

## CLASS AND COMPETITION: THE GENTRIFICATION OF SPORT CYCLING

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### Abstract

*Cycling as a popular and populist activity has had a complex relationship with class distinction. From the earliest years as a bourgeois leisure pursuit, through the gentlemen/player divisions of 19<sup>th</sup> century competition, the association with working-class toil and labour dominating professional cycle sport, to its recent reappearance as an aspirational activity used as a means of conspicuous consumption, a complex narrative of representations and realities of both class (and gender) have been present. Contemporary advocacy of cycling as a fitness and leisure pursuit contends with the legacy of this history whilst simultaneously appearing to promote imagery of the cycle as a carrier of middle class values of freedom and choice. (Note that whilst gender issues cannot be separated from representations of class, these will not form the principal area of study for this paper being a fruitful area of further study.)*

*External to these narratives within the representational history of cycling, class identity itself has been the subject of broader social transformation and has undergone considerable repositioning. The broad literature on this phenomenon provides a background against which the internal transformations of cycling and class can be examined.*

*Deriving from a longitudinal study of sporting cycle literature, this paper takes an historical overview of the representation of class in relation to a number of sporting cycling activities and examines the messages implicit in particular growth areas of participant and professional sport cycling to understand how these relate to wider changes in class identity.*

### Introduction

This paper arises from observations made in an ongoing reading of UK cycle sport literature from the 1950s onwards. Rather than an explicit content analysis I have tried to develop an impressionistic approach to the literature survey, concentrating on the broader impressions and tenor of race reports and biographies, rather than to extrapolate from a limited set of examples.

Although focusing on the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is important to go further back in order to contextualise these images in a wider cycling and social history, and to refer across to the parallel yet very separate world of continental cycle sport. The peculiar nature of British cycle sport has been well dealt with by a number of historians and their work is acknowledged here but not interrogated. External contexts, of course, provide the very substance against which identity can be formed, since identity formation is as much an exercise in comparison with 'otherness' as it is in self-development (see e.g. Woodward 2004).

It should be noted here that class is here related to social status and to social and cultural capital rather than in a strict socio-economic sense or in specific relation to the ownership of the means of production.

The first section of the paper draws on existing accounts of competitive and sport cycling in the latter part of the nineteenth century in order to make initial observations on the origins of the concepts of sport and class identity in relation to bicycling. A transition towards cycle sport as both public spectacle, on the one hand, and a participant activity on the other is noted, establishing the basis for more contemporary understandings of cycle sport. The use of class and gender imagery in cycle sport through the 20th century is discussed alongside broader socio-economic and socio-structural changes which have affected it. The concepts of social and cultural capital are used to help understand the more recent changes that can be observed in road sport cycling participation in the past decade

### **Cycle Sport in the Late Nineteenth Century**

At risk of gross over-simplification, in its 19<sup>th</sup> century usage, 'sport' indicated primarily an activity or pastime in the open air, not necessarily a competitive practice, hence the value of country sports. Further, it was associated in continental Europe with the activity of the English country gentleman, denoting a bourgeois pastime (Ebert 2004: 150). Hence, at the very outset we have a lexicographical problem with the changing uses of the terminology of sport, leisure and competition and their associated meanings and connotations.

The foundation of the Bicycle Touring Club in 1878 (to become the Cyclists' Touring Club in 1883), with its green uniform inaugurated the following year, can be read in this context as legitimating the leisure pursuit of cycling as a country sport. The adoption of uniforms, bugles and other such paraphernalia of early sporting societies created both identity and belonging and legitimised the pastime amongst its bourgeois participants – necessarily so because of the sheer cost of the new technologies. Further, as Mackintosh and Norcliffe (2007) clearly show, these activities reinforced “well established constructions and divisions of gender” through a “technology of class privilege”.

Early racing clubs, such as the Cambridge University Cycling club, founded in 1874, reflected the bourgeois status of these relatively expensive toys (Green 2003). Yet by the latter end of the 1890s the University Cycling club was in decline, perhaps reflecting the very different circumstances that had come to surround cycling as a 'sporting activity' by this date. The activities of club-organised racing events in these years of the 1880s and 1890s, taking place on privately owned tracks (such as that built by the Cambridge) and to an extent on public roads can be contrasted with the simultaneous popularity of the spectacle of professional cycle racing, which, largely took place in the confines of regulated private space, that is in specially built stadia and tracks. The first 6 day race took place as an exhibition on an indoor flat track in Birmingham in 1875 (Nye 2006).

Competition as a public spectacle, structured around performance by paid professionals in set geographical spaces was the significant development of the latter years of the nineteenth century, and cycle sport was very much part of this growth (Ritchie 1996, Simpson 2007). During the late high-wheeler years of the 1880s, growing numbers of competitive events were organised to prove the relative performance capacity of different machine designs as much as the athleticism of their riders. With the widening class profile of cycling in the 1890s we see both an increase in the number of competitive competitions on the road, and of increasing hostility to them by some police authorities (Ritchie 1975).

The National Cyclists Union allied itself to the continued emphasis on cycling as a gentlemen's pastime and resolved in 1888 to discourage road racing, refusing to recognise any road records and prohibiting its officials from officiating or assisting at any such events (Woodland 2005). Henceforward, in the UK therefore, the mass start road race which formed the backbone and fundamental form of continental European

cycle sport, was relegated to a distinctly minority activity. It did go on, but not as a significant mode of sport.

Effectively, British cycle sport, excepting six day events and other track competitions, was denied expression as a professional sport in the UK, and became predominantly an amateur participant sport. Professional riders existed, but as an outcome of amateur success, not as a separate entity (Holland 2006), a situation that persisted through most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, the adoption of secretive codings for time trial courses – originally in order to avoid antagonism with the police – and the insistence on uniform anonymity of riders mitigated against the time trial as any form of public spectacle or esteem (Fife 2005).

This distinction between public and private space can be seen to as a means to interpret the complexity of the amateur–professional contrast which has shaped our understanding of cycle sport. Even the closing of roads for mass-start cycle racing, as became the norm in continental Europe, regulates public space, in contrast to the settlement of British cycle sport on the public highway, with the emphasis on its continued and simultaneous status as public highway. The cost of the use of public space, however, is the relegation of the rider to anonymity. The imagery of the cycling club had moved from a gentleman's association to a working class gathering.

### **Cycling and Class in the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

Subsequent to the boom years of the early-middle 1890s, with the widespread introduction of the safety bicycle and the stabilisation of form and design, bicycle ridership is extended beyond the bourgeoisie (Oddy 2007) and its gender profile changes from the almost exclusive domination of the high-wheeler as a masculine vehicle (Oddy 2003).

The formation of the Clarion Cycle Club in 1895 signifies the first explicit recognition of the potential linkage between working class identity and cycling in the UK (Pye 1995). The Clarion's motto (taken from William Morris) "Fellowship is life – lack of Fellowship is Death", and its propagandising work aimed to promote the use of the bicycle as a means of liberation for working class men and women. Though the intention of the Clarion CC was primarily propagandist and cycling was simply a means by which to spread propaganda, the growth of local clubs and activities, and the increasing availability of a second-hand cycle market enabled a significant change in the image of the cycle as a bourgeois plaything. The process enabled by the bicycle for the Clarion CC was two fold – both to provide physical means of escape from the confines of urban industrial life and to provide the means for said fellowship.

The enduring solidity of this image can be seen in Alan Bennett's use of a Halifax cycling club outing set in 1911 as the means for reflection on class and conflict in his first television play *A Day Out* (1972), filmed by Stephen Frears. Whatever the historical (in)accuracy, the use of this setting provides the viewer with a familiarity and recognisable stereotypes that require little explanation. The cycling club is necessarily a firmly working class activity contrasted with the (horse) riding of the bourgeoisie.

The true rise of the mass bicycle in the UK has been convincingly argued as dating from around 1930 with the introduction of Popular Gents models costing £3:19:9d or equivalent to 2-3 weeks wages for a skilled worker (Pinkerton 1997: 105). Our contemporary understanding of 'amateur' sport as participant sport is also rooted in this inter-war period, where clear distinction can be made between the persistence in some sports (e.g. athletics) of the 'gentleman amateur' and the growth of working class participation sports such as cycling. Cycle sport as an activity for the aspirant working class thus dates more properly from the inter-war years and the introduction of the lightweight roadster (Oddy 2007). The iconic imagery of the racing cycling club also dates from the advent of affordable lightweight machines rather than the turn of the century.

The club racing scene of the 1930s therefore laid the basis for the years to come, dominated by time trials, but also with a smaller number of mass start events on non-road circuits (see Holland 2006). It is unsurprising that the breakaway formation of the BLRC (British League of Racing Cyclists) to organise and run mass start road races in opposition to the continuing ban occurred in 1940 as the airfields and other circuits that had been used for the mass-start events run by some clubs were unavailable because of the wartime conditions.

### Continental contrasts

In France, the 1890s saw the rise of a number of spectacular sporting endurance races celebrating the machines of mobility and the capacity for endurance. In 1891 the 550km Bourdeaux-Paris cycle race and the 1200km Paris-Brest-Paris cycle races were inaugurated, with the latter using motor pacing to increase speed, a feature introduced in the former from 1897 (Gaboriau 2003). Paris-Brussels was run as an amateur event in 1893 and opened to professionals in 1906. The first motor car races in France were run in 1894 and other feats of cycle racing like the Paris-Roubaix was inaugurated in 1896. In 1903, the year of the first tour de France, the biggest sporting event was the Paris-Madrid motor race (cars and motor-cycles) which with its numerous crashes and multiple deaths, of both participants and spectators, threatened to destroy all sport on the public roads (Gaboriau 2003). As motor sport moved to specially constructed circuits, cycle sport maintained its claim on the roads. The expansion of continental cycle sport continued through to the outbreak of the Great War with events such as the Ronde van Vlaanderen first run in 1913, again in association with a newspaper, the "Sportwereld" (*'De Geschiedenis van de Ronde Van Vlaanderen'* 2003).

All of these events were run as spectacles, demonstrating the enduring image of the athlete participant as hero. This image was deliberately embraced by Henri Desgrange as he developed his Tour de France through the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in association with the newspaper *l'Auto*, famously declaring that the ideal tour would be the one with only one finisher. The early tours acceptance of both professional (manufacturer-sponsored) and amateur riders side by side contrasted with the strict British class division between gentleman amateur and professional. Unlike British amateurs of the early years, the French amateur was only rarely a gentleman (or moneyed dilettante as Gaboriau (2003:72) more accurately describes them) and more likely a gifted enthusiasts. Rapidly however, the bulk of riders were made up of 'independents', largely working class financially sponsored by benefits from their local towns or industries. Thus was created the myth of the racing cyclist as working class heroes which dominated the sport through that least until the era of Bernard Hinault (Dauncey 2003).

In *l'Auto*, Desgrange consistently depicted the riders of the Tour as "*ouvriers de la pedale*" emphasising the participants' status as workers (Thompson 2006: 141ff). Unlike football, the language applied to cycling is that of work (*faire*), not play (*jouer*), as Thompson explains. The strongest depiction of the cyclist as labourer came in an interview with participant Henri Pelissier in 1924 published in *Petit Parisien* where, complaining about the conditions imposed by the race management, the interview was published under a headline of '*Les Forçats de la Route*' (Lazell 2003: 24). *Forçats*, loosely translated as convicts or slave labourers – forced labourers – is the term used in the opening lines of the '*Internationale*' to evoke the image of the exploitation of labour [*Debout, les damnés de la terre, Debout, les forçats de la faim*] (Thompson 2006: 195). Yet the image of the racing cyclist as worker was also accompanied by a simultaneous depiction of the participant as a skilled artisan, enabling emphasis of different aspects of the race as appropriate (Thompson 2006: 165).

In the latter years of the 19th century therefore cycling can be summarised as a 'sporting' pastime for the upper and higher middle classes. In the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup>

century however, the language of sporting competition changed to its more modern usage, concomitant with the rise of participant sport, shifting the imagery of sport cycling to a firmly working class identity during the inter war period.

### **Images of Class: performance and production**

The relationship between competitive cycling and the imagery and identity of class in the UK and in France can be seen through these parallel narratives to reveal complex levels of both identity formation and reproduction.

In both cases, the physical effort of competitive cycling reinforces the image of working class masculinity. The British time trialist of the 1930s may not have had the brutality of image of the *forcats de la route* of the Tour de France but, remaining framed by the imagery of the hardworking amateur, even when riders such as Charles Holland turned professional, they retained an image of well deserved graft (Holland 2007).

The portrayal of women in cycling in the era immediately either side of the Second World War emphasises conventional depictions of femininity as grace and elegance: for example lingering shots of legs and ankles being much in evidence in Pathé News coverage of Evelyn Hamilton's long distance record breaking runs. Thus the public depiction of bicycling in contemporary documentation both creates and reinforces class and gender stereotypes.

Structuring cycle sport through club membership further ensured collective identity formation and a sense of belonging among members. It was through the club that one was able to gain entry to competitive activity whether in the Road Time Trials Council, National Cycling Union or British League of Racing Cyclist's events.

### **The club cyclist as a 'hard man'**

It is in the years after the Second World War, that the image of the racing cyclist becomes indelibly that of working class endeavour. The repeated imagery is of the racer as a hard man. Emphasis is made both on the 'toughness' of riders – even the long distance tourist is described thus (Kitching 1993) and simultaneously by their 'ordinariness'. The best of riders, even Reg Harris (World amateur sprint champion 1947, double Olympic silver medallist 1948, Professional champion 1949-51 and 1954) is depicted as being firmly rooted in the culture of ordinary club cycling (*Spinning Wheels* 1952).

The participation of a British team in the 1955 Tour de France - from 1930 onwards Tour riders were organised on the basis of national teams, reverting to the more familiar corporate structure only after 1961 (Reed 2003) – reflects the backgrounds of the top riders in country at the time. Though mostly professional riders sponsored by or connected with Hercules or Tube Investments (the parent company), their backgrounds were largely in manual trades, plumbing and building together with general office work (Fotheringham 2005).

The same backgrounds reappear in successive ranks of top British riders: Tom Simpson and Barry Hoban both from mining communities, for example. For both Hoban and Simpson, however, reaching the ranks of top continental professionalism and settling on the continent was a way to leave their backgrounds behind, cycling being the means to that transformation, in the same way as can be seen in Boxing. For the very few who made that transition, the reality is that most remained firmly rooted in the word from which they started and to which they returned when their cycling careers were over.

For the domestic competitor, the world of the club cyclist depicted in the pages of Cycling in the 1960s is that of a tightly bonded community. Everyday cycling, touring and club cycling are all given space alongside reports of continental races (both road and track) in the pages. For example in the 36 pages of Cycling, September 10, 1966,

alongside reports of the five golds claimed by British riders in the World track championships (9 pages of coverage) is a double page spread on Touring in Coverdale and Wensleydale, and another 4 pages on the York cycle show. Another double spread is given to roughstuff (off-road) riding in the western Highlands and three more pages devoted to sundry touring related matters, including cyclists in Youth Hostels. The same pattern of mixed reports is visible in repeated issues

These depictions of toughness and endurance repeated throughout the descriptions of riders and their exploits echo those of Orwell's *Road to Wigan Pier*, projecting a world of white, male working class values and identities. Women's racing in this era is caught in a degree of ambivalence. On the one hand, the achievements of Beryl Burton, women's BBAR (British Best All Rounder) 1959-1983, twice world road race champion, 5 times world pursuit champion placed her in a unique position. Her record of 4-8-22 for the national championship 100 in August 1966, bettered the men's championship time on the same course by 38sec, and the following year she set a new 12 hour time trial record of 277.25 miles, not bettered by any male competitor for two years. Reports of other women competitors, on the other hand, stress their domesticity and racing as secondary to the requirements of running a household (*Cycling* September 10 1966). Yet they were still serious competitive cyclists at the top of racing in Britain.

The values and images expressed among club cyclists the roles in which they are depicted correlate with the values and adherences described in Young and Wilmot's classic study of working class life, *Family and Kinship in East London* (1957). Loyalty, familiarity and mutual support are expressed in the pages of the cycling press of the 1960s. Names of the top ten or more riders in every club event published weekly in *Cycling* reinforce its feel as an 'insiders' journal. Familiarity with the riders is taken for granted. Through to the 1980s we can see the backgrounds of those engaged in cycle sport as firmly rooted in working class or professional trades background – Richard Moore's biography of Robert Miller emphasises his 'escape' from an engineering apprenticeship and the world of Glasgow tenements, repeating a familiar pattern.

At first glimpse, the rapid growth of high visibility sport cycling in the UK in the 1980s, epitomised by televised city centre criterium series – just as unemployment boomed especially in the northern heartlands of racing cycling – would appear at odds with its working class constituency. Yet it was the existence of mass unemployment that created a realm of full-time amateur riders. Able to claim unemployment benefit and provided with equipment and clothing by sponsors, these riders could only have emerged from a primarily working class sport without the distractions of work itself to get in the way of training.

### **Changing directions in the 1980s?**

The advent, first of BMX in the 1970s and then of the mountain bike in the 1980s created profound shifts in British cycling activity. In addition to the simple expansion of numbers, mountain bike ridership changed the social profile of riding. Not tied to the traditional road club, competitive mtb races created a far less structured sporting context. Its origins in America, coupled with the addition of Japanese technology, created a very different image profile to the traditions of European-focused concerns in road racing (see e.g. Davey 1992 or MBUK 1988 onwards). Both the road racing club scene and the touring clubs closed themselves off from the new technology, responding to it rather as a fashion led fad, the same attitude of closure that had been exhibited to previous technological changes in small wheeled cycles (*Cycle Touring* passim).

Road-racing cycle technology, although constantly in search of the latest development intended to provide a competitive advantage, remained substantially static until the end of the 1980s. Several factors combined to change this profoundly in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Changes in both manufacturing organisation and production technology,

and the resultant increase in market share of innovative Japanese components initially designed for mtb use but rapidly adapted for other uses, coupled with a restructuring of the retail sector, created the opportunity for substantial shifts in the profile of sport cycling from a static and conservative activity to one of innovation and novelty. High profile publicity typifying this came as a result of Chris Boardman's success in the 1992 Olympics on a Mike Burrows designed carbon monocoque bicycle, looking radically different from anything previously seen.

The rapid developments arising from mountain biking and the incursion of Shimano to rival and finally dominate the existing European manufacturers resulted in the possibility of significant functional novelty in road racing componentry. Bicycle groupsets and components began to be marketed as replaceable consumer items, with new models being released first at intervals, and later on an annual basis, as any other fashion item, enabled a change in the image of the cycle from that of a consumer durable to a consumer disposable. For example one can trace the progressive changes to the Shimano XT range introduced in 1982 in an accelerating pattern of frequency of change, a feature celebrated in trade advertisements (*'Shimano Works'* 2007).

The application of material technologies from the early 1990s, first with widespread introduction of aluminium for frames and then with carbon and composite construction also radically changed the concept of the durability of the cycle, bringing it into line with the motor car as an element of a consumer culture. Thus we see the way that the bicycle and therefore the riding of it, is transformed in the wider socio-economic restructurings of late modernity in the move from a production-oriented society to a consumer society.

Commercial considerations outside the realm of the cyclist as actor also create changes in the relationship between the potential rider and the act of riding. Through BMX riding in the 1970s and MTB riding in the 1980s and 1990s, a generation was initiated into forms of sport and competitive leisure cycling not through the traditions of the local club scene, but through the individualised activity. As these age, many expand their interests to other forms of cycling and thus transfer their adult cycling activity from MTBs towards road cycling. The conventions and traditions of many road clubs, combined with their exclusiveness have often not encouraged this type of new member by continuing forms of competition largely geared around winning rather than competitive participation. Consequently, the rise of sportives described in the last section, should be no surprise.

The advent of the mountain bike can be seen as coinciding with wider social changes. Off-road cycling had been a mainstay of the club scene, whether in 'Rough-stuff' or cyclo-cross for numerous decades, but both activities were framed within the context of organised club activity, not an individual or companion activity.

### **Interpreting the changes – 'Riding Alone'**

In *Bowling Alone* (2000), Robert Putnam explores the decline of community in the United States by mapping the decline in social participation. One of his categories of investigation was the decrease in numbers of people taking part in organised bowling leagues, indicative for Putnam of an increase in what may be described as a privatisation of leisure. Putnam charts social change and attitudinal change through the decline in organised social league bowling and the rise of bowling as an activity undertaken on an individualised or temporary group basis, matching it to a whole raft of changes in social activity and connected patterns of community-building activities. This he observes as a decline in social capital.

Social capital can be both inward-looking within a group (bonding) and/or enabling groups to link together outside of themselves (bridging). The organisational form of the traditional road racing club, especially where involved primarily in time trials with their coded locations only open through membership and participation in a club highlights

the inward-looking bonding forms of social capital. However the problem with high bonding capital is its inability to respond to rapid social change and to take advantage of new opportunities. Consequently, there is a pattern of strongly bonded communities becoming increasingly marginalised in a rapidly changing society.

Yet, even where immediate forms of association involving local face-to face contact are in decline, Putnam recognises and records a parallel growth in national organisations. A similar pattern may be discerned in the changes in cycling activity. Whereas club numbers and weekend club runs have lessened in importance, the numbers involved at national level are steadily increasing. The current membership of the CTC is at its highest for a number of years, yet the membership of traditional local 'sections' is lower than ever, and they are largely insignificant. While this has no immediate relevance or correlation with class, it is indicative of a less collective and more individualised approach to cycle sport. Similarly for British Cycling, overall membership is increased but local club membership is frequently in decline. Notable, the greatest area of increased growth at local level in the last decade have been in Surrey. An area of higher general levels of income, the activities of clubs have extended beyond the conventional road race to broader based competitive and sporting activities in which participation is key, rather than all out winning.

### **Symbolic elites and consumption**

An accompanying factor to the decline in club membership is the increased possibility for use of activity as an identity forming activity. Closely bonded groups exert a strong degree of behavioural normativity. These close frequent groups create norms and expectations and frequently prohibit or inhibit innovation and display outside of limited codes. The decline of the traditional club scene with its closely bonded units opens the possibility for greater use of the bicycle as a vehicle of self-expression and display, reflecting the capacity of conspicuous consumptions. Cycling can be used as a form of conspicuous consumption when occurring outside of the attenuating context of close group normativity.

Increased levels of disposable income across a broad range of income groups have changed the face of cycle retail in recent years. A few examples can provide a set of images to illustrate the selling of cycling as a desirable, elite activity, taking advantage of these changes. First, the marketing of Brooks saddles since their takeover emphasises its iconic status, referencing an historical heritage, craftsmanship and style. The saddle is now an item of desire in itself. Re-launching products selected from the patent books of 1890s (e.g. 1896 toolbag relaunched 2006) reiterates a message of timeless and classic styling. Similarly the Rapha range of retro clothing is aimed securely at a high fashion elite market ("the best jersey that money can buy" [www.rapha.cc](http://www.rapha.cc) Jersey £110, bibshorts £120), whilst mimicking the constructions and design of cycling apparel from the early part of the twentieth century. In a parallel vein, poshbikes.com similarly successfully market their goods as the ultimate boys' toys. Top-end cycles are not sold as loss leaders but provide a small but significant sector of the market in road cycling (Reid 2007, [www.bikebiz.com](http://www.bikebiz.com) ).

The commodification of the sport bicycle as a consumer product can be seen as a emphasis on exchange value over use value (Featherstone 1991). It is the symbolic value of the cycle and its communicative capacity that drives the marketing of contemporary sport and leisure bicycles within the context of a consumer society rather than society ordered around production. Some indication of the pervasiveness of the cycle as consumer product can be gauged by the relative space given to product review and advertising in a comparison of cycling magazines over time. Alongside the product review, we also see increased coverage of health and lifestyle issues to a degree inconceivable in the magazines of the 1960s, reflecting concerns with lifestyle, body image and health.

As a final illustration of the changes visible in the contemporary profile of cycling and its relation to class and identity, we can examine the very different images and profiles of two growing areas of cycling activity and their relative promotion in the cycling press.

### **Audax**

Audax rides are organised long-distance road cycling events usually covering upwards of 200km, though 100km rides have become an important part of the calendar since around 2005. Participation is open to all, though membership of a national organisation, Audax UK formed in 1976 (see [www.aukweb.net](http://www.aukweb.net)), provides lower entry fees and automatic provision of a published calendar of events. Events are self-navigated through a pre-given route, and checkpoints must be met during the ride. These are time limited, ensuring riders adhere to a schedule between a pre-determined minimum and maximum speed depending on the length of the event. Completion is the only criteria for the validation of a ride and awards are given for various combinations of achievement. Entry fees are kept to a minimum, usually around £3-6, depending on the length of route.

Though growth has been steady, audax riding has retained an emphasis on traditional club-run style amateurism. 200km rides, although possible to complete in faster times, usually take a minimum of 8hrs. As such they are not the ideal forums for the display of conspicuous consumption, retaining the necessity for considerable endurance and commitment. As such they rely heavily on sheer doggedness for completion, and rendering the cosmetic appearance of cycles largely irrelevant. They provide little opportunity for conspicuous consumption but can be seen as a continuation of the values espoused in the pages of the cycling press of the 1960s, though structured through a national organisational network, not dependent on local clubs.

Audax rides have gained relatively little attention in the published cycling press, and Audax UK as a volunteer organisation, has not seen necessary to pursue growth other than its own organic continuation. This is in sharp contrast with the rise in importance of cyclo-sportives

### **Cyclo-Sportives**

Cyclo-sportive events provide organised mass start, timed rides, fully supported and signed on public roads (see [www.cycloport.org](http://www.cycloport.org)). They are technically non-competitive but gold, silver and bronze standards are set for each event for bands of finishing time, with age dependent categories. Entry is individual and unconnected with club membership. Costs of entry are in the £20-40 range and numbers limited to 500-1000, and not infrequently selling out months prior to the event.

Although a recent introduction in Britain and heavily promoted in *Cycling Weekly*, they have a longer history elsewhere. In France the sport cycle scene is dominated by these rides and there are two monthly magazines dedicated to them. Many are run in conjunction with professional cycle races and the UCI recognise a global set of cyclo-sportives known as the 'golden bike' series. Their popularity is sufficient for manufacturers to produce road bike models specifically for the sportive market. Where professional road racing is a spectator sport, then there is a need for events that are not simply replications of the pure elite racing activity, but allow a wider selection of sporting participation in a parallel event. Thus, alongside many professional classic races are 'tourist' events or, in the case of the longer stage races, 'etapes'- individual stages – arranged for mass participation.

The sportive, in contrast to audax offers shorter events and operates at a commercial level, usually involving some form of sponsorship and chances for participants to mingle and to interact. They are, a such ideal forums for the display and encouragement of cycling as conspicuous consumption, a chance to display ones style

and ownership of expensive toys, in a way that a purely competitive, or an ultimate endurance event are not.

Initial observation suggests that the profile of participants is considerably different from that involved in audax. Detailed data is not available but conversations and use of online discussion boards suggests that the socio-economic class of participant is considerably higher than the traditional club event. Comment within the trade paper *Bikebiz* has even suggested that these events are being used as an opportunity for social networking for members of professional groups as other sports have been used in the past. Cycling as the new squash?

### **Gentrification?**

The rise in these newer categories of participant sporting event, coupled with wider changes in patterns of social organisation and commercial and technological changes resulting in the commodification of the cycle as an object can all be seen as contributory to a different image to on-road sport cycling. This is not to suggest that sport cycling is now a middle class endeavour, or that the traditional club and its imagery have been entirely supplanted. It is, however, to argue that there have been significant changes to both the profile of activities and to the riders taking part. Road cycling is being relegitimised as an activity for a certain groups of social elites, with echoes of the ways in which the earliest cycle clubs acted as opportunities for social display of values and disposable wealth.

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