

04 Promotional Events

Key Principle

Promotional events can encourage non-cyclists to try cycling; or occasional and less-adventurous cyclists to try some cycling activity that is a little different, or more challenging. Events can provide a stimulus to move people on from thinking about cycling (or cycling more often) to actually doing so. Events can introduce people to cycling in a non-threatening fun setting with an opportunity to meet other people facing the same challenge and with full support available. This can help people to realise the possibilities that cycling has to offer them, either as a beginner, or as a way into more challenging or regular cycling activities. Cycling festivals can help familiarise people with the range of organisations, resources, services and opportunities available locally to enable them to start cycling, or cycle more.

Background

Promotional cycling events have tended to emerge out of one, or more, of the following objectives:

- A desire to encourage non-cyclists to try using a bike by providing an environment where they will be reassured by the knowledge that there will be many other participants like them.
- An effort to raise awareness about the benefits of cycling, and its status, by focussing attention on an event, or series of events, with elements of fun and sometimes also a challenge.
- To raise awareness about a variety of different cycling-related initiatives in an area, by creating an opportunity for them to coalesce into a critical mass and demonstrate what they have to offer.
- To promote sustainable tourism and / or increased visitors to an area.

Promotional events can broadly be grouped into three categories:

- Events where the main focus is a **mass participation ride**, or series of rides of varying degrees of difficulty, contained within a specific timeframe (e.g. a day, weekend or week).
- A series of rides, of varying or increasing levels of difficulty, **regularly repeated** (e.g. weekly or monthly), or run over a period of time (e.g. between Spring and Autumn).
- **Cycling festivals** comprising a variety of cycling-related activity – such as films, stunt shows, cycle repair workshops – which may or may not include organised rides. The latter may comprise a stand-alone event, or be part of a larger event covering a related theme – such as sustainable transport, green living, or active lifestyles. Cycling festivals may take place over a day, a weekend, or a week to nine days (two weekends and the weekdays between).

Mass participation rides

These tend to fall into three categories, each catering for slightly different level of cycling experience.

Endurance rides

Events aimed at sporting cyclists, often involving an element of competition: e.g. Cyclo-sportives (where riders are individually timed); Audax rides (where riders aim to cover a set route within a maximum time limit); Polaris Challenge (mountain bike endurance/orienteering event). Most of these events cover longer distances and/or challenging terrain. Participants are likely to be keen regular cyclists, and the scope for increasing their activity is limited, although they may use commuter cycling and other utility trips as a component of their training and preparation for an event.

Enjoyment-focussed rides

These are often charity based events aimed generally at reasonably competent cyclists, but with a more sociable than challenging flavour, and unlikely to involve elements of competition: e.g. the London to Brighton Bike Ride; the Great Nottinghamshire Bike Ride. These rides are likely to appeal to occasional and infrequent cyclists and may provide a trigger for them to increase the amount of cycling they do to 'get fit' for the challenge.

Easy rides

Rides aimed at novice and occasional cyclists, which tend to be relatively short and are often organised by a local cycling campaign or club as a means of introducing new people to cycling with their group. Local councils and health authorities are often keen to support these types of promotional cycling events as they do most entice new participants into this physical activity. Their support can be in the form of organisation/funding/publicity and insurance, providing any necessary training for ride leaders, laying on refreshments, etc. A variation on this type of activity is 'health rides', sometimes organised or supported by a local primary care trust. Health rides may be targeted at specific groups, such as coronary patients, 'exercise on prescription' schemes or simply marketed at all potential cyclists but with an emphasis on the health benefits of cycling.

Case studies

The Great Nottinghamshire Bike Ride: This is an annual event, now in its 26th year. Initiated originally by the Nottingham cycle campaign group, Pedals, its organisation was taken over by Nottinghamshire County Council when the event became too large for the volunteer group to manage. Participation is now capped at 5000. It comprises a choice of three rides of 50, 18 or 7 miles around the Vale of Belvoir lanes to the south of Nottingham. Riders are encouraged to raise sponsorship money for nominated charities.

CTC Five Miles to Fabulous: A number of 5 mile rides, held at different venues around the country on the same weekend (2007 was the inaugural year) to provide a fun, supportive and encouraging experience for novice women cyclists. Five miles was chosen to show that short trips can easily be made by bike. The events also included maintenance tips, general riding advice and a café stop.

Regularly repeated rides

Many cycling clubs (social and racing) organise regular rides for their members, but the vast majority of existing and potential cyclists will never be a member of a cycling club yet would still welcome the opportunity, on occasion, to participate

in a sociable group ride. Those new to cycling often value the chance to ride with a small group, as this enables them to gain confidence as a road user and find the best places to ride in the local area, and helps dispel feelings of being 'in the minority'. Some local authorities, often with the support and assistance of local cycling groups, are running regular rides, often confined to the summer months, aimed at this market.

Case studies

Nottinghamshire's Rural Rides: The County Council organises these monthly rides which are publicised via leaflets, the [website](#) and supported by members of the local cycle campaign and CTC. The rides are designed for casual cyclists, guided, following quiet lanes and off-road routes at a leisurely pace and there are frequent stops to take in points of interest or just to admire the view.

Merseyside Bike Time Rides: This is a programme of leisure rides aimed at building the confidence of less experienced cyclists. The programme is coordinated by [Merseyside TravelWise](#) in partnership with Merseyside Cycle Campaign and Healthstart (a local health promotion agency). It is aimed at families and beginners and takes place on Sunday afternoons, twice a month. The rides take around 2-3 hours. Rides were originally scheduled only for summer but due to the high demand for the programme in recent years they have continued throughout the winter. The highest number of cyclists on one ride so far has been 140 and the major proportion are new riders and women. The rides are a mixture of on road and off road cycling and it is widely promoted throughout the local area.

Luton's monthly lunchtime cycle rides: Luton BC offer a weekday monthly [lunchtime ride](#) led by one of their cycle trainers. The aim is to give less confident cyclists the opportunity to ride with others and to learn basic tips about road positioning by following the trainers (although the rides are not billed as 'cycle training' and participants are responsible for their own safety). The rides also aim to give local office workers the incentive to take a little exercise during their lunch hour.

Lancaster's Women on Wheels - A guided ride programme for women: Lancaster is one of the Cycling Demonstration Towns. During summer 2007 they promoted a series of guided rides to encourage women who might not have the confidence they need to cycle on their own, to get out and about with other like minded women. The rides were publicised in leaflets, council newsletters and via [websites](#).

Cycling for health rides (Cumbria County Council): "If you would like to have a go at cycling but you haven't ridden a bike in many years, you aren't confident to go out on your bike on your own, or you have never learned to ride – the good news is the [Cycling for Health](#) project can help you get back in the saddle." This initiative is funded by North Cumbria Primary Care Trust together with Sport England, and is delivered through Cumbria County Council. It provides support for new and returning cyclists in a variety of ways: Cycling Refresher Days for 'rusty' cyclists; Cycle Maintenance Workshops; regular Cycling for Health Group Rides; Family Fun Cycle Event Days. The initiative even offers free bike loan to those without access to a machine who would like to participate in the activities on offer.

Cycling festivals

The value of cycling festivals is that they draw together a range of cycling-related activity, offering both participation and spectator activities, and thus appeal to a

much wider audience than stand-alone bike rides. This does, of course, require a good deal of organisation and preparation, and festival organisers typically cite the need for at least a six, and ideally twelve, month lead-in time.

Typical components

- Cycling films.
- 'Dr Bike' (cycle repair) clinic.
- Stunt demonstrations e.g. on Mountain or BMX-style bikes.
- Go-Ride skills training for children.
- Photo competition.
- Cyclists' breakfasts (or similar) – for those who travel to festival events by bike.
- Displays of different types of bikes, often including unusual bikes, like recumbents, tricycles, tandems, triplets, and those adapted for use by people with special needs.
- Try-out opportunities on unusual machines.
- Information on maps, guides, books, routes, etc, relating to cycling – particularly those relevant to the local area.
- Novelty displays, e.g. a juice making machine powered by a bicycle.
- Displays of those organisations involved in promoting and facilitating cycling in the area, e.g. local cycle campaign groups, recreational cycling clubs, cycle training organisations, cycle courier services, etc.
- Local cycle retailer stands.
- Some festivals include organised bike rides, which may be themed, e.g. a cycling treasure hunt.

Case studies

The Isle of Wight Cycling Festival: Organised by Isle of Wight Council together with Wight Tourism and local cycling clubs, this event runs for a week in September. Its aim is "...to establish the Isle of Wight as a leading destination for cyclists, as well as providing a programme of events that would benefit the Island's cycling community". Events include the 'Sink or Swim' competition (where homemade pedal powered crafts attempt to make it across the River Medina without getting wet), a mountain bike stunt display, and a 65 mile road race around the Island's coastline.

Craven Cycling Festival: An initial 'prologue' event was held in May 2007, wrapped around the established Etape du Dales cycle challenge ride. The festival centred on the town of Settle, and pulled together a variety of cycling-related activities, including both led and self-guided rides; introduction to mountain biking; Go Ride skills training for local school children; a bike film and pasta evening; bike and rail trips; MTB stunt displays; Dr Bike checks; etc. It is likely that this will become an annual event, aimed at both attracting cycling tourists to

the Yorkshire Dales and to encouraging all-round cycle use among the local population.

York Rally: A two day cycling event, organised by the CTC, held in June each year on York's Knavesmire racecourse. The rally attracts up to 20,000 participants, with its showcase of contemporary cycling equipment and accessories, as well as vintage bike displays, frame building, health and fitness advice, time trials and track racing.

Cumbria's Bike Fest: A week-long event held in May 2007, set up by Cumbria Tourism, comprising a variety of initiatives around the county including guided rides, maintenance lessons, treasures hunts, demonstrations, etc. The festival culminating in a three day gathering centred on the Lowther Deerpark south of Penrith, offering stunt ride displays, skills training for children, mountain bike instruction for adults, cycling films and an MTB bike marathon in the surrounding hills. This is likely to become an annual event (more information on www.lakedistrictoutdoors.co.uk).

Publications and references

National Bike Week

National Bike Week runs for a week in June each year. The web site includes listings of all events registered, with a facility to search by location, type of event, date, or target audience (see www.bikeweek.org.uk).

Bike festival web sites

[Abergavenny Festival of Cycling](#)

[Craven Cycling festival](#)

[CTC York Rally](#)

[Cumbria Bikefest](#)

[Isle of Wight Cycling Festival](#)

[Mildenhall Cycling Rally](#)

[Pendle Bike Festival](#)

Event Organisers

[Bike Events](#) is the organiser of many fund raising and recreational cycle rides in the UK.

[Cycling Projects](#) run the Cycling for Health scheme in the north-west of England, an eight to twelve week cycling programme to support and encourage people on the Exercise on Prescription scheme to have a more active lifestyle and have fun.

[Cycle Rides Ltd](#) manage the London to Brighton Bike Ride every year on behalf of the British Heart Foundation. 27,000 riders take part in Europe's biggest fund raising bike ride.

[Pennine Events](#) is an event management, promotion and cycle activity operation, specialising in organising events that promote healthy lifestyles, physical activity and encourage cycling.