



LIFE MAGAZINES

MONTHLY A5 LOCAL LIFESTYLE MAGAZINES

TONYA'S CHALLENGE - The Circle of Life

Thirty years ago, one dark night in the winter of 1979, I was arrested in Hull city centre, drunk in charge of a bicycle, without lights, weaving in the wrong direction down a one-way street. Today, a similar offence would merit that modern badge of 'hoodie honour', an ASBO. Back then I suffered public humiliation at the hands of the Hull Daily Mail and, more painfully, a £25 fine. At the time you could buy four pints of Old Traditional for a quid, so this Draconian penalty had a sobering affect on my social life. Ever since – against all ecological, environmental and planet-saving arguments - part of me has secretly muttered the mantra, 'two wheels bad, four wheels good'.

"That incident in Hell" (as my father referred to it) had a lasting affect on my attitude to cycling. It convinced me that, were I ever to mount a bicycle again, there would have to be a very good reason.

At last, in 2010, I've found one. Some of you will already have heard of Tonya's Challenge, the "off-road charity bike ride" that's become a fixture in Nottinghamshire's sporting and social calendar. But, having only lived in Southwell since 2003, I'd wrongly assumed the "challenge" was one of those tough competitive events for committed cyclists with custom-built bikes and honed-buttocks. In reality it's a family-orientated "challenge" that attracts participants of all ages and standards, from all cycles of life. Since the inaugural "Tonya's Bike Ride", the event has increased in stature from around 30 cyclists in 2000 to over 500 in 2009, raising much-needed funds for the Southwell Care Project (SCP).

This success is the result of growing community support and the ongoing commitment of Anna Joyce and her intrepid team of volunteers. After establishing the 50k Viking Challenge in the Vale of Belvoir back in 1995, Anna joined Tonya's Challenge in 2008: "The original Tonya's Bike Ride was a much smaller affair but still managed to make about £1000 each year. We're hoping for 800 riders this April but the real target is to attract 1200 by 2012, raising £20,000 each year for the SCP."

Apart from getting fit and doing penance for my previous cycling crime, it's well worth getting involved in Tonya's Challenge 2010 simply to help the SCP, which struggles to organise local accommodation for adults with learning difficulties, to offer caring support and community-based activities, and also tries to encourage independence.

"Over the years, care for adults with learning difficulties has been something of a national embarrassment," says Steve Shatwell, project manager of SCP in Southwell and Newark. "After leaving school at 18, when the rest of us go to university or get jobs, what happens to adults who can't fend for themselves? They're unlikely to find work. Some clients have the safety net of their own families but, when the time comes and their parents die, they're uprooted and moved to accommodation away from their own community.

"Our dream would be to provide suitable local accommodation with our own community care support system. But we don't just want to own the building, we also want to own the care around it, employing local people to run and look after it. To do this we need to tackle an annual budget deficit of around £40,000, so Tonya's Challenge plays a big part in helping achieve our goals."

At the dawn of 2010, this fifty-something father-of-two - complete with post-Christmas fitness problems, boneshaker bike and sadistic saddle - has signed up to tackle the off-road challenge on Sunday April 25th. There's barely 100 training days to go, but if I can do it then, believe me, anyone can. So why not join now - either over the family-friendly five mile course, the more scenic ten or twenty mile distances, or even on the hardcore 37 mile marathon! – by going to www.tonyas-challenge.org or calling 01636 819066. What's your excuse?

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