

George Brown – cyclist extraordinaire



This is a photo of George Brown, taken in July 1950 when he was 29 years old, showing him riding in a 12 hour time trial. The event started at Staplehurst, Kent, and continued to the Romney Marshes, where the photo was taken. It poured with rain for much of the 12 hours and George cannot remember the result - he would have covered some 210 miles. The bike was made to order by a Mr Stewart who had a small bike-making business in Streatham, and cost £40.

You can see the bike had no gears, and George rode the whole trial on a fixed wheel, which meant pedalling non-stop for 12 hours. George's outfit was regulation for the time: time trial cyclists had to wear black and were not allowed to indicate that they were taking part in what was termed a "road race". There were a number of feeding stations on the course; the staple diet was a custard tart slapped into the cyclist's hand as he passed. To get to the start at Staplehurst George had to cycle some 30 miles from his home in SE London. A lady in Staplehurst had a very large barn equipped with a lot of bunk beds where most of the riders slept before having breakfast at 4.30am and heading off to the 5.30am start. The cost of this B&B was around 3/- or 3/6d (15p-17½p in decimal money). At the end of the event George had to cycle the 30 miles back home. He is still riding 40 miles or so, two or three times a week, at the age of 84.

Thelma Brown