

Wiggle!

Twice I happened upon the Wiggle Sportive, firstly while driving and the next day when walking - both times travelling in the opposite direction to the cyclists. My views might well be stronger had I been following them! Each time my route was around 2 km, driving the entire length of the Shirley Homes road, and then walking from Shirley Holmes railway bridge up to Pitmore Lane along to Coombe Lane.

Numbers encountered were more than expected. Driving for 4 minutes there were 162 cyclists, while nearly 3 times that number passed in my 22 minute walk. The organisers say 2,000 began over a 2.5 hour period each day. This equates to much smaller numbers within these short periods of time. Did they bunch up so much over the preceding 19 miles or were start times not sufficiently staggered?

All appeared good natured but many seemed oblivious to the fact they were on public roads with traffic in both directions. Although driving at 20 mph, we were forced to brake hard for riders to regain their side of the road and saw one cyclist forced off his bike as others cut across his path doing this. While walking, some passed far too close. Clearly the entire road width was considered their own territory.

Cars following groups of cyclists stood little chance of overtaking. It is often difficult passing just one bike, but 10 or so is like a juggernaut. Groups of 16 or more were common. Walking I noted 25 motorists stuck in this way.

I saw little or no marshalling on either day. Cyclists coming out onto the A337 across to the Boldre road were on their own. I guess the lone AA man a little way down the Shirley Homes

road was just warning of the junction ahead. Surely traffic control is needed on main roads with such numbers of cyclists crossing? On Sunday I saw just one marshal slowing down riders as they approached a cattle grid.

As for the effect on ponies and other livestock, the single pony I saw on the verge at Shirley Holmes appeared totally oblivious to all going past.

Did the cyclists enjoy the peace and tranquillity of the New Forest? From observation and comments overheard, attention was mainly focused on the tarmac just in front of their wheels. Some praised the road surface and that was before they had entered the new Shirley Holmes road! I heard general chatter but no mention of scenery apart from one person who was desperately seeking a convenient bush! A dozen or so called out a cheery "good morning". Everyone seemed to be enjoying their ride.

I think Forest roads are inappropriate for events of this size. These cyclists did not need to be in the New Forest per se. They just wanted suitable tarmac. Other activities attracting such numbers are held in segregated environments. This should be run on dedicated cycle paths, not public highways. At least ensure any roads used are sufficiently wide to carry two opposing lanes of traffic safely alongside the cyclists. The 25 cars I saw held up when walking along 2 km of road suggests many hundreds of frustrated motorists across the entire length of the course over the two days. Small groups of cyclists wishing to enjoy the forest can do so any time without impacting so many. It simply does not make any sense to stage such a large event in this way.

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