

Wiggle New Forest Spring Sportive 14/15 April 2018

Report by Hugh Marchant – last updated 20 May 2018 12:00

Summary

As I have said so many times before, there is a dismal lack of marshalling at these events, According to a presentation to NFALC on 18 January, this Wiggle had 23 marshalling points which is far too few. This issue was raised with Jo Pickering after the first Wiggle day to no avail. Many issues have been observed over the years that could have been avoided had there been adequate marshalling at key points in the route. Someone needs to start taking this seriously before there are serious injuries. We came very close to this with this Wiggle when traffic diverting due to the closure of Pitmore Lane impinged dangerously on the route of the Wiggle

Speed Limits at dangerous junctions must be reduced by temporary traffic order. In our area, there is the staggered crossroads at the top of Shirley Holms where cyclists have to negotiate across 50 mph traffic. During this Wiggle, the marshal there was highly dangerously standing in the middle of that 50 mph road ushering cyclists across. This was crazy. The speed limit there must be reduced to 40 mph or lower. Ideally every road on the entire cycle route should be reduced to 30 mph for the safety of all concerned.

All cyclists must be required to wear numbers at both front and rear. Last year it was noted that 1 in 6 riders failed to comply in that their rear number was not clearly displayed. During this Wiggle, that number was almost twice as bad in that nearly 30% were not displaying clearly readable rear numbers. These ranged from being completely absent, to being obscured by clothing, long hair, backpacks etc., worn too high up the back to be readable with the cyclist bent over their handlebars, or so low down that the cyclist was actually sitting on it. Some had them attached to the side of a leg where it could not possibly be read from behind. Many were simply so badly fixed that they had folded over with the slipstream making them impossible to read. Several had handwritten numbers that were totally illegible.

It is essential that every participant should be identifiable by anybody who may be affected by their behaviour during the event. There could be a great marketing opportunity here for a simple bracket that clamps onto the seat post with a bar extending to the rear with the number firmly attached so that it will always be readable from the rear as it could never be obscured by any part of the cyclist or their clothing.

Cyclists need to give the same consideration to other vulnerable users of the roads they share, as they themselves demand of drivers who pass them. That is to give vulnerable users space when overtaking. Cyclists state that 1.5 metres is required. There is no difference between a car passing a cyclist at a relative velocity of around 15 mph, and a cyclist passing a pedestrian or horse rider at a similar relative velocity. Therefore, please urge your participants to pass all other road users no closer than 1.5 metres and with due consideration. Publicise this fact such that all other vulnerable road user can be assured that should they be treated inconsiderately by any of your participants, then you will treat any complaints very seriously.

Saturday 14th April

Dense fog at start of day which did not fully clear until around 11am. Emergency gas works at Pitmore Lane meant that for part of the time, traffic was diverting down Shirley Holms (the route of the Wiggle) from around 09:56. Fortunately a chance encounter with a police car meant that I was able to alert them of the danger of this situation, and Pitmore Lane was re-opened for southbound traffic at around 11:28. During that time 196 vehicles mixed with 733 cyclists along the narrow Shirley Holms coming out onto the busy A337 where they all had to negotiate 50 mph traffic. Prior to the closure only 20 vehicles had passed and after Pitmore Lane was reopened, 33 vehicles used Shirley Holms.

During the closure, a number of vehicles were observed reversing back from the cattle grid in order to turn into Shirley Holms. Some turned around in the Shirley Holms junction. All this caused even more danger to cyclists turning into Shirley Holms. One HGV was trying to turn around and although several cyclists wisely held back until he had finished his manoeuvre, one nipped behind him while he was reversing (see photo below). Another large vehicle drove down Shirley Holms only to return 2 minutes later presumably realising he would not fit under the low bridge. Turning around further down Shirley Holms must have been tricky with all the cyclists passing by.

All in all, this was a dangerous situation made worse by the murky conditions. A marshal at this junction would have considerably reduced the danger to cyclists, and would also have prevented the one I encountered when walking up Pitmore Lane on Sunday, from having missed the Shirley Holms turn.



I walked back and forth along Shirley Holms between about 10:45 and 13:05 observing the behaviour of the cyclists and counting the numbers failing to display identification numbers clearly. I had also stationed my vehicle in a parking area on Shirley Holms from around 08:00 until 13:15 with a dashcam monitoring cyclists turning into Shirley Holms from Pitmore Lane. It is from this dashcam footage that I derived the numbers of cyclists in this event.

At around 11:47 on Saturday I encountered a cyclist who was awaiting recovery. We had a long chat. His front tyre was punctured and the wheel buckled. His wife had cycled on ahead to the marshal at the end of Shirley Holms (a mile away) to ask to phone for assistance. During our chat he repeatedly referred to the Wiggle as being a race. He said that the other competitors were generally a good lot although he had observed some simply discarding gel packs as they went along and was disgusted with that. It was a shame his race was over only 1/3rd of the way round. It was also a pity that nobody came out to help him – I left him carrying his bike on his shoulder all the way to the marshal at the other end of Shirley Holms.

At around 12:00 I encountered group of a couple of dozen walkers on a stag do walking down Shirley Holms in the same direction as the Wiggle. I wonder how well they mixed with the Wiggle participants!

In the hour prior to Pitmore Lane closure, Shirley Holms had 20 vehicles following 257 cyclists. During the hour and a half closure there were **196** vehicles following 733 cyclists. In the remaining 1 hour 40 minutes there were 33 vehicles following 658 cyclists. I think this clearly indicates the true impact of a road closure that according to SGN *“will not affect the route of the cycle ride.”* And for which UKCE simply stated: *“we were aware of this road closure so we have briefed our marshal on the A337 crossing and will keep an eye on the traffic.”* I think this was a totally inadequate response.

Sunday 15th April

I did much the same again. My car with dashcam running was parked from about 8:15 to 13:00 in the layby on Shirley Holms close to the Pitmore Lane junction. I walked Shirley Holms from about 09:45 to 12:30 again experiencing what it was like being a vulnerable road user in amongst the cyclists.

Even before arriving at the Shirley Holms Junction with Pitmore Lane, at around 09:40 walking Northwards up Pitmore Lane towards Shirley Holms I encountered cyclist (3328 I think) who had completely missed the Shirley Holms turn. He said his SatNav was telling him the way! This would not have happened if UKCE had followed my suggestion and stationed a marshal at the Shirley Holms junction. Analysis of dashcam footage suggests the cyclist reached the junction at a time when another cyclist (not in the Wiggle) was just moving off having waited at the traffic lights, so he simply followed that other cyclist, completely missing all the direction signs. 3 minutes later he re-appears having been alerted to his error by my shouting to him - otherwise, he might still be out there wondering where all his fellow cyclists had gone!

General observations as a vulnerable road user

Cyclists complain about motorists passing too close to them. Vehicles should leave a gap of 1.5 metres when passing cyclists. Cyclists should do the same when passing pedestrians. This does not happen. Several cyclists were no more than half a metre from me as they cycled past often at speed leaving no margin of error.

This needs to be written into the cycling code.

I have hours of video taken using a handheld video camera. This along with a running commentary might be of interest to others in that provides more of an insight into what it's like being a pedestrian caught up in a mass cycle event.

Statistics

Numbers of riders:

Analysis of dashcam video shows the number of cyclists participating each day as:

Saturday = 1644 (fewer than the 1850 in the Event Plan)
Sunday = 1536 (fewer than the 1750 in the Event Plan)

Rear number displaying:

This year, UK cycling events agreed to implement that part of the Cycling Events Organisers' charter requiring that participants wear a number on their backs so that they can be easily identified. Last year, they piloted this for the Brewin Dolphin event in July. At that time, I reported that over 150 out of 1014 cyclists (14.8% or 1 in 6 cyclists) were not displaying their number clearly enough to be identifiable. It was very disappointing therefore to find that this lesson had not been learnt, and that over 900 out of 3180 cyclists (29.65% or 3 in 10 cyclists) failed to display their number clearly enough to be easily identifiable. This is far worse than in the Brewin Dolphin.

Saturday 14th April

Cyclists counted between 10:40 and 13:15 = 1014
Cyclists not displaying rear number clearly = 300
Percentage failing to display rear number clearly = 29.58%

Total cyclists counted between 09:00 and 13:15 = 1644
Estimated total not displaying rear number clearly = $1644 * 29.58\% = 486$

Sunday 15th April

Cyclists counted between 09:51 and 13:00 = 1186
Cyclists not displaying rear number clearly = 353
Percentage failing to display rear number clearly = 29.76%

Total cyclists counted between 08:45 and 13:00 = 1536
Estimated total not displaying rear number clearly = $1536 * 29.76\% = 457$

Overall

Total cyclists = 3180
Total observed failing to display number clearly = 653
Estimated total failing to display number clearly = 943 (29.65%)