

# Riding a 600km Audax?

By Edward Thomlinson

This article is written with the 600km Audax event on 25/26 November, a Paris-Brest-Paris qualifier, in mind. However, the principles and advice are applicable to any 600km Audax or ultra-distance ride.

## Here's the bottom line!

You will probably experience some or all of the following: despair; doubt about your sanity; fatigue; soreness; hunger/thirst; sleepiness maybe even hallucinations; frustrations etc!

## Now for the buzz!

When you successfully complete a 600km Audax in under 40 hours you will feel so transcendent that it will be like you are living on a different planet. When someone talks about 150km or 200km being 'long-distance' you will just gaze into the distance and utter a quiet "Ho hum!"

## Go for the buzz!

Remember pain passes, quitting is forever! Start slowly and then ease up!

Ride at your own pace: with others if possible.

Don't fight the hills.

Eat and drink, little and often with tried and trusted nutrients.

Sleep judiciously.

Use stops and controls constructively but don't waste time. After all, 600km/40hrs is only 15kph average!

So much for the generalities, now for the specifics.

**Be Prepared:** Physically, mentally, emotionally and don't forget the bike. Let's deal with that first. All the preparation will be thwarted if the bike fails. Check it out or have it checked out. New tyres and tubes, spare batteries and bulbs are sensible precautions. Remember, this event will be run under Audax International regulations as a PBP qualifier; lighting will be scrutinised and reflective clothing and helmets will be mandatory. The least you will need for night riding is to see the road ahead significantly and be seen by other road users, including pedestrians. Get some practise riding at night not only for the experience but also to make sure that your equipment is adequate and functioning. Don't experiment with anything on the ride.

**Physically:** Once the bike has been sorted out the physical aspect will have a direct bearing on your mental and emotional state. If you have been riding Audax events fairly regularly, there should be no doubt about your physical ability. After all 600km is 3 x 200km! However, the demands on the

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body are cumulative which means the physical machine needs looking after. Eat and drink, little and often, starting within the first 30 minutes of setting off. Don't change your regular eating and drinking habits for cycling: don't experiment. Be prepared for hot weather. On the 2003 PBP qualifier the temperature went over 40°C. Bring lotsa sunscreen, lotsa fluids, make sure the back of your neck and arms are covered to minimise dehydration and oh, by the way, just in case, carry a rain cape!

**Sleep:** (Perchance to dream!) Some hardy souls cycle right through. Good for them and maybe good for you! Fatigue leads to drowsiness, which impairs judgement – a recipe for accidents. For those like me, some sleep is essential. The route will be in two loops: the first coming back to the start. It will follow mainly the 400km Audax route but will be some 50km shorter. When you get back to the start venue you will be able to shower, change, have a meal and then get some sleep. I had four hours. In the mid-afternoon I felt drowsy and had a nap at the side of the road... This made quite a difference.

The second loop is basically the Ian Kernick Memorial 200km route with the extra kilometres added on the way back from Magaliesberg. It's also tougher than the first loop but will give you a good taste of what parts of PBP are like so you need to be

on your way, allowing a decent window for the final loop.

You will also be able to sleep at the start venue prior to the start so you won't have to get up and drive there. Sleep facilities will be on the floor so you will need to bring your own mattress and bedding.

**Mental:** Don't entertain thoughts like "I can't / won't make it / finish it, etc." Break the distance into manageable chunks, plan coffee stops or breaks; finish each chunk and then start again. Remember NO outside assistance is allowed between controls; deviation from this rule results in non-qualification for PBP! If you are riding in company it becomes very much more self-supporting in every respect. An event like this inevitably has its bad spots, ride through them, keep success in mind - PBP qualification, Super Randonneur status, personal satisfaction etc. After successfully completing a 600km Audax the definition of what is possible in one's entire life is substantially redefined and that's not to belittle the Cape Epic and such like.

**Emotional:** Take care of the foregoing and this will take care of itself. Be happy, enjoy the scenery, the challenge, the cycling.

Some thoughts for the ride: "When you're alone and you get to that weak point – when you get really tired and it's easy to quit – everything becomes clear. You get really honest with yourself. Whenever you break yourself down that far, you break your inhibitions down also. A lot of time you can fake it and cover it up. But in the dead of night on a 600km Audax, nothing is hidden!"

"The best rides are the ones where you bit off much more than you can chew, and live through it and come out smiling 'I did it!'"

(Both quotes from: The Quotable Cyclist)

