



“Riding on the back of a tandem is a form of meditation”

thrill-seeker, and he's up front in charge of the brakes and steering. “I'm not worried about that though. I've got the capacity to switch off. Honestly, riding on the back of a tandem is a form of meditation,” Harmon says.

They've still got work to do. The whole project is being sponsored by Wiggle. A specially made Dolan tandem, called Rocket 2, needs more testing and their positions must be refined. “There aren't the same rules as there are in time trials regarding positions; almost anything goes to get the record. Magnus opted for the ‘Superman’ position up front, and I'm going for the other Obree position, the crouch, behind,” Harmon says.

Day job

There might be testing and fine tuning to come, but Harmon's physical preparation is on track, despite the apparent demands of his day job. “It's not as bad as people might think.



INFOTAINMENT

David Harmon

Lives: Shropshire
Works: Cycling commentator for Eurosport
Favourite racer: Philippe Gilbert

“SHROPSHIRE IS THE TOP UNDISCOVERED CYCLING DESTINATION IN ENGLAND”

Shropshire
With David Harmon



57km
Ride distance

one way, so would-be breakers take advantage of terrain and prevailing winds. Long downhill routes are sought out, giving rise to phenomenal speeds. The current tandem 25-mile RRA best is just north of 41 minutes.

40mph average

“We have to average just under 40 miles per hour to beat it,” Harmon points out. “So we're planning to use a stretch of the A66 that starts on Bowes Moor on the Yorkshire-Durham border. The first 12 miles are downhill, then after 22 miles we hit Scotch Corner. We do a sharp left, go north along the A1 for one junction then west to the finish.”

It's a huge physical challenge, and a mental one. Backstedt is renowned for demon descending and is a self-confessed speed

EUROSPORT'S VOICE OF cycling rides the roads that form part of the Wiggle Wild Edric sportive

WHERE TO?
Voice of cycling David Harmon trains for a tandem record attempt by previewing the Wild Edric sportive route

long-distance records, but this is better for me. My training has been a lot shorter, doing a lot of snappy stuff, where I did a lot more training last year, even some eight-hour rides, and I got quite ill during the autumn,” Harmon tells me at the start of this ride in Bishop's Castle.

Records like those Harmon is planning to go for are ratified by the Road Record's Association (RRA), and can be place to place or set distances. Unlike time trial records, RRA records can be attempted on any route, and the set-distance records are usually

Italy and France, so he's agreed to preview the route of the Wild Edric sportive in Shropshire, where he lives. He also needs to put in some training for his own cycling project: breaking records on a tandem.

“We planned to go last year, but my tandem partner got injured. So now I've got Magnus Backstedt on the front, and we're going for the straight-out 25-mile record. The plan was to go for

WE listen for hours as he describes what's happening in races, so it's nice to get David Harmon out on his bike, and it's good to hear him talk about his cycling for a change. It's mid-summer and Eurosport's voice of cycling is between prolonged stints of commentating on the Tours of



Double bubble: the tandem '25' is Harmon's goal

For example, when we do the Giro we are based at Eurosport's Paris studio, not at the race, and I keep a bike there. There are some excellent groups who ride around Longchamps in the evening; even elite French amateurs join in. It's very fast and just the sort of training I need.

“Then when we are on the Tour de France, Sean (Kelly) does all the driving, so he drops me off for the final 80 kilometres of each stage. It's great training, but the knowledge I gain from riding also helps my commentary. For example, you might see a hill on the race profile that looks steep, and if you hadn't seen it you might tell the viewers it could be a factor as the race approaches. But if you've ridden it and see it isn't such a problem, you won't make that mistake,” he says.

Harmon supplements his on-race training at home, and is currently clocking up the miles in short, sharp sessions on his



Quiet country lanes offer enough climbs to test the legs

"The view from the top of the Long Mynd is amazing"

487m
High point of the ride, top of the Long Mynd

local Shropshire roads. Roads which are quite like the ones he's riding today, although not quite as hilly as the first and hardest climb of the whole route.

"It's a hard pull, especially the first part, but the view from the top of the Long Mynd is amazing. Tell your readers, though, if they do the sportive to be very careful on the descent. The road surface is like a washboard, I was on the brakes most of the way down," Harmon points out on the other side of the climb in Church Stretton.

He heads south-west from there to Little Brampton, turning east to Clun. Later Harmon describes this part of the ride: "The rest of the roads on the ride

are well-surfaced and traffic-free, which is a thing I enjoy about riding in Shropshire."

Best and worst

This ride was done before what turned out to be an epic Tour de France, but when I ask Harmon to pick his high point from the racing he's seen so far he hardly hesitates. "The whole Classics season, but in particular the Tour of Flanders. The way Nuyens won that: hide, hide, hide and then making his move exactly when it counted."

The low point of the year, sadly, was easy to pick too. "Wouter Weylandt's death. As soon as I saw the pictures I knew, I got the same cold feeling as when Senna died. Next day was

so hard, talking for five hours while no racing went on. Some commentators stayed silent, but Sean and I both thought it was important to speak."

Back in Bishop's Castle, with just over 35.5 miles in the training bank, Harmon concludes the day with a bit more on the progress of his record attempt. "The tandem is having some adjustments made now, then we do the testing and the idea is to go later in the year. Wiggle has been really patient, though, they understand that's the way with road records. When we go for it we'll head north then might have to hole up in a hotel, with a team of 10 to 15 people, which is what you need for a straight-out record attempt, and wait for the right weather and a favourable wind."



Sometimes it's good to let the pedals do the talking...

Cycling in Shropshire

The Wiggle Wild Eddic Sportive takes place on Saturday, October 29, the last day of British summertime. There are 59 and 98-mile routes, with mountains to climb and the fast-cruising valleys of England's secret county in between. Details and entries are on www.kilotogo.com.

The sportive's event headquarters, the SPARC centre in Bishop's Castle, also hosts the Bishop's Castle tandem triathlon. One competitor swims, both ride and the other runs at the end. It's been going since 1985 and was once the biggest tandem event in the country. Check out www.tandeming.co.uk for more details.

Cycling WEEKLY Shropshire
57KM (35 MILES)



THE LONG MYND
There is a real mountain feel to this whale-back upland area, which is deeply dissected by steep-sided valleys called Batches. The two highest points of the Long Mynd are Pole Bank at 516m (1,693ft) and nearby Caer Caradoc, at 459m (1,506ft). They are both Marilyns, which is what someone with a sense of humor gave as the collective names for all hills in the United Kingdom over 150m (492ft) high. The joke being that all mountains in Scotland over 914m (3,000ft) are called Munros. As in Marilyn Munroe, see?

CHURCH STRETTON
Continuing the mountain theme, the town nestling at the bottom of the Long Mynd's east side was known to Victorians as Little Switzerland. The geology of this area is very complicated, and Church Stretton lends its name to an important geological fault which is by no means dormant. In 1960 a local side-fault shifted, leading to an earthquake measured at 5.1 on the Richter Scale.

WILD EDDIC
His name has grown in folklore and it isn't certain who he is, but it is known that a man called Eadric led a rebellion against the Norman conquest in the west Midlands during the 11th century. The Domesday Book records an Eadric owning land in this area, close to Wenlock Edge.

CLUN
Named after the River Clun that flows through it, the town's wonderful name features as part of other place names in the district. The poet A.E. Houseman couldn't resist including them as part of his most famous work, *A Shropshire Lad*, in the passage: "Clunton and Clunbury, Clungunford and Clun, are the quietest places under the sun."

NEXT WEEK
Geraint Thomas previews the Etape Cymru, and talks about the Tour de France

My training bike

DAVID used the Focus carbon bike he trains on for this ride. "It really is a comfortable ride. It's not the lightest bike, but I haven't had any trouble with it, and there's no drama riding either, no matter what the road throws at you," he says.



Training route

START in Bishop's Castle and head north-east, crossing the A488 and follow the lanes to Norbury, Wentnor, Bridges and Ratlinghope. Turn right in Ratlinghope and begin the Long Mynd climb. Descend with care to Church Stretton. Turn right and continue through town to join the A49. Turn right in Acton Scott, following the B4370 to the A489, where turn left and first right to Lydbury North. Turn left on the B4385 and right on the B4368 to Clun, where you turn right on the A488 and ride north to Bishop's Castle.

