

## Introduction to Audaxes

If you were to be really unkind, you could say Audaxes are poor people's sports: they are much cheaper to enter (in most cases £3 to £6); there are no marshals, just a route sheet; and the ethic is one of self-reliance.

It is dead simple. You enter (follow the [link](#) to get a downloadable entry form); you get a route sheet through the post; you arrive at the HQ half an hour or so before kick-off, sign in and get your Brevet card (to be stamped/signed/completed at each of the controls en route); and off you go, alone, or with the mates you arranged to ride with, or with a load of new mates who self-select into groups which, as things hunker down on the ride, are broadly compatible in riding style/speed/ability.

The aim is to get to each of the controls, and eventually to the finish, within the specified time limits. It is easiest to look at an example, the [Tour of the Berwyns](#). This ride has to be completed at a minimum speed of 15kph and not more than 30kph (roughly 9.5 and 19mph, this is the meaning of the obscure 15-30 if you follow the link to event details). The first control is at Garth after 57km; with an 8am start you have to get to Garth (nice café, ask Dave McIlroy) between 9.54 and 11.48am (this information is on your Brevet card); and so on through the other four controls to the finish in the cosy bar at the Farmers Arms, Kelsall after 208km. You have to get there between 2.56 and 9.52pm. In British Audaxes it is virtually unheard of for riders to be near the fastest speed/minimum time.

At the finish your card is checked and signed; it is then kept for validation. A record of all rides and riders is kept by Audax UK and, for some rides, at the HQ of the international organisation, Audax Club Parisien. After it has been validated you get it back in the post.

There is, of course, a bit more to it than is suggested here. Reading/interpreting a route sheet is something which comes with practice; in fact Audax riders vary enormously in what they actually do with their route sheets. Some shove it in their back pocket and hope that navigation can be left to someone else (not a good idea unless you have good and competent mates; and dodgy, even if you have); some enlarge it, laminate it and cut it into usable strips to fit onto devices on the handlebars; some transfer the information onto maps; some transfer it onto a GPS.

Most riders operate with a personal target in mind. It might be getting round inside the time limit; this might be (in the Berwyns) finishing in 12 hours, or 10 hours, or 8 hours, or being first back. You then need to develop a strategy (speed/effort judging; feeding; deciding whether/how long to stop at controls or elsewhere on the ride; assessing the groups and getting into the right one or ones) which, with experience, you find works for you and what you are trying to achieve.

And having done the Tour of the Berwyns and maybe other 200km rides, you might want to see how you fare at 300km; 400km etc.

The Audax system and structure is great if you want to push yourself into the unknown and check out your powers of endurance; a full range of distances is available; if you are that way inclined it is quite easy to get sucked into the culture of long-distance cycling – the chat, the enthusiasm, the transmission of experience and know-how. And you become aware that what you are doing has deep historical roots (going back to 1897) and bike-riders the world over are aiming to complete their 200km at 15kph in 13h 20m; and some of them are using that as a stepping stone to 400km in 26h 40m; 600km in 40h; and then Paris-Brest-Paris; London-Edinburgh-London; Boston-Montreal-Boston etc etc in 90h (or equivalent).

In my case, I was fairly confident I could handle 400km; the big step into the unknown was going up to 600km – much, much longer in distance and time than I had ever done before; having done that, London-Edinburgh-London was an irresistible challenge, with the same journey into the unknown. This time, having done 600 and settled down for a 4/5 hour kip, would I have it in the legs and the head to get up and do it again? And still have 200 to do after that? One of the secrets, of course, is to try not think like that, or you're screwed.

If there is anything you want to check out, please get in touch.

**Dave Barker**