

THE TANDEM TART CHALLENGE

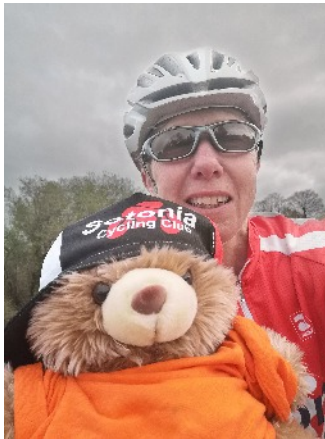
Partner number 63, Teddy the Bear, Sotonia CC, rides with Mary Corbett
Lockdown CC 10 on the P164c 13 April 2020

Teddy was feeling a bit apprehensive come race day, his quiet little world was about to come crashing down on him – not literally I hoped. Many of us knew just how that felt.

As Teddy doesn't listen to the radio or watch television, I explained to him the difficulties that us humans are experiencing at the moment but told him not to worry and that everything would be alright. I told him that if we saw any other cyclists, runners or walkers, I would be moving away from them by at least two metres (even more if it was safe to do so) and not to be alarmed if I seemed to be steering us into the middle of the road. I also explained to him that the P164c was on our doorstep and that the entire loop was only 15 miles in total. Teddy nodded in approval and with a measure of excitement, got himself kitted out in his cycling regalia ready for our departure.

We decided to take along one of his friends to act as an official to ratify our ride. On asking for a volunteer, Grubb the Grub put his hand up first (or would have done if he had hands) so he was placed in my back pocket ready for his little adventure.

Teddy's friends then wished him good luck and after saying their goodbyes, he boarded Trixie Bumble Barrow for our short ride to the start at Boltons Bench.



It was a bitterly cold morning and the wind felt ominous. We posed for the obligatory pre-race selfie photos, presented ourselves to the start timekeeper (me), and after ensuring that Teddy was ready and that Grubb was alert, I counted us down and off we went.

It is always a lovely downhill start on this course but today we were battling into a fierce headwind. Trixie was being thrashed about and Teddy was having difficulty staying upright. "My – this is a bit challenging" he said and I agreed whole heartedly. To take Teddy's mind off the struggle conditions, I

pointed out all the beautiful sights, sounds and smells which very often go unnoticed by us humans in our busy topsy-turvy world. "How could anyone not appreciate this" said Teddy appropriately.

The first of the big hills was soon upon us, a steepy climb which was a tad difficult but nothing we couldn't handle with a push and a few puffs. Once over the top, we picked up our speed and I heard Teddy woo-hoo with joy. That joyous sound was shortly replaced with a bit of a bear growl and a roar as we descended Matley Hill at a rate of knots - a bit too fast for Teddy's liking!

We had now settled into our ride and had accepted the difficult conditions we were under. Teddy announced that although he had been a bit nervous to begin with, he was enjoying himself enormously and how much fun it was to be out and about.

"Why are there locked gates at the entrances to the Forest car parks" asked Teddy a little while later. I explained to him that not all humans are acting responsibly and some were flouting the rules by driving out to the Forest car parks, spreading their germs and endangering others who are more vulnerable. Teddy found that very difficult to understand.

After Pig Bush, we were glad to be out of the open Forest and into the trees, giving us a bit of shelter from the wind. We rode up and down the many ups



and downs and twists and turns leading up to the first left hand turn at Leygreen Farm. I took a glance back to make sure Teddy was still securely fixed to his saddle, which he was, so on we went.

Leygreen Farm was taken with caution. This corner is always gritty and very tight. Beryl's gang, a little family of donkeys are known to reside here from time to time, ensuring maximum disruption to motorists and cyclists alike. I adore Beryl's gang. Today however, they were nowhere in sight. Probably tucked away behind some gorse bushes gaining shelter and munching away on their breakfast.

Trixie Bumble Barrow has a habit of wanting to steer into the ditch on this next section of the course, the camber forcing us to steer with all our might. I told Teddy to hold on tight as we pedaled along and he did just that.

There was a car approaching us from the left at Ipley Cross. We were both a bit done in at this stage of proceedings so we slowed even more to negotiate the turn. What happened next was quite exhilarating. For the first time in the race I was able to whack Trixie BB into the big chainering and we flew up the steep hill at Ferny Crofts at 100mph. "One

last push" I said to Teddy as we approached the summit, so he pushed and pushed with all his little might until we made it over the top. "Don't forget to lean into these bends" I called as we picked up speed on the descent to the finish. As we crossed the paint mark on the road, Teddy shouted out our number and we came to an abrupt halt so that I could stop the watch.

All this time, Grubb the Grub remained securely fixed in my pocket with his eyes peeking over the top. I showed him the watch and he agreed that the finish timekeeper (me) 😊 could give us an official time of 47.11 after knocking off a minute for packing away the watch at the start and retrieving it again at the finish.

"Well done Teddy the Bear" I said with a smile on my face. "You were brilliant." Teddy was looking a bit bedraggled by now but was nonetheless beaming from ear to ear. "Will you take me out again please" he asked. "Of course, but only as part of our once a day permitted exercise" I explained. Teddy understood.

"I know it's not been very long but I'm really missing my friends like mad" said Teddy on the journey home. "It won't be long now" I reassured him. "After being apart, it will make it all the more special when you meet up with them all again" I said with emotion, fully understanding where poor Teddy was coming from.



The ride back was much easier with a bit of a cross wind keeping us on our toes and paws. On arrival back home, we celebrated with a Teddy the Bear's picnic. His family of furry friends were all invited and they were soooo delighted that he had returned back to them safe and well. As a special treat Teddy tucked into some Manaka honey and a hard-boiled egg. Grubb the Grub gave a detailed account of his ride in my pocket to a more than captivated audience and everyone marvelled at Teddy's courage and success.

"When this is all over, do you think your world will ever return to how it was" asked Teddy thoughtfully. "I hope not" I replied in all sincerity. "I hope that this will be a time for reflection, a time to realise what is so important in our lives and a time for the powers that be to invest in us humans and re-build our crumbling foundations. Teddy and his friends nodded in agreement.

If all goes to plan, we too will return safe and well to each other in the not too distant future and once again be able to celebrate our friendships and the many things in life which are so important to us all.

The End.

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