are familiar with yours.

Your bike should be in first class order. If you are not a bike expert or if you have any doubts at all, get someone who knows to run a critical eye over it to make reasonably sure it won't let you down.

Your kit should be stored in individual boxes as per the kit list and each box should be clearly labelled with its contents. Adequate supplies of water should be on board as you can get through quite a lot. Use bottled water for your drinks, especially if they are of the isotonic variety. Make sure all the food supplies for you and your helpers are fresh.

A spare bike or at least spare wheels should be available, just in case things go wrong. You should be certain that spare wheels fit properly and easily, and that the chain and gears will continue to run smoothly if they are used.

Skin suits are not a good idea for these events; they won't keep you very warm, they don't have rear pockets and they are difficult to get in and out of if you need to change, especially when you are stiff and tired.

If you are staying at overnight accommodation, either prior to or after the event, or both, make certain that your hosts are familiar with what you are doing.

Events like the Mersey Roads are a great social occasion, and all sorts of cycling personalities turn up at the start. Enjoy the atmosphere and the light-hearted banter and try to feel part of the scene. It will help you to feel more relaxed and it might also make you feel more committed.

Before you leave the time-keeper, you will hopefully have your race strategy worked out. Your overall race plan and your back-up plans will be safely committed to memory and clear in your mind. If this is your first '24', be sure that you have made some allowances for tough periods.

If you have set yourself a realistic schedule you should be able to keep to it, and you will find this confidence-boosting. Riding the event will be a big learning curve in itself, and if the tactics that you have worked out begin to show the expected results it will prove most encouraging. Things seldom quite run to plan, but expect to overcome these obstacles and you are well on the way to success.

Whilst you should have a clear idea of the sort of mileage you can achieve, always allow a bit of flexibility in your schedule to accommodate such things as strong winds, heavy rain and possibly a bad patch. No one is going to stick with a rigid speed schedule throughout the event. Ups and downs, highs and lows are something you are striving to iron out as your skills improve at distance riding.

For the first few miles allow yourself to settle in and get the feel of everything, being especially careful to try to get into that magic pedalling rhythm that the experts seem to find is like music in their ears, and hang on to it. Change your position frequently. Move your hands, wriggle your toes, ease yourself out of the saddle occasionally. This will give the more isolated muscles a break and a stretch and help to maintain a good blood flow.

Don't be too daunted if your minute-man passes you as though he were riding a '25' mile time trial; tell yourself he won't last long. Ride your own race at this stage or you may well pay the price. There is plenty of time to turn the tap on later when you know you are good and ready.

If you suffer from a bad patch, try to work out why it happened! – indeed, try to anticipate the onset and so avoid this situation. Have you been over-doing things, are you short of regular nutrients and have you been drinking the right amount of fluids? The feeling may be rather daunting and unending at the time, but just hang on in there and be patient. Try changing down, or rolling a bigger gear, but keep pedalling - even down hill. If you begin to feel depressed perhaps a very brief stop with your helpers might do the trick, especially if there is someone to give you a proper stimulating massage. It usually helps to break the race into small sections. Think of ten mile units that are done in so many minutes, rather than 14 hours and 200 miles to go. Use a computer to give you all the information you require about your miles and speed. If you choose to use a heart monitor as well, be sure that you can correctly interpret and understand the results.

Remember to take small amounts of liquid at regular intervals, and also to try to take on food before you really need it, to give it time to digest. Don't leave it until too late – it's a long, distressing way back from the bonk. If you have done your preparation experiments you should be well practised at judging how much, and how often, to keep your system well balanced.

If the weather is hot, you should have applied protective sun block in appropriate places so as not to get burned. You should also be wearing some form of head-covering - especially if your hair-count is minimal or non-existent. Mild forms of sunstroke can creep up very quickly and can seriously affect your performance. If the sun is on the back of your neck, turn your cap round or wear some other form of skin cover. Don't get caught out in this way!

If the weather is wet you may need some water-proof protection, and it is as well to keep both your feet and your lower back as dry as possible otherwise chafing can occur. Spray and possibly grit from your back wheel might get down inside your shorts and cause problems of discomfort. Your racing number, if carefully fitted, may help to keep this problem at bay.

As the evening creeps on you may find that the air becomes chill quite quickly. Hopefully this will not occur before you are due to pick up your lights and night clothing. Ensure your helpers are well drilled and have everything ready so that a minimum amount of time is lost. Riding through the night is covered in another chapter, so we will move on to the following morning.

When the sun has risen and the air has lost its initial dampness, it may be time to dump your lighting and night clothes, and to make a brief stop to freshen up a bit. Warn your helpers to be ready, and then you will waste a minimum amount of time before setting off up the road once more, feeling suitably refreshed and full of optimism.

You should find it much easier to maintain your magic rhythm in the daylight, and so you can begin to take stock of your progress. If you have scheduled carefully, you should be on target, and may perhaps feel that you can go a little faster. Don't push things unless you are confident; just wait until you are on the circuit before you really open up.

On the circuit you will normally get a lift, unless you are really suffering and just hanging on to finish. This should not be the case if you have followed the instructions carefully. There will be lots of spectators offering encouragement and adding to the atmosphere, and you will have the certain knowledge that the end of the race is now in sight. Be careful what you take if someone offers you hand-ups. Leave this duty to your helpers and only take sponges to cool you down.

Having ridden past the final time-keeper, try not to collapse in the ditch - or even in your helpers car. Try changing down and pedalling on for at least another couple of miles to get the benefit of a gentle warm-down, after which have a quick wipe over, make sure you are dry, put on warm clothing and then make your way back to headquarters, especially if the weather is wet. Now is the time to take a little appetising food and drink as an important part of your recovery process.

## Aches and Pains

These include backache, knee stiffness and soreness, tender feet, neck or shoulder ache, headache, sunburn, etc. We will deal with them one by one in general terms, and then give some advice about other medical problems that might arise during preparation and during the event. If you suffer with any of the above ailments during your preparation, be quite certain to resolve them before the event, otherwise they will most certainly return to plague you during the race and cause you much discomfort. In fact it can be said that it may feel even worse as the event progresses, and will seriously slow you down and may eventually prevent you from completing the ride - thereby wasting your own valuable time and money, and probably annoying your helpers, who will have put themselves out for your benefit.

If you can't sort out the problem yourself, get some help. Most of these niggling little complaints will turn out to be mechanical, so to speak, in origin: something which is brought on by continued use of a movement which is nearly at its limit and not in the middle of its range as it should be. A good sports therapist, a qualified cycling coach, an experienced rider or a well-informed cycle shop can often offer more practical and reliable advice than your G.P. Some of them are quite capable of offering medication or even surgery for bent cranks or wrongly positioned shoe plates. There are, of course, exceptions, and you may be fortunate enough to be able to put yourself in the hands of a G.P. who really will take the time and trouble to get down to finding the real solution to the problem. Remember that prevention is always infinitely better than cure.

Before getting down to offering specific advice, it has to be said that it is often the case that you may not be flexible or supple enough. Make certain that you complete daily stretching exercises and you will find that this puts most of these problems behind you. Make certain that your position on your bike does not put any of your muscles at the full range of their movement otherwise you will almost certainly find yourself in trouble. You must try to allow for an ample amount of flexibility and indeed it can easily be shown that you will definitely benefit from having the extended range of movement that will be gained by doing the prescribed stretching exercises.

Ride a bike that is comfortable! A low-profile frame designed for pure speed in short distance events will hardly be ideal for a 24 hour ride. So if you still plan to use this sort of machine, you must prove to yourself that you can sit on it in reasonable comfort for this length of time. It may well go faster but can you sustain that speed if you ache all over, and more importantly can you enjoy the experience so that you might want to do it again? It would always be advisable to accept a compromise with a definite bias towards comfort.

**BACK PROBLEMS:** Pain that only comes on when cycling is usually the result of bad position. Your saddle could be too high or indeed too low, or you could be too stretched or too cramped.

Big gears can cause trouble in this area too, as can tenseness. It has been noted on many

occasions that back problems have developed when handlebars turn in their extension clamp and take the brake levers almost out of reach. This happens gradually and almost unnoticed, so it's worth checking from time to time. Back problems other than the mechanical ones we have mentioned can prove difficult, and should be presented to a properly qualified chiropractor, who is a real expert on backs and should be able to provide practical help and advice for you. If the trouble only shows up on the bike, be sure to stress this fact.

**KNEES:** As with backs, check that your saddle height is right, check that it is parallel to the ground, and that when your pedal cranks are parallel to the ground you can drop a plumb line from just behind your knee cap to fall through your pedal spindle. Are your shoes in the right place on the pedals, with the big-toe joint centrally over the pedal spindle: not too far forward or too far back?

All sorts of knee problems can be caused by cold and damp, especially in the night. Be sure to cover your knees to avoid this happening. At the very least you should apply oil or other protective balm to keep out the wet and the chilling cold. Big gears should be avoided, it's far better to pedal a smaller one with a bit of rhythm. Knee covers can be made from the cut-off ribbed tops of old stockings as long as they are thin and flexible and do not bunch too badly at the back.

A firm massage, correctly applied with an application of arnica cream, will nearly always provide a safe solution to any niggling discomfort, though this should not be done if there are signs of swelling.

**SHOULDERS:** Cyclists are often not as strong as they should be in the upper body; therefore it is essential that exercises are done to correct this weakness, otherwise it could cause you a lot of trouble in the later stages of the event. Push-ups and pull-ups will help, and any other similar exercises. Tenseness in the shoulders could appear during the night, especially if your lights are inadequate, preventing you from seeing too well and probably causing you to grip the handlebars rather tightly. Wearing padded track-mitts or using extra padding under your handlebar tape to absorb some of the shock from the road might help. If all else fails, stop and have a shoulder massage with a good embrocation.

**HEADACHES:** These can be caused by a variety of things - dehydration, hot sun on an uncovered head, wrong food or drink, tension, indigestion. (See riding in the heat and cold.) The answers are not easy unless the cause can be determined and taken away. De-hydration or lack of fluid intake should not be a problem as long as you continue to take small amounts of drink at regular intervals. It is surprising how many don't, and suffer not only headaches but poor performance too. At least a good mouthful every 10 miles or every half-hour is a useful yardstick, depending on the prevailing conditions. See riding in the heat and cold. Hot sun on an uncovered head or neck can also cause headaches and reduced performance. Many riders have been known to suffer the effects of heat exhaustion, so cover up when the sun is hot. Wear a hat, and

try reversing it so that the peak covers your neck.

Make certain all the food and drink to be handed up to you is fresh and compatible with your digestive system, and neither too hot nor too cold. Some people react to certain foods which can cause tummy upsets and probably headaches. You should have learned what suits you and what to avoid during your preparation.

Tension does occasionally creep in, often during the night. Try to check from time to time that you are not tense - which usually means things like gripping the handlebars tightly and holding yourself stiff. Taking deep breaths both in and out works well, or try gripping the handlebars as tight as you can for a count of ten and release slowly. Repeat once or twice as necessary.

Indigestion is surprisingly common amongst long-distance cyclists, and often causes some unusual symptoms which can range from headaches to hallucinations. It is caused by trapped wind causing internal pressures and blockages, and can be relieved in many ways. A peppermint often works well but other solutions are a drink of either peppermint cordial or boiled rice water. Although the mildest cure of all is reckoned to be baby gripe water. As with everything else prevention is better than cure. As a last resort, a skilled shoulder and neck massage will normally put things right. Otherwise a paracetamol tablet or similar product might be tried.

**HOT OR SORE FEET:** This is an increasingly common problem these days, and is often due to the design of modern shoes. The ones that cause trouble are often very light in weight and made of plastics. They will have fairly narrow, thin soles and will almost certainly be very close fitting. Avoid them and use something with a much more flexible fit as well as a much firmer sole. Well-fitting cotton socks with no wrinkles or seams will be a great help too.

Remember that your feet are likely to swell, especially as the event nears its end, and therefore your shoes should be designed to accommodate this process. If you use toe clips, they should be clear all round your shoes so as not to create pressure points. Laces, straps and velcro fasteners should not be done up too tight. Temporary relief can sometimes be achieved by squeezing a sponge full of cold water over your feet whilst riding.

**NUMB OR TINGLING FINGERS:** Too tight a grip on your handlebars, wrong position, tight-fitting racing vest, tight sleeves or elastic in arm-warmers and, on occasion, cold conditions are all possible for this uncomfortable problem. Restricted blood flow is always the cause of this situation, so try to discover how this occurs. Suspect close fitting clothes, especially on your shoulders where there are seams. Suspect the elastic in your sleeves or arm-warmers, which can easily cut in and reduce blood supply. Move the position of your hands on the handlebars to see if this brings relief. Cold fingers can obviously be cured using gloves. In an emergency, a pair of socks works well.

**NUMB OR TINGLING TOES:** Similar problems to numb fingers with the addition of saddle pressures and shoe pressures. Tight clothing always restricts blood flow and your shorts should not be too tight a fit. Also beware that well-developed thighs can mean pressure where the elastic fits, especially if they ride up your leg to a thicker part. Your saddle could cause pressure on a vital blood supply - either because it is the wrong style for you, because it is wrongly positioned or because the padding has become tired and ineffective.

Shoes are most important. They should be a close but comfortable fit with no points of your foot under obvious pressure. A difficult specification, but it is certainly worth spending a bit of time choosing the right item. Many modern shoes are made of plastic, and have little give to accommodate odd-shaped feet and the problem of swelling, which often occurs when the miles begin to mount. OK for short distances, but not so good for distances. In this respect leather is usually better, and if you can find a suitable pair these are always to be preferred.

**SADDLE SORENESS:** Often an awkward problem, and indeed one that should have been solved long before the event. However, it is sometimes brought on by factors that might not have been encountered during preparation. A good saddle and a comfortable pair of well-tried shorts is usually all that is needed. These days many riders use some form of lubrication on the chamois insert in their shorts in an effort to avoid chafing brought on by the exposure of the crotch to wet conditions or hot sweaty conditions. The lubricants most often used are zinc and castor oil cream, as used on babies bottoms; a more modern solution is to use witch-hazel gel.

An effective emergency cure is to roll two or three sheets of quilted paper kitchen towel to make a flat strip about three inches wide. Bend into an upside down "U" shape and place over the crotch of the shorts so that the open ends extend down the legs. This might feel a bit bulky initially, but it will very soon settle down to make a comfortable pad and prevent the chafing that causes so much discomfort.

## Riding Through the Night

NOTES FOR RIDERS: Riding through the night can be an unusual experience, and you would be wise to know what to expect. At least one overnight ride should be completed prior to the event, preferably in company with someone who has already ridden a '24'. You will learn a lot, and if you use the bike you intend to use for the event it will be a good test for the equipment as well.

Very often summer evenings are warm, dry and pleasant, but when the sun goes over the horizon, changes can take place rapidly. Be prepared so that you don't get caught out miles from your helpers and starting to feel uncomfortably cold. You could quickly stiffen up and be in trouble, from which you might not quickly recover. Therefore, just before dark, it is common practice to make a brief stop with your helpers. It could be a toilet stop, and you will also need to pick up your lights and some extra clothing. Your pockets can be emptied of food and rubbish and replenished with fresh. A light massage might be desirable, especially if it is skilfully done. A light dressing of protective balm or oil may be applied to the knees and ankles to help keep out the anticipated chill. Knees are particularly vulnerable to the cold, so be sure to take great care of them if you are to avoid unwelcome stiffness and pain.

Lycra arm-warmers can go into your back pocket in case they are needed. If the night is warm, and you insist on wearing shorts, be certain to protect your knees with home-made knee-warmers. A short peaked cap is very useful. As well as keeping your head warm, it enables you to lower your eyes to cut off some of the dazzle from on coming cars. Try to focus your eyes on the nearside kerb of the road to avoid looking directly into headlights. When the road is empty it is best to move out a little so that you can avoid the bumps and rubbish that are often to be found close to the verge.

If the weather turns out to be wet then you must be ready. The main thing is not to get cold, especially in areas like your back which could get splashed by spray from your back wheel. A racing cape with ventilated sides and sleeves should prove effective in most instances, because it will keep out the worst of the wet and cold, and it normally breathes sufficiently to avoid condensation building up. It helps if you choose a transparent one so that your number can still be read by the marshals. Some people prefer a light-weight gilet, which breathes rather better than the racing cape and can be folded up to put in your pocket after the showery conditions have subsided. When the rain is over, and especially if you are not drying out rapidly, you should make a brief stop for a change of clothes to maintain your comfort level. Beware of wet shorts and wet feet, where chafing can occur.

During the night, it is often useful to hum a marching tune to help keep your nose clear, to help sustain your rhythm and to break up the monotony. If you do suffer from a stuffy nose, a few drops of Olbas oil on a folded tissue slid under your watch strap can be sniffed from time to time to relieve the problem and allow normal breathing.

Don't forget to continue eating and drinking small amounts at regular intervals. Always remember to carry some emergency rations just in case your helpers manage to lose you for a while. It's not always easy to keep track of riders during the night.

At the first signs of daybreak you may experience some unusual feelings which it is important you should understand. No two riders ever feel the same, but there are some fairly common symptoms which will be felt by the majority of riders. When the sun first peeps over the horizon you will probably feel quite elated, as you do on the first day of spring. Then you may well begin to feel a little depressed, as the thought of several long hours in the saddle still to do starts to strike you. You could feel both hot and cold at the same time or you might describe the condition as clammy and feverish. Your joints might lead you to believe that they are giving out on you, and you may begin to think that your energy is not going to last. Though it is most unlikely, it is just possible that you may not feel anything except the mildest of these effects. If so you are one of the really lucky ones.

Whatever your reaction, try to just hang on and put it to the back of your mind for a while. This may not be at all easy, but tell yourself that it really is a temporary situation, and all will soon be well. Positive thoughts! Normally it won't last long, and when the sun starts to glitter on your spokes you will begin to feel on top of the world. If however you feel that you are not coming through it and are really in the doldrums, you should make a brief stop with your helpers to freshen up. A quick wash, a stimulating massage, clean dry clothes, fresh food and drink and an inspirational chat will soon put you back in good spirits and ease you successfully through this bad patch.

**NOTES FOR HELPERS:** Riders need you more than ever during the night, especially those who feel insecure when they don't see you for a while. Make certain that you can lay your hands on whatever is needed instantly, which means the systematic placement of everything that you can provide. Have a good torch available at all times and always know where to find it. This usually means carrying it round your neck on a cord or attached to your belt. Have a good detailed and up to date map available so that you can be certain of the route, the likely detours and the short cuts that enable you to get ahead without passing your rider.

A pair of binoculars would be a very useful piece of equipment to have with you. They should have objective lenses of at least 50mm to enable you to see reasonably well in the dark. You will find that about 8 to 10 times magnification will be quite adequate. The binoculars will mean that you can recognise your rider more easily before he gets to you, so that you are prepared and will hopefully be able to determine his condition more accurately.

A night-time recognition system is invaluable, both to you and especially your rider, so that he can be certain it is you who is parked in the lay-by before he gets to you. Various ingenious systems

have been used, from a flashing set of distinctive LED.'s to the more usual one of an illuminated board with the rider's number, placed down the road a bit before he gets to you.

Be especially careful where you park so as not to cause any danger to yourself, and especially to your rider, and of course others as well. Wherever you are stopped, keep the vehicle well illuminated and off the road, and it might also help to use a reflective triangle.

## After the Event

The ride is the acid test of your preparation and methods, and if they have worked out correctly you should recover quite quickly. When you have passed the final timekeeper, it would be ideal if you can continue for a mile or two using a nice low gear to warm down nicely, before you climb off to get cleaned up and into some warm comfortable clothes. However most people just collapse with relief and wait to be picked up by their helpers. If this is the case, a light massage (even if it is self-applied) would be most desirable.

If a shower or bath is available at headquarters, or where ever you are staying, please do make use of this facility. Don't sit in a bath for a long soak - you could fall asleep and the water could get cold. Clean your teeth, drink a glass of water, and get off to bed as soon as you can. If you have access to a good masseur you will certainly benefit and recover much more effectively, apart from which, he should be able to sort out any discomforts, aches and pains, and possibly give you some useful information on any problems. Most people sleep like a log, but if you twitch or are restless, a paracetamol tablet should settle you down.

When you wake naturally the next morning, try to get up and do a few gentle stretching exercises. Avoid the temptation to stay in bed too long. The stretching will help you to get your body back to normal. Any stiffness or tight spots should be gently massaged until they are comfortable, unless of course they are swollen. Ice could be used if this is the case.

A glass of water and a light breakfast should be taken. Then it is a good idea to get out your bike and pedal a low gear for about ten miles. However repelled you are by the idea, you will almost certainly feel much better at the end of the ride.

If you find yourself constipated, or your urine is a very deep straw colour, you probably did not drink enough. Weigh yourself, and if you have lost a pound or two this is more or less confirmed. Any weight loss is almost certain to be fluid loss. If on the other hand your bowels are very loose, it could be that you ate the wrong food.

Make a note of your mistakes, your strengths, your weaknesses, as well as aches and pains, and set about finding an answer to all of them, so that you might be more successful the next time.

Evaluate your equipment, and make a note if you found it to be inadequate or unsuitable in any way. Try to find and test an alternative without delay. Go through your kit list and add items that should have been included. Delete stuff you definitely didn't need.

Evaluate your whole performance and write a report of the entire experience whilst it is still fresh in your mind. Ned Millington might appreciate a condensed version for the '24-hour' magazine as well. Remember that your intention must be to do even better next time.

## Kit List

It is essential that your helpers carry a comprehensive supply of all the things that you are likely to need before, during and after the event. Though in days of old riders often got by on what the organiser provided, this is very seldom the case these days, even though it should be possible with the fantastic facilities set up each year by the Mersey Roads organisers. Having a car-bound helper should mean that you should be able to equip yourself for just about any contingency that might arise, apart from the oft-requested new pair of legs. The following list should be used only as an overall guide, as it is suggested that you go carefully through it in detail and personalise it, so to speak.

Store items in separate boxes, and provide a list of their contents so that helpers know exactly what there is and where to find it. If, after a year's preparation, or after riding three quarters of the course, you fail to complete an event owing to something that your helpers could have carried with them, you really will be mad with yourself.

**MAKE SURE** that your helpers have sufficient food to maintain themselves as well as yourself.

**Box 1 FOOD BOX:** (Should preferably be of the insulated variety) Bananas, bread rolls, sports drink, ham, chicken, dried fruit, canned fruit and whatever you and your helpers have decided upon.

**Box 2: CLOTHES BOX** Socks, shorts warm cycling tops, hats, track mitts, gloves, dark glasses, night glasses, racing cape, overshoes, tights or leg warmers, towels, quilted paper towel, toilet kit, track suit etc. Quilted paper towel has a multitude of uses, from mopping up, drying hands, cleaning oily legs, serviettes, drying dishes and cutlery and so on.

**Box 3: MEDICAL BOX** Waterproof medical patches, cotton wool, safety pins, bandage, Vaseline, eau de cologne, antiseptic cream, scissors, paracetamol, peppermints etc

**Box 4: TOOLS & SPARES** Complete set of spanners, hexagon wrenches, screwdrivers, chain link extractor. Spare tubulars or tyres, inner tubes. Shoe laces, batteries, oil, Swiss pen knife, scissors. Note pad, pen. Gaffer tape, PVC tape. Shoe laces or cord have a number of uses.

You will need to carry cutlery, plastic plates, cutting board, sealed food and drink containers, vacuum flasks, plastic bags, at least 4 gallons of water, washing up bowl, bottled water for making up drinks, sponges, spare feeding bottles, a kettle or pan and a portable stove with sufficient fuel. Always make certain of your hygiene; an upset tummy due to passed-on infection or unclean containers can play havoc with riders and helpers.

A clip-board with start-sheet, schedule, road maps, list of all-night service stations, a copy of this

book and pen with clip.

A pair of binoculars, with 50 mm object lenses and 8-10 times magnification, should enable helpers to recognise their rider before he gets to them, even at night. A camera and film will provide a record of the event, which might be appreciated.

Spare batteries, bulbs and lights for back and front. At least two torches, one of which can be carried and used 'hands-free'. A night-recognition system so that you can recognise your helpers as you approach them during the dark hours.

A folding chair will prove very useful for helpers and for when you stop. It makes changing cycling tops much easier, as well as allowing someone to work on your legs and feet without much difficulty. A large umbrella is a useful accessory in some situations.

Spare wheels and a spare bike might prove useful if your helper's car can carry them. Make certain that spare wheels fit and run perfectly.

This list will at least give you ideas, and it is suggested that you add and subtract from it as required until you get it right for yourself. Remember to do a full appraisal at the end of the event and modify it accordingly.



*First published 2002.*

*Reprinted 2005.*

*The 24 Hour Fellowship*

*[www.24hourfellowship.org.uk](http://www.24hourfellowship.org.uk)*

## Index

Introduction	i
Considerations for Riding a '24'	1
Initial Preparation & Planning	4
Notes on and for Helper	8
Riding in the Heat and the Cold	10
Food and Drink	12
Lighting for the Event	15
On the day of the Event	18
Aches and Pains	21
Riding Through the Night	25