From Solo Rides to Shared Purpose: Hilary Jackson's Bike the UK for MS Story

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Meet Hilary Jackson: Fitness Instructor, Solo Cyclist, and MS Fundraiser

Hilary Jackson is no stranger to long days and physical endurance. As a fitness instructor based in the South of England, she's built her career around helping others stay active and healthy. But with unsociable hours and split shifts being the norm, Hilary has always found herself riding solo. Cycling, for her, was a trial-and-error journey – learning on the go, fitting in rides around work, and taking on challenges like the inaugural RideLondon 100 and multi-day charity rides.

When she discovered Bike the UK for MS, everything clicked: the support, the cause, the team. It was the perfect bridge between solo adventures and shared impact.

A Personal Connection: Riding for Mick and Margaret

Hilary's motivation to ride goes deeper than the love of cycling. Through her work, she came to know two clients, Mick and Margaret, who lived with multiple sclerosis (MS). Their experiences were very different—Mick dealt with nerve pain and muscle spasms that limited his day-to-day life, while Margaret, once an avid athlete, found creative ways to push forward despite her symptoms.

Their stories stayed with Hilary. They gave MS a face, a voice, and an urgency she couldn't ignore.

Scotland Calling: The Ride That Started It All

One day in early 2023, while scrolling Facebook, a post caught Hilary's eye: the North Coast 500 ride. In that instant, everything aligned. A chance to return to Scotland, a place that had left a lasting impression during a childhood holiday, and a way to give back to people like Mick and Margaret.

"It was the perfect chance to do 'bike-packing' without the packing," she says. "I signed up pretty much straight away."

Why I Keep Coming Back: Bucket List Routes and Bigger Purpose

Since that first ride, Hilary hasn't looked back. From the North Coast 500 to the Sea to Sea, each route has been a bucket-list cycling experience, made even better by the thoughtful planning and support.

"The best part is you can focus on riding, not logistics," she explains. "And meeting MS groups along the way adds real meaning. I learned so much about the condition—things I never knew before. And it made my fundraising feel more direct and personal."

From Nervous to Natural: Finding Her Place in the Peloton

As someone used to riding solo, Hilary admits she was nervous about joining a group ride. But those nerves quickly melted away.

"The atmosphere is relaxed and welcoming. Everyone finds their rhythm, and there's no pressure to ride in a pack," she recalls. "The faster you go, the more time for coffee at the next rest stop!"

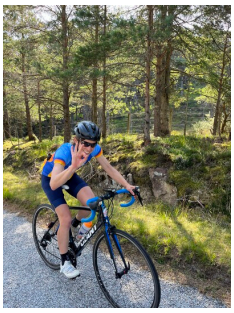
Mint Magnums and Starry Skies: Unforgettable Moments on the Road

Ask Hilary about her most memorable moments, and the stories come pouring out:

- Sitting in the sun with a mint Magnum outside the last shop before Gairloch, waiting for fellow riders.
- Stargazing at John O'Groats after a bracing dip in the North Sea.
- Mastering the sleeping bag roll after three days of failed attempts.
- Waiting patiently to take a celebratory selfie at the Northumberland border—only to be delayed by another cyclist taking the longest wee in history beneath the welcome sign.

These are the kinds of memories that make Bike the UK for MS rides more than just challenges—they

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become shared stories of laughter, struggle, and joy.

The Hardest Bit? Not the Weather!

Despite the usual reputation for UK weather, Hilary's been lucky. "I've had almost wall-to-wall sunshine," she admits. But that doesn't mean it's been easy.

Climbing Hartside Summit into a headwind stands out as a real test. "But if you've trained, you just push on. It's only one more pedal stroke, after all."

What I've Learned: MS, Community, and the Power of Showing Up

Hilary's rides have been as educational as they have been physical.

She learned that MS may begin much earlier than most people realise, sometimes manifesting as clumsiness or misdiagnosed as dyspraxia. And she heard how, since the pandemic, MS support groups have been struggling to keep their members engaged and connected.

"It made me realise how important our support is," she says. "We don't just raise money; we give MS groups a reason to gather and connect again."

Lessons in Simplicity: From Bike packing to Camp Life

Hilary expected to enjoy the rides, but she didn't expect to fall in love with camping.

"Climbing out of your tent and onto your bike is tougher on Day 1 than it is mid-week," she laughs. "But I've been lucky with the weather, and the experience has been magical."

Still Part of the Family: Staying Connected as an Alumnus

While Hilary hasn't made it to as many alumni events as she'd like, she still feels part of the Bike the UK for MS family. She follows updates, celebrates others' rides, and plans to be back on the road again soon.

Hilary's Advice: Book the Trip, Pack Light, Train Hard

To anyone thinking about joining a future ride, Hilary offers this:

1. Just book it
2. Don't overpack—you need less than you think
3. Train—it really will make the ride more enjoyable

Hilary's story reminds us that you don't have to be an expert cyclist or a seasoned adventurer to make a difference. Sometimes, all it takes is a bike, a cause, and a little sunshine.

Want to join the ride? Bike the UK for MS is waiting for you. And if you see someone rolling their sleeping bag in one perfect swoop, it might just be Hilary.

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