



Left to right: Dawn is always a long way into an overnight ride but gives an energy boost when it arrives. Early morning roads are wonderfully quiet. A misty sunrise on one of the bridges the Fen Bridges ride is named for

Bright ideas

- Sleep in as much as you can the day before.
- Conversely, accept that you might sleep badly due to being nervous. That way you won't fret so much if it happens.
- Use powerful lights! Riding in the dark is less about merely being seen [which is key for city riding] and more about seeing where you are going. I sometimes use my night-running headlamp – either around my forehead or around my bar bag.
- You tend to eat fewer snacks than you think you will but do bring some.
- Dawn will give you an energy boost. Hang on until then!
- Never drive after an all-night cycle excursion. It's not worth the risk.

and they cycled overnight to Brighton at a conversational pace, had breakfast there and headed home," Fridays organiser Titus 'Bob' Halliwell tells me over the phone. "They said: 'Let's do it again.' They brought friends along and it grew and grew."

Titus did his first Fridays ride in 2009. He soon started taking part in other cycling events, too, like the Dynamo, London-Edinburgh-London and Paris-Brest-Paris. The Fridays, he says, is a gateway drug.

In 2015 when Legg, who until then had done all the planning and admin, decided to step down, Titus and some other regulars asked if they could take on the job. "We all thought we'd do it for a couple of years," he says. "But some of us are still doing it." Newer members help, too. Today the club has 2,000 members.

The new leaders have been conscious of keeping Legg's ethos alive. "Anyone is welcome as long as you have a bicycle," Titus says. "It doesn't matter if it's a £50 mountain bike or a £5,000 road bike."

Other clubs can be quite misogynistic and all about performance, he says, but although there is still a male bias in the Fridays – around 40% of riders are women – that is not the mood here. "If you come on a ride, we'll get you there. It's a pleasure to see new riders arriving at a seaside town, realising they have cycled through the night. That is what keeps many of us going."

But what, I ask, happens

“Slowly you become aware of a shift in the quality of the darkness. You can see the landscape around you. The dawn chorus starts up”

if people are simply too slow? "There are a few rides where we have suggested quite strongly that people leave," Titus says. "But they are not left behind. It's done in agreement with them. Stronger riders may show them the way to the train station. You have to think about the benefit of the whole group. If it's really cold and 60 people end up standing about waiting for someone who is a lot slower, for example, it gets very cold."

As the Fens ride continued onwards that April morning, I was not at risk of falling behind but I was tired. When would the River Ouse cycle path end? And when would we see Ely Cathedral – the ship of the Fens – towering over the surrounding land and heralding the end of our tour?

Finally we arrived at Ely's Market Square.

Around us milled people who had just woken up, looking fresh and rested in the bright sunlight. After buying coffee and perusing the food stalls, we sat on a low wall to eat and chat. Soon I cycled back to the train station to take the train home for some sleep. Another night ride was over. ●

Back at Ely in the morning for coffee and farewells

