

## Chair's Report 2025/2026

This year has had its successes and areas where the club is struggling, caused, in my view, by 3 factors that I will address later.

I am pleased to report that no deaths of members have been notified, and that no serious accidents have occurred on club rides. That said, Keith Butcher had a serious crash in Mallorca very recently and is recovering in hospital. We all wish him a full and speedy recovery.

I would like to thank all the ride leaders for their efforts over the year. Without them we wouldn't have a club! Thanks are due to the retiring and new committee members for their contributions past and future.

Turning to the sections of the club, the broad picture is as follows:-

The Tours section has been a huge success, and Jenny Hung has continued to this, doing an amazing job behind the scenes and to the tour leaders, especially Simon Binning (who is retiring from tour organisation this year) and Christine Johnson. All the UK tours were oversubscribed and there was an alpine adventure and a 2 day 200 mile raid organised for our more intrepid riders.

The 1\* group has continued its recovery with 37 rides organised, and the average attendance rising by 2 to nearly 6 with a maximum of 12. The section is overly dependent on Monika Zarebska who has led a disproportionate number of rides. More leaders are needed if the section is to thrive. That said, this section is in better health than it has been for many years.

The 2\* midweek group remains healthy with a good pool of ride leaders and usually attracts 5 – 6 riders per event with a maximum of 16. Nick Bloom has done an excellent job as ride coordinator and is retiring to be replaced by Tim Fontaine.

The 2\* group continues to thrive with a typical attendance of 10 and a maximum of 16. 54 rides were organised in total. This section is the backbone of the club and the entry point for most new riders. The rides are often oversubscribed over a week in advance, which flags up an issue to which I'll return. There is scope for more than one ride per weekend and I'll return to this later.

The 3\* section is in deep trouble. Ride leaders continue to leave and this year we will probably lose another two bringing the total to 8 in the last 3 years. Some have relocated, others ride more with the 2 or 4\* groups, and others have drifted away. The number of rides organised has fallen from 44 to 37, and the average attendance hovers around 4 with a maximum of 9. Baska Karch has done a valiant job with scant resources but something needs to change if the section is to attain a critical mass of leaders and riders. More of this anon. The Regent's Park Saturday rides have seen a sharp fall in

numbers usually attracting 4 – 5 as opposed to nearly double that number recently. Worryingly, there have been no new recruits in the last year

The 4\* section, though small is vibrant and enthusiastic. Julia Moye has continued to organise a good variety of rides and the attendance is similar to last year.

The top male and female riders in terms of rides ridden were, as last year, Colin Hartridge-Price and Inez Thorn though the margin of victory has narrowed slightly.

The club, in my view faces 3 significant challenges that are not separate issues but interact and compound one another. They are :-

- 1) Lack of ride leaders
- 2) Barriers to new riders, specifically the fact that 2\* rides are frequently oversubscribed a week or more in advance.
- 3) An ageing demographic.

The most pressing by far of these is the lack of leaders. Unless more people are prepared to lead a ride, the club will wither and die. It is really that simple.

The second issue is that the 2\* (the usual starting point for new riders) rides are often oversubscribed a week or so out, so newcomers may be put off when making a casual enquiry and may not check back later when riders may have dropped out. We'll never know how many have been deterred by this. The fact that we are not tied to a small geographical area, and London has a lot of competing offerings may be a factor. We used to get a lot of riders from the EU and elsewhere who were in London for a year or two, but that source of supply has dried up.

There is little to be done about the fact that the average age of the club's riders has steadily increased over the years, and rides have slowed (the 3\* riders of 20 years ago were roughly where the 4\* group are now) other than to broaden our entry point for most riders. The fact that the demographic skews older may deter younger people.

I have a few ideas that may address some of these issues. Rather than having a 2\* and a 3\* ride coordinator, it may be better to have two 2/3\* coordinators with responsibility being divided geographically, and to badge longer rides, even if moderately paced as 3\* rides to encourage movement between groups, and to break down the tribalism that is unhelpful. In that way, more than one 2\* ride can take place at weekends in different areas and, with luck, the 3\* section nursed back to health. If it really works well an additional 2\* coordinator can be appointed along with a 3\* coordinator once the 3\* section attains critical mass. In addition, ride leaders and coordinators should consider to the following :-

- Avoid very long train journeys and expensive lunches with no cheaper options. Younger people are often short of both time and money!

- Consider half day rides or short day rides – this would be more applicable to brisk 3\* rides e.g. ride out from London to Hertford and train back from the outskirts.
- Consider more themed/place of interest rides – this would be more applicable to 1\* rides
- Consider Saturday rides – pubs may be less formal than on Sundays and there isn't a huge difference in traffic nowadays except early mornings.

I would like to thank all the serving and retiring committee members who I haven't namechecked for the excellent work done over the past year. In particular I would like to place on record appreciation of the sterling work done by Nick Bloom who is retiring having served on the committee for well over two decades, and held to offices of Secretary, Chair and ride coordinator over the years.

Finally, keep it safe, have fun and may the wind follow you!

Paul Foster

Chair.