

## Vernon's Chronicles of a Time Triallist - Newbury Road Club 12Hr Time Trial 11/06/17

*I marshalled at this event last year, watched the riders go by and thought, I reckon I could do that. I went online and looked at distances covered by the slower riders and thought, I could do that. So in January I filed my entry and paid my money. I spoke to a couple of friends who had completed it, about training for it, and they said, "you can do that".*

*In January I started doing some training by going on long rides starting at 50 miles trying to average 20mph. Over the following months I did a few more at 60 miles and 80 miles both at 20 mph+. The veteran Standard for a 63 year old is 181.17 miles. Approximately 15mph. I planned on trying to get to 200 miles so would need to average 16.67 mph. The theory behind the training rides was to get used to pushing myself hard over a shorter distance and therefore have no trouble riding slower for further.*

*Having done the 25 mile TT down in Wales in early May I then took the month off from serious riding and just did the cafe rides with Jeff and the short cycle to and from work. I was trying to conserve my energy, relax my muscles and avoid injury. The day before the ride I took all my food and drink supplies round to Dave Triska who has going to handle the first changeover at about 4 hours in. We discussed a bit of tactics and how he was going to handle the stop. Jon Cooke had kindly volunteered to do the stop at 8 hours so Dave would fill him in on the details of what to do.*

*I had a 07:28 start so I loaded the car with everything on Saturday night, bike, spare wheels, food and drink for the first 4 hours and riding kit. I use tubular tyres so a puncture would be the end of it for me, hence the spare wheels. I got up at 4:45 sorted my breakfast and drove to the layby at The Bull Inn. The course consists of a 20 mile loop on the A31 that starts at the Chawton roundabout and goes to the Coxbridge roundabout where you head back to the start. After 8 hours they reduce the loop to 14.81 miles by making the circuit between Alton and Farnham.*

*I parked at the Bull so that I could leave my wheels in the car and then rode to the HQ giving me a warm up of about 10 miles. Arriving at the HQ I signed in and collected my numbers. It was warmer than I thought, so trying to get into my speed suit whilst sweating was not an easy task and having zipped it up then realised I had forgotten to use any chamois butter. I knew there was no way I could get it off again as I realised I was cutting it fine to get to the start. Unzip the front, stuff handfuls of cream down where it was supposed to be and zip it backup. So much for cool, calm and collected.*

*Back on the bike and head off to the start about 2 miles away. You get used to seeing a steady stream of riders heading to the start but this morning I did not see anybody. Was I going the right way? I arrived at the start as number 27 was getting his 30 second warning, definitely cutting it fine. 12 hours of riding to come and I was almost late for my own start.*

*3...2...1...Go, and off I set trying hard not to ride too fast and remembering not to push it hard up the hills. The first 10 miles go by and I am at the Coxbridge roundabout for the first turn. I get 3/4 of the way round and am turning back into wind, I had a 10mph tailwind all the way up which I had not really noticed. The wind catches my 80mm deep front rim and gives it a twitch, nothing serious but enough to make me realise I need to watch out for that as the day continues and tiredness sets in. Now on the return leg and I start noticing the wind. I hunch down on the extensions and try to keep my watts around 100. A rider's power is measured by his FTP (Functional Threshold Power). Mine is low at 200 Watts and the aim of today was to ride at 50% power. On the hills I am getting up to 120-130 watts but back off on the flats.*

*I continue like this for the next 2 3/4 hours before I have to stop for a pee break in the bushes. I am averaging about 18mph, above my target but I'm feeling OK with it. Riders with higher numbers have been coming past me at regular intervals. Some creeping past but those with the zero numbers 30, 40, 50 fly past with very little kit on their bikes. They have support teams that will feed them bottles and food all day as they come past their feed stations. These are the guys that will get the high mileages.*

*I plod on at my current speed getting to learn all the fresh road kill as I pass by. Dead crow on its back, squashed bird, dead rat, badger in the outside lane, fox in the outside lane. I also learn how to pick my way*

through the bad road surface. Normally I am flying along and ride near the centre of the road in the bad patches. Now I am chugging along near the gutter picking the smoothest route and avoiding the worst bits. Surprisingly I manage a reasonable smooth ride on the Chawton Roubaix loop. Time passes and I am coming past the Hen & Chicken where we had agreed to put the feed station.

About 3 1/2 hours in and I spot Dave at the side of the Road holding up some flapjack bars. I wasn't expecting him so had not slowed down. I make a grab for them and an epic fail as I miss and they go tumbling to the ground. I carry on and make another circuit so by the time I get back to him 4 3/4 hours have gone by. I pull up and he shoves a drink bottle in one hand and a bag of food in the other. Whilst I am glugging down electrolytes and stuffing my comfort food into me (mini pork pies and scotch eggs) he is busy replenishing my bottles, energy bars and gels. We discuss my progress 85 Miles at an average speed of 18.4 mph. I am going too fast and I need to slow down. I admit that I have started to feel it at this pace and the return leg into wind is starting to cause problems. By now it has crept up to 16mph and if I do not slow down I will burn myself out battling the wind. A quick pose for the camera, I say my thanks and head off again knowing that my next stop will not be for another 4 hours.

I drop my power to conserve energy and my lap times increase by about 10 mins. The gain in time is on the Coxbridge to Chawton return leg of the circuit. The outbound leg is staying around the same time as I am being pushed by the wind and am at times only pushing 60 watts to maintain speed.

The afternoon wears on and the miles pass by. Whilst my times are staying steady the increasing wind is really getting to me and I start wishing the long loop could be over and done with. Swapping to the short circuit would reduce headwind time and remove two hills from the circuit.

8 hours have passed and I approach the Alton roundabout hopeful that I will be waved onto the short circuit. As I come round the curve of the roundabout I see the marshal and he puts out his left arm signifying that I must carry on down to Chawton. My heart sinks at the thought of the next 6 miles of bad road surface and hills. I make the loop and head onto the Holybourne - Coxbridge section. As I pass the Timekeepers position in the layby I see a sign instructing riders to ride the Main Circuit. Yes!!! No more bottom loop! I feel exhaustion setting in and have started coasting whenever I can. I roll past the timekeepers doing 20mph running on pure tailwind.

I get to my feed station 8 1/2 hrs in and am greeted by Jon with my wife and daughter in attendance as well. I get off the bike, is that a wise thing to do ?

Jon and my daughter restock the bike whilst I refuel but I can't eat. Fluids are going down OK but I just don't have the energy or inclination to chew. I bend over gripping my knees and my wife massages my shoulders. "You're doing well, you can do this" she says. She has not been my greatest supporter for the whole idea of me doing it. I was too old, I was not fit enough, I was risking my health. On hearing those words of support I nearly burst into tears. I was definitely tired and emotional. Luckily I had my head down and my mirrored visor on so she could not see how bad I was. 7 minutes rest I was back at it, 146 miles covered and 3 1/4 hours left. I would need to average 17 mph to hit my target distance. Mission Impossible. I decided to forget all about targets and just concentrate on finishing.

I still couldn't eat and seemed to be running on God knows what. I knew I needed to keep hydrated so kept swigging at my fluids and even managed a gel or two. Those caffeine gels are brilliant and did keep me going when I felt my mind was starting to fatigue at various points during the day. The other problem I had was that in my rush to get to the start I had not switched the auto pause off on the Garmin. All the pee breaks and feed stops meant that the timer was running somewhere around 20 minutes out but I did not know precisely. At about 10 hours I had a third and final pee break at which point I checked the time on my phone. Yes I was somewhere around 20-25 minutes out on my timer.

By now the wind which had peaked at 20mph was down to about 14mph and at some points on the return leg I was down to 12mph. At around 170 miles whilst battling up the long hill after the Bentley bypass cramp started to set in. I had been pushing about 115 watts and had let it creep up to around 135 watts. The left thigh suddenly started to seize. I thought "no, no, no, not now" and immediately dropped my power. This had the effect of allowing the muscles to stiffen even more. Back onto power again but hovering somewhere around 85

watts for a while allowed everything to return to normal. I was going to have to watch that as I knew it would return again if I gave it a chance.

I carried on down to Alton again coasting on all the downhill sections and on the flats wherever possible. Back towards the feed stop where I pulled up to check with Angie what the time was and how much longer was left. 30 to 40 minutes was the answer. Oh God now is not the time for a vague answer. Almost crying again at the thought that it would soon be over I managed to restart and get clipped in. I checked my Garmin and roughly worked out at what time I would be finished. Knowing that I only had half an hour or so left I went for it. I could do a 10 mile TT in under that and being on the downhill section with a tailwind I gave it all I had towards Farnham. I checked my mileage, it was around 189. So close but I could get closer if I gave it everything. Cresting the rise, where the traditional start for most time trials are, the timekeepers shouted out 6 minutes left. Pushing on down the Bentley bypass whilst not setting off the cramps I made it to the next set of timekeepers. "Is that it" I shouted but couldn't make out what their reply was. What the hell, take no chances, and push on to the next one stationed just past the Hen & Chicken which is where my support was. I pulled up at the timekeeper and asked "Is that it?". She checked my number and looked at her clock and said yes. Oh thank God.

I got off the bike and hobbled across to the other side of the carriageway where Angie and my daughter had walked down to meet me. We headed back to the car with me riding as it was just too hard to walk the 150 yards. Once there they quickly wrapped me up as I had started shivering and I got some protein drink and a small bit of energy bar down. From there it was back to HQ to hand in my numbers, sign out and get a cup of coffee. I couldn't even face a bit of cake I was that bad.

One cup of coffee later and we headed back to the Bull Inn where my car was parked. By then my brain was functioning well and I drove my car home.

My Garmin gave me a reading of about 197 miles, Strava says 199 miles and the provisional results 202.7 miles. I quite happily take the last one.

There were 47 starters, but only 30 finished. I came 27th. Position isn't as important as finishing as far as I am concerned. The winner Andy Jackson number 20 completed 300 miles. An amazing feat.

I would like to thank everyone who supported me on the day. It is surprising how much it bolsters you to be cheered on by friends. Even having spectators from other clubs cheering you in the last few hours helps keep you going. It was so much harder to do from a mental standpoint than I thought. When your body is getting exhausted you really have to work at keeping your mind going. Grim determination not to fail is how I kept my legs going.

Special thanks to Dave Triska and his son for their help before and during the event. Jon Cooke for giving up his time to organise my second feed stop. And to my wife who let me get this out of my system by allowing me to do it. Especially as she was really worried about the state I was in when I left the second feed stop. When I was being fed and warmed at the end she asked me if I would want to do it again I said:

"Ask me again in 6 months"

Cheers, Vernon.