



Going the distance

Diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease a decade ago, **Terry Manning** set himself the goal of completing long-distance cycle rides

I nner panic struck me. The neurologist confirmed that, at the age of 46, I was suffering from early onset Parkinson's Disease. Monday 23 October 2000 is a date emblazoned on my brain, and as I drove home from hospital on that day I was already wondering how long it would be before I couldn't cycle. Pulling over to the side of the road, I cried for myself – for the one and only time.

My fascination with Le Tour de France began in the early '90s as Indurain began his domination of the event. As my love of cycling developed, so began my quest to conquer as many of the high cols used in Le Tour as I could. Two of my best rides during this phase were in the summer of 2000 when I completed l'Alpe d'Huez in 59 minutes and then Mont Ventoux in 1 hour 39 minutes.

Following my diagnosis, the support I received from my wife Sue, my family, and one good friend in particular, soon had me up and back in the saddle. My love of cycling was still intact, and distance rides became my target. In the summer 2003, I completed a ride from Santander on the north coast of Spain to the northern Portuguese town of Barcelos, a total of just over 400 miles. The sense of achievement at the end of each day's ride was immense. I was hooked.

A number of mini tours followed. One that stands out was a ten-day ride around Andalucia in southern Spain. Beautiful whitewashed hilltop villages smelled of freshly baked bread and coffee in the early morning as we passed through. Churros (like doughnuts) and hot chocolate were our reward when we made our obligatory café stop mid morning.

Still feeling good on the bike, in the summer of 2006 I fulfilled a long held ambition to cycle through France from the Channel to Mediterranean. I paid little attention to my Parkinson's, being more troubled by saddle sores.

In the summer of 2009, I repeated this ride with two friends. Parkinson's had taken a real grip and I'd started to feel unbalanced on the bike. My right leg was doing 80% of the work, with the left in the main playing catch-up. Being overweight didn't help, and time and again I found myself a long way behind my fellow riders, particularly on inclines. I completed the ride but something wasn't right. I stopped cycling: Parkinson's was to blame.

Questioned by an old friend, I was forced to rethink this decision. I could still ride a bike: Parkinson's wasn't preventing me doing that, although it made it much more difficult. I decided that whilst I still could, I should! I tried a couple of rides with a friend. Being on the bike was suddenly fun again. After a few more rides, I was convinced I could and should give it a go.



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In summer 2010, I left El Saler on the Spanish Mediterranean coast to cycle across Spain and Portugal to the Atlantic coast at Porto, with Sue supporting me. I was positive, enthusiastic, and feeling so lucky to be attempting the ride. It was with sheer elation I held the bike aloft as I stood in the cold Atlantic water – mission accomplished.

Life holds many challenges for us all. Parkinson's for me is just another one of many. Cycling has helped me meet that challenge head on. One thing I've come to realise in this last year is that Parkinson's can only prevent me doing what I allow it to.

Bring on the next big ride!