

# Bike to the future



By Clara Zilahi

I think it was in 1984 that Trevor Garrod, then East Anglian branch secretary, undertook a solitary sponsored cycle ride to Watton-at-Stone.

This was the first of a long series of annual sponsored rides to draw attention to local issues such as re-opening campaigns. The aim was also to promote the bike-train combination as an ideal mode of travel.

Money was raised for the Rail Defence Fund and, at the riders' discretion, for other good causes as well.

Cyclists, riding alone or in groups would meet up at pre-arranged venues with local campaign groups and the media. Often the local groups provided excellent hospitality even at unstaffed halts, or old station sites which they hoped to reopen.

Several of the reopening schemes thus supported ended successfully. How far the publicity resulting from the event played a part we do not of course know.

Following the re-opening of Mansfield – at one time the largest English town without a rail service – the North Midlands branch took the trouble of writing to all who had taken part in the ride to that town to thank them for their effort.

Certain highlights stand out in the rides in which I have personally taken part. The first of these was to the recently reopened halt at Metheringham near Lincoln. Our oldest participant on that occasion was Richard Tulse, whom I remember as I heard of his death a year or two later.

Mansfield I recall as the weather was wet and windy in turn. The ride from Melton Mowbray and back was the longest of my life. Exhausted and facing a strong head wind towards the end, I had to walk the last few miles, escorted by Trevor Garrod.

I missed my planned train and would, according to the timetable, have just missed the last connection home. A kind guard phoned from Peterborough (no mobiles in those days) and the connection was held for my benefit. Such a thing could not happen in the privatised railway.

A shorter ride to Lewes saw our youngest ever participant – the



**One of the few places in Britain where it was easy for parents to take their children by bike and train was to and along the south coast of England.**

**Around 10 bikes can be accommodated in each of South Central's existing four-car trains. With the impending replacement of slam-door trains, however, the situation is about to get worse. Instead of providing an area of flexible space which could be useful for cyclists, luggage, push chairs, wheel chairs and standing passengers in the rush-hour, the current plan is to allow only two bikes per train. That excludes virtually every family group of cyclists from travelling by train.**

**The CTC is one of the groups which regularly publish information about how to get through the maze of regulations which makes taking**

**a bike on the train so difficult. It is urging people to become involved in the fight to save cycle space on south coast trains. CTC public transport officer can be contacted via 0870 873 0060 or**

**tom.bogdanowicz@ctc.org.uk**

**The Family Bike in our picture – with adaptable child-carriers – is ideal for young families who too easily take the option of going everywhere by car. It is distributed by a company based in Hunstanton, one of the many seaside resorts in Norfolk which lost their rail service during the mad period when roads and cars dominated transport policy.**

**PCL of Homer House, Austin Street, Hunstanton PE36 6AN can be contacted:**

**0845 4585222,**

**pcldistribution@aol.com www.family-bike.com**

Railwatch editor's son, then two and on a baby saddle on his mother's bike. (He and his younger sister were to take part in several more rides.)

Our ride to Corby hosted by the East Midlands Branch introduced a new idea. While some of us cycled to the town from Peterborough or Kettering, several local people, including children and a couple who had not cycled for years and had borrowed bikes, took part by cycling several times round the town centre.

Corby was reopened under the Speller rule but sadly closed again.

I should like the tradition of bike rides to continue, but adapted to the 21st century. A long-distance ride suits some of us but we should not need to

fork out significant fares. That could mean several rides in different parts of the country, wherever one or two people come forward. But the Corby pattern might suit others.

Short distance cycling to replace car use would benefit the whole community. We should encourage it as part of any future plan.

An example of what I have in mind would be to encourage people who normally use the car but still have the old bike in the garage, to undertake as part of a sponsored project, to cycle to work, or to the station, for a week, or a month.

Would members be willing to sponsor such undertakings? I certainly would. I should appreciate feedback on these thoughts and to hear other suggestions. I should also like to

hear from those willing to offer sponsorship, however modest.

Some of our keen cyclists have been put off because members chose to sponsor those whose names they already knew and some new members taking part received no sponsorship. Sponsoring participants is a way in which those who otherwise cannot be active in Railfuture can help the cause. Unless we can revitalise the project there will be no Rail Defence fund.

The current modest nest-egg will soon be exhausted and many worthwhile campaigns will lose out.

Responses by January 2003 if possible, to Clara Zilahi, 31 Wimbotsham Road, Downham Market PE38 9PE. Tel: 01366 383954