

Sportive Masterclass

CONQUER YOUR FIRST SPORTIVE

Doing your first long-distance mass event and have training, gear and fuel queries? Anna Gardiner is here to help...

Cycling is experiencing a surge in popularity similar to the post-2012 Olympics boom. Many of us enjoyed the freedom and safety of the empty roads in the lockdowns of 2020 and 2021. There was a thrill for newer cyclists of reaching further distances, higher elevations and rides of longer duration. For the experienced cyclist, there were extra opportunities to spend increasing FTP (functional threshold power; roughly your average power for an hour) on an indoor trainer or head out in the light evenings and rack up miles without normal life commitments getting in the way.

With all these on-bike gains plus a post-pandemic urge to take on new challenges and explore new scenery, sportives are a perfect way to combine these dynamics.

In a sportive – a mass-participation, non-competitive event – you can test your long-distance legs on a different stretch of road with comfort stops en route; and often a medal, sense of achievement or Strava kudos as a reward. Multi-day adventures such as Haute Route events can also be a great chance to travel abroad and

“IN A SPORTIVE, YOU CAN TEST YOUR LONG-DISTANCE LEGS ON A DIFFERENT STRETCH OF ROAD, AND GET A MEDAL AS A REWARD”

tick off exciting achievements on your bucket list.

Andy Cook, a lifelong cyclist and organiser of sportives such as Land’s End to John O’Groats (LEJOG) and The Dragon Ride, has seen a big rise in sportive participants, especially in corporate and charity challenges. As events become more accessible, relatively inexperienced cyclists can sign up but don’t have the knowledge of how to prepare.

Those who come from other sports might be confident cycling solo or with a couple of people up to 50 miles. RideLondon with 25,000 participants is another level. As Andy says, “If you prepare properly, you’ll enjoy rather than endure it.” And with that in mind, we’ll hand you over to Andy for his advice on how to smash your first sportive...

Right Honing your climbing skills is essential for many sportives

Below Take hydration tabs to pop into your water bottle



“SPORTIVES ARE A PERFECT WAY TO COMBINE YOUR POST-PANDEMIC FITNESS GAINS AND URGE TO TAKE ON NEW CHALLENGES”



Sportive Tips

10 steps to success

Here's how to prep for the big day, from kit to tactics and rules

01

What do I need to wear?

● Having the correct clothing is essential on a long event. Good quality, worn-in shorts and socks, chamois cream and no underwear will all help reduce the risk of chafing. Also necessary is a cycling top with back pockets, a base layer – even if the weather is good, as it provides an extra layer between your skin and the road should you come off – and packable waterproof jacket. Check the weather forecast and remember lightweight layers are your friend.

“GOOD-QUALITY, WORN-IN SHORTS AND SOCKS, CHAMOIS CREAM AND NO UNDERWEAR WILL ALL HELP REDUCE CHAFING RISK”

Right Don't forget to snack regularly along the way

Below A watch or bike computer can display the route for you



02

What kit do I need?

● In addition to the obvious bike, helmet and shoes, other essentials are: lights, nutrition, water bottles, a phone, inner-tube spares, gear hanger (a small bike part that connects the rear derailleur to the bike frame) and tools. Good-to-have items are a smart watch or bike computer, preferably with the route loaded, sunglasses, gloves, small first-aid kit and sun cream.

03

What if I have mechanical issues?

● Depending on the event, there are often stops en route with mechanics to help with technical malfunction. However, it's worth practising tyre changes and having an overview of bike mechanics so that you're skilled and confident enough to manage independently if you're a long way from help.

04

Do I need to know the route?

● It's best to have an idea of the route, especially for smaller-scale or longer-distance events as it will help you know what to expect. Some sportives have marshals, but don't rely on them. Look for the coloured arrows, but make sure that you're following the correct ones if the event has more than one distance. Ideally, you'll have a smartwatch, phone on holder or bike computer with the route loaded. Read the briefing pack carefully so that you know where landmarks such as big climbs and stops are.

05

What kind of bike do I need?

● A road bike is preferable, ideally with 25-28mm tyres, though people do take part on all sorts of bikes. We would highly recommend a bike fit where expert fitters will ensure the

bike is set up to your frame, making the bike as comfortable as possible and helping prevent injury.

06

How do I learn to ride in a pack?

● The short answer is practice! One of the most important aspects of sportive training is riding in a group. Most local cycling clubs welcome beginners and can demonstrate cycling etiquette in a pack situation as well as giving advice on manoeuvring around potholes, pedestrians, cars, lights, tight turns, downhills and other hazards. Become comfortable being amongst other cyclists so that you won't be intimidated on the day when others are nearby, and you won't endanger yourself and others. It's worth remembering that you save 30% energy sitting behind someone's wheel, so it's worth the effort of learning how to do it.

07

What do I do about food?

● It's vital to practise nutrition in training as experimenting with something new may lead to stomach issues. Sportives generally have food stops – details will be in the briefing – but take essentials with you. Hydration tabs are a good way to ensure you're enjoying the right mix of carbohydrates and electrolytes as you can fill up water bottles at stops. Dr Andy Middlebrooke, an exercise physiologist and cyclist, recommends consuming 60-90g of carbohydrate and 500ml of fluid every hour during the ride.

“TAKE ESSENTIALS WITH YOU AND TRY TO CONSUME 60-90G CARBS AND 500ML OF FLUID EVERY HOUR”

08

How much training should I ideally do?

● It depends on your current aerobic engine, but time in the saddle is the most important factor in getting used to long rides. Ideally you'd find eight to 10hrs a week to train and do two shorter rides midweek, a quick session on a Saturday and a long ride of four-plus hours on Sunday. Access to an indoor bike is an advantage for training regularly, safely and consistently. Train for the course you're riding too. Sportives usually feature hills, so find some hills to challenge yourself on and build muscle strength and endurance.

09

What are the essential event tips?

● Remember to eat and drink on the way to the sportive's start so you begin your ride fuelled up.

“DON'T CARRY TWO WATER BOTTLES UP A MOUNTAIN IF YOU CAN REFILL AT THE TOP AND YOU DON'T THINK YOU'LL NEED THE WATER”

- Put your car keys in a safe place!
- Always take advantage of refreshment stops.
- Recce the course beforehand to familiarise yourself with the route.
- Don't get too carried away at the start: cycle at your own pace.
- If you find yourself riding solo, drop back. There'll be a group not far behind who you can ride with to help save energy and add fun.
- Don't carry two full water bottles up a mountain if you can refill at the top and you don't think you'll need the water: a full bottle can weigh as much as a bike frame!

Below Learning some basic hand signals is a must for group riding



10

What are the rules/etiquette of sportives?

● The Highway Code is key here but some other specifics include riding with approximately 1ft between your front wheel and the back wheel of the rider in front, and 1ft between your shoulders and the rider beside you. Be prepared on small or busy roads to ride in single file. Lead cyclists should navigate and point out hazards such as potholes, manhole covers and dangers in the road that could cause punctures or accidents, by shouting or using hand signals. Listen and repeat for cyclists behind you.

Sportive Workouts

It's training time...

Put the effort in now and you'll reap the rewards come the event

Workout 01
Hill repetitions – beginners through to experts (2 hours)

Coach Adam Duggleby MBE, Double Paralympic Champion and Level 3 British Cycling Coach (adamduggleby.com)

Why do it? Sportives are normally hilly, so hill reps are a must to improve your climbing ability.

Kit needed Preferably the bike you'll be doing the sportive on.

Nutrition Ideally drink 500ml energy drink per hour. You're unlikely to need solid food for a 2hr ride.

Warm-up 20 to 30min ride out in zone 2 (comfortable talking pace) to a 5min hill that's roughly 10% or more in gradient.

Main set Ride up the hill at 80-90% of maximum effort for 5mins (standing or seated is fine). Ride back down and have a minimum of 5mins rest between the repetitions. Repeat this a total of five times and on the final time, your effort should be 100%. If five reps feels too much, you should try to build up to it over a few weeks.

Cool-down Ride home steady.

Right No pain, no gain: hill reps are a training must

Far Right Go faster for longer, thanks to Workout 02



Workout 02
Speed endurance – a great session for experts (3½ hours)

Coach Andy Cook, Level 2 British Cycling Club Coach (andycookcycling.com)

Why do it? It increases Functional Threshold Power (FTP), which means you'll gain more power and speed through the pedal stroke. To find your FTP, you'll need an indoor trainer. This session will also help increase aerobic capacity and endurance.

Kit needed Preferably the bike you'll be doing the sportive on.

Nutrition Carbohydrate snack about 1hr before you start and 500ml of carbohydrate-based sports drink over the last hour before you start the ride. Then 60-90g of carbohydrate and 500ml of fluid every hour during the session.

Warm-up A 20min steady ride.

Main set Ride at 85-95% FTP for 75mins followed by a further 30mins at recovery rate before a second 75mins at 85-95% FTP.

Cool-down 15 to 20min steady ride.

"IT INCREASES YOUR FTP, WHICH MEANS YOU'LL GAIN MORE POWER AND SPEED THROUGH THE PEDAL STROKE"



ENTRY-LEVEL KIT

Complement your sportive debut with good-quality, affordable equipment...



- 01 Le Col Pro Seamless Cycling Bra £60**
● Comfortable and supportive, albeit not for the bigger-breasted woman, it's flexible so works when you're on the hoods or drops.
- 02 Van Rysel RR900 Ultralight Jacket £39.99**
● Great for drizzle up to moderate showers but, understandably at this price, won't withstand a downpour. Ultra-light, breathable and packs well.
- 03 Fat Lad At The Back Kit £99.99 (bib shorts); £64.99 (jersey)**
● As the name suggests, this is gear designed for the larger rider (but not just lads). Comfy, durable, looks good and great quality.
- 04 Triban GRVL 500 Shoes £49.99**
● As you'd expect from Decathlon, these are feature-packed at a great price. Power transfer's good, thanks to the nylon outsole, and the quality's impressive.
- 05 Tacx Flow Smart Turbo Trainer £269.99**
● Ease onto the start line in top condition with the help of the Bluetooth and ANT+ connectivity on this trainer that can tap into the likes of Zwift.

BEGINNER-FRIENDLY EVENTS

A trio to welcome you into our great sport...

Etape Caledonia 15 May 2022
● This sportive's good for newcomers as it's closed to traffic. There are 40- and 80-mile options. The terrain's pretty challenging but you'll take some comfort from the stunning views offered by the Scottish Highlands. Check the weather forecast beforehand.

Tour Of Cambridgeshire 3-5 June 2022
● This cycle bonanza features numerous ride options including your choice of a time-trial, plus 50-mile, 70-mile and 100-mile routes. As you'd expect from this part of the world, the terrain is pretty flat, but you'll still need to put in the training hours.

London To Brighton Cycle Ride 11 September 2022
● Once out of the city, this legendary 55-mile effort's mostly along quiet, flat country lanes passing through Mitcham, Carshalton and Haywards Heath before taking on the challenge of Ditchling Beacon, a mile-long climb to the top of the South Downs.