

CLAIRE COOKE



Age: 55

Club: McNally Swords Cycling Club

Discipline: Road | Leisure

Started Cycling at the age of: 50

Why did you start cycling:

Husband swindled me into it. Asked me to sign us up for ballroom dancing classes and then he signed me up for a beginners cycling course.

What is your favourite thing about cycling?

The rush and sense of power when I'm flying along on a sunny day with the wind behind me. I feel invincible.

What have been your cycling highlights?

When I did my first 100kms. My club does an annual whole club spin every June and the first time I did it was my first 100kms. At the end, when we all got back to the start point for coffee etc., my bike computer said 97kms. No way was I stopping until I had my 100kms so I kept going for another 1.5km and then turned around and came back. I was so delighted with myself.

Do you have a quote that you live by or inspires you?

"I'm going faster than the fella on the sofa". I was struggling up Howth head one night on a club spin. The rest of my group were long gone. One of the more experienced guys from the club from another, much faster club group was on his way down the hill and he very kindly turned around and cycled back up with me. I thanked him and apologised for being so slow and he said to me "you're going faster than the fella on the sofa". It has always stuck with me and encouraged me when I am pushing against the wind.

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What has been your involvement in cycling, your story?

My husband took up cycling and when he used to come home and say that he had cycled 60kms and had gone up Howth hill, I thought he was nuts and also careless. A man in his mid-fifties could have a heart attack doing that kind of thing. So he asked me one day to sign us up for ballroom dancing. Complicated steps are good for the brain I was told when I questioned this unusual request. My husband has two left feet. No amount of complicated steps was going to be good for his brain. Anyway, I found us a course and signed us up.

Two weeks later he announced that he had signed me up for a beginners cycling course. The penny dropped. In hindsight, he only got me into cycling so that I would stop moaning and fretting about him cycling daft distances, up daft hills. And so here I am, just as daft and demented as himself.



Our club spins are organised by group speed. I am in the group that is next to the bottom. My average speed over 80km is 23kms. I have to work to maintain that. I can, in the summer bring that up to 24kms. Occasionally I can hit 25kms – a minor miracle. I love the long spins to Tara, Duleek, Celbridge etc. There is a group of 70 year olds that I go out with in the summer when I am off work. They are the most patient, well-coming and knowledgeable group of people to cycle with. I learn so much from them every time I go out. And so funny. They just make me laugh all the time. They also make me feel like I'm a great cyclist even as they peddle me into the ground.

What would you say to other females who may be interested in cycling?

1) Don't be afraid. Join a club or group who will teach you how to cycle safely. Learning how to be safe on the road gives you so much more road confidence. It doesn't matter how slow you are, everybody else was slow when they started out and they are only delighted to help you and have somebody slower than them!

2) Nobody looks good in lycra, just get it on you. You wouldn't play tennis in high-heels and you wouldn't go swimming in ski-gear. And you'll very glad of that padded seat.

How do you feel cycling has benefitted you?

Well even though I am the slowest in my club, I am fitter than all of my non-cycling friends. It has also given me confidence in my body. A post 50 year old female body can quickly develop a whole range of minor problems and glitches which can slow us down and chip away at our confidence. There is tendency in women of my age to believe that fitness, strength and endurance are for younger people. I actually think that it is far more important for our age group. Younger people have those things naturally. But fitness, strength and stamina gets more important as we age, we just have to work a bit harder to maintain it, and not simply for vanity's sake. I feel reasonably fit and strong and that gives me confidence both physically and mentally.

I also enjoy the look of mild shock on my younger co-workers faces and my nieces when I tell them that I cycled 80kms at the week-end.

I thought cycling would make me slim but it turns out cyclists live on my two favourite things - cake and coffee. So pros and cons!

How do you feel about becoming a Bike Like Me Advocate?

I am absolutely delighted. My club asked me to go on the committee and take on the role of women's rep and try to encourage more women into the club. I hate being on committees but I feel if you are in a club, you have to do your bit at some point. I don't know the first thing about being women's rep or encouraging other women as I am not a naturally confident person so I am hoping I will learn something about the role by being a Bike Like Me Advocate.



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