

Kevin, can you answer to the following questions !

Hello, Kevin ! When you get the time to do it, can you answer to the following questions, asked to all the finishers (edition in the review + website)

1) What are your feelings reaching the arrival ? [a great sense of achievement](#) 2)

Why and how did you begin to cycle ?

[When I was a young boy on my toy tricycle I would push the boundaries by exploring the footpaths further and further away from home because I always wanted to know what was around the next corner.](#)

3) Why and how did you begin the BIG challenge ?

Which is the most attractive criteria for you in this challenge media (professional races) or sport (difficulty) or tourism ? The reason I chose the BIG Challenge was because it offered me a reachable and realistic goal of 1000 climbs in Europe (well – 950 then plus a ‘maybe’ possible across the world in the future). How I began was built on the already achieved total of nearly 100 on entry back in the mid 1990’s. this gave me the boost to extend the climbs that I wanted to visit in the UK and Switzerland to start with. My most attractive criteria in the challenge is tourism. Racing has never been my forte as our former secretary Helmuth well knows when he named me ‘kevinspeeding’ because of my slow approach to the climbs.

4) Was there someone who motivated you in the beginning ?

[Yes, my father. He introduced me to our local hills near our home in Cheshire – Peak District and Snowdonia that led me to explore for myself. It wasn’t long before I was motivated in the challenge of road cyclo-climbing](#) 5) At which moment did you think : "I'll reach 1000"?

[When I was cycling with Axel Jansen and Daniel Briollet in Georgia. When these were reached I knew it was possible to complete. Following that there were those elusive two climbs in Crimea where it was now totally unsafe to visit without a gun for protection! It was a relief when the two were replaced and it was possible to visit western Ukraine for a second time together with Heiko Linnert, Irene Schneider and Gabor.](#)

6) About your score evolution, were there events in your private life that increased or decreased it ?

[Yes, when Ruth decided to join me \(albeit her driving not cycling!\) and we shared holidays in Madeira, Canary Islands, Corsica, Sardinia and Iceland making it possible to increase the count while holidaying together. This important so that we had time together without me being selfish to use time alone at her expense](#) 7) What were the countries where you found more difficulties to cycle ?

[Romania was particularly difficult because of the poor state of the roads. I really should have taken a mountain bike on my two visits to that country. Ukraine was also difficult but so glad that Gabor was able to loan me a mountain bike when I arrived](#)

8) What are the most beautiful sceneries (landscapes) that you met ?

[I fell in love with the Alpine countries – especially Switzerland where I’ve cycled on thirteen different occasions over the years. Except for a ‘Channel hop’ across the water – Dover- Calais- Boulogne – Folkstone, this was my first country visited outside of the UK and climbed my first BIG – the Brunig Pass – in 1976.](#)

9) Did you often think : "I put my wheels where professional racers put theirs" or "where other BIG members put theirs" ?

[As my climb count in the BIG club increased – yes, I would agree that I enjoyed the thought of cycling where other BIG members had visited, especially when I read their exploits in the annual BIG review](#)

10) Were there a final competition or race between those at the end who were near the Grail of 1000 ?

(In English, by the way, it’s called ‘The Grail’) [No, I was never concerned about competition with others to reach the 1000. It was only my own personal ambition.](#)

11) What are your best souvenirs of relationships sharing in the BIG world ?

[Enjoying developed friendships with other BIG members but especially Francois Candau then later Heiko Linnert and Irene Schneider followed by Axel Jansen and Daniel Briollet](#) 12) What are your worst souvenirs inside the 1000 ?

[Cycling in thunderstorms and soaked to the bone in deluge in northern Italy – but I enjoyed the climbs in better weather! Some of the climbs in Bulgaria and Romania were boring to climb but on the whole great countries to visit.](#)

13) The several languages used in the BIG Cycling World : is this an additional interest or a real problem for you ?

Being English and typically mono-linguistic as most Brits are – yes a problem but thank God for the internet and universal translators! I'm always grateful to my European friends for their willingness to speak English to a Brit would couldn't be bothered to learn a second language.

14) Do you think that your kind of passion is very similar to the majority of the other members that you met ?

In conversation with many of them, yes the passion is similar. We share the same goals and outlook.

15) Had you a good feedback inside your country when talking about the BIG ?

Local friends and family were always interested to hear of my latest adventure when I returned home as the places where the BIG's are situated are in locations where few British people would visit.

16) Do you think that the national British challenge will give an additional interest to your fellow countrymen ?

What do you think generally about the parallel challenges ? (Natachas, Ironbigs) The British Natacha's should add interest to Brit who might find it difficult to explore further afield for lack of time or financial constraints. Personally I don't think the Ironbig's hold the same interest. I like the idea of Natacha's that each member can attempt in their own countries as it adds interest to explore other areas

17) Among your 1000, what are the most difficult ones with the slopes ?

Was there in those places that you suffered more ? Kitzbuhl Horn was a killer! Especially the day I cycled it (and eventually walked) as it was in fog and couldn't see the road before me except the wall of a road before my eyes. L'Angliru was another one – been there three times now and each time walked the higher section. I must go back with my lower gear mountain bike and attempt it again.

18) What do your family and friends think about this passion for cyclo-climbing in Europe ?

They think I'm mad, but admire my determination and sense of adventure. While they go to Benidorm or Blackpool they're interested in hearing about my exploits. They say "but it's not normal" to which I say "What I normality? By what standard do you judge it by? Normality is relative!"

19) Do you have any bad or sorry feelings somewhere about all these years used to build your score in BIG ?

Yes, time away from Ruth who had toped up with my being away from home too much, especially when I was working and only had limited holiday periods away from work and our time away together suffered. Personally for her – she's glad it's all over! Ah but is it? I'll be revisiting many to cycle other unconquered sides! The mighty Ventoux is on my list for next year!

20) How do you see your future in your cycling practice ?

Probably as I become older I'll visit more gentle cycling areas such as cycling the European lake boundaries of Lake Geneva or Lake Constance but over the next few years I'll be revisiting BIG's and exploring the unriden sides

21) What do you want to say to those who begin the BIG now ?

If you've got the time and money to spare visit all the BIG's as it will give you a better appreciation of European landscape and culture – and visit those areas as soon as you can as Brexit may result in some constraints to travelling for British people in mainland Europe in the future

22) Can you sum up BIG in one short sentence ?

The BIG is the Biker Information Guide and the Best In the Game to all of it's members

Saturday 15th September 2018

My BIG day has arrived



. Francois had contacted me to say he would leave his car at the road top of Col de Tourniol then cycle down and across Romans sur Isere to my hotel. He arrived at 10.30. We chatted a while then cycled down to the bridge over the river by the cathedral. Heiko, Anja and Irene would arrive at 12.00. Unknown to me – as Heiko had only mentioned it as a possibility – Ard Oostra would also join. I was extremely grateful and humbled by the fact that Francois had driven from Normandy, staying overnight in Lyons. Also Heiko and contingent had driven from Amberg and stayed over with Ard Oostra at his home in Montreux and driven from there this morning. Enrico Alberini from Italy staying with Thierry Labour and also Daniel Coulon another French man had also arranged to meet at the foot of the climb in Bourg de Peage south of the river. Heiko and Irene had

parked their large vans just north of the A49 crossover in a lay-by. There was some confusion as to where and how to meet up. Heiko and Thierry had cycled down to the river bridge to meet us. I had suggested a parking place on a quiet road near to where I was staying a kilometre to the west of the cathedral but they wanted to park at the starting point. We cycled back to the vans to join the others then set off at 13.00 to climb the western side of **Col de Tourniol BIG 297**. 1145 metres. Distance 24km. (15 miles) it took 3 hours to cycle up, 2 hours down. 13.00 to 18.00

It was so good to cycle with others. Eight of us kept together as we enjoyed the climb and the scenery on a wonderful warm and sunny day. It was a deep blue sky and no wind – absolutely perfect! There were eight – but where was Francois? “Oh, he’s gone on ahead”, said Anja. I wasn’t aware until I reached the top that Francois was providing waiter service when we arrived. A few hundred metres from the end the others urged me on to reach the top first. Then I saw the Union flag and EU flag draped across the road, kept down with a few rocks. I rode the UK flag then back over to go over the EU flag just to show that I’m a Brit who respects the EU ! After many photos and congratulations – so thankful – Francois and Thierry went back to where we came up and produced a folding table hidden behind a large rock. Francois then draped the Union flag over the paste table and brought out champagne – Carod Clairette de Die Cuvee Symbiose Tradition - and a box of chocolate biscuits from the boot of his car. We celebrated my 1000th climb achievement in real style thanks to Francois’ wonderful organisation and arrangement – and his great effort because he driven from home in Saint Marcel, Normandy to Lyon then the following day to Romans then after that had driven to the Col de Tourniol road summit, cycled down then cycled up again before the rest of us had arrived. That was a superhuman effort that goes far beyond the call of duty and really



shows the character of the man. It's no wonder that he has a responsible job in his workplace and also that he's attracted a beautiful wife to marry. Thank you Francois! But before me showering him with praise – on the day he showered me with a bottle of champagne! It was like a Formula 1 racing driver at the podium! Following that the smell of the alcohol stayed with me in the evening as I went to Thierry's house for a meal without taking a shower first! Thierry Labour invited me to his home in Mallisard near Valence for a meal so made my way straight there. My BIG day has arrived



Monday 17th September 2018

Driving 31km (20 miles) 09.30 – 10.30 Briancon to Bardonecchia along the direct minor road along Vallee de la Claree and later over Col de l'Echelle. My experience here was through a thick morning mist obliterating the scenery. Either side of the road are huge white cliffs and several tunnels to pass through then down to lower ground into Italy and Bardonecchia where I parked up for the climb of BIG 679 Colle Sommeiller 2993 metres. It was good fortune that I wasn't cycling this climb on a Thursday as this road is closed every Thursday from 15th July to 30th September. (What do they do? Dust the road?) It's 26km to cycle from Bardonecchia (16 miles) but took me 4.5 hours to climb, 10.30 to 15.00 and later 2.5 hours down. My descent was from 15.30 to 18.00 as there are plenty of photo opportunities. Last cycled – well-walked most of it – in July 2010. The start of the climb once out of Bardonecchia is along a narrow thickly wooded area on asphalt pot-holed road to Rochemolles. From that point on the continuation is gravel but the final section is small stones. It's impossible to cycle Colle Sommeiller on a normal road bike. I had brought my mountain bike from England specifically to conquer this climb. After Rochemolles the way forward begins with some steepness but passing the reservoir further along the climb is more gradual. Ahead the mountains close in and a steeper climb and hairpins, passing a waterfall and further up where the track goes over into an upper valley then a gradual ascent to the stony section that is also steep. I was followed on the way up by a group of Germans driving SUV's and met them at top where they congratulated me and offered me a beer! Couldn't refuse that! At the end of the track there's an open area with a low wooden barrier to stop vehicles going further to the very top – a 100 metres further to the very top with a lake in front and the mountains surrounding with the view over the other side further into Italy. Back down to the car and drove from Bardonneccia via Col de l'Echelle back to Briancon. 18.00 – 19.00.

Wednesday 19th September 2018

Away at 09.00 from Bassura where it's steeply up through small Stroppio village with its orange and yellow horizontal stripe church of San Giovanni then to Cucchailes where there's a downward section to skirt the mountain and gradually up again through a wooded area then into an open clearing and a ridge to the road junction for Elva to the left and **BIG 684 Colle di Sampeyre** 2284 metres to the east. At the top is a turquoise Madonna statue and at the highest point off-road is a rocky outcrop similar to Dartmoor tors. From the south east it's 18km (12 miles) and that took me from 9.00 to 12.15 – 3.1/4 hours up, then 1 hour down. (12.30 to 13.30). Back to the car then drove to 56km (35mils) to Demonte at 14.30 and parked up at the car park opposite the road junction. From here I cycled gradually up through the woods to San Giacomo, then steeply west away from the village but this soon became a more gradual ascent. On meeting a cattle grid and into open country the road becomes steeper as the mountains were approached. I was climbing **Colle Il Fauniera - or Colle dei Morti – The Hill of the Dead BIG 685**, at 2481 metres. It really is the hill of the dead as Marco Pantani's statue crowns the top of the pass. The statue doesn't do him justice as his head looks like a skull. After the cattle grid it was a struggle to reach the top as the road became steep until a lone hostel on the right was reached. From there it's a bit easier until a farmstead off to the right where the road veers round to the left in a wide arc then to the ridge of Col di Valcavera then swings to the right and skirts under a mountain side sloping down from the north to a cut in the rocks, around to the left and a final short rise to be greeted by the face of Marco Pantani. There was no one else there with Marco except for a girl cyclist who had overtaken me a short distance back. I asked her to take my photo – and with Pantani – but of course no comparison – except I'm living a lot longer. It was quite cold on the descent back down the way I came and was glad of jacket and gloves. On the way down, traffic signs diverted any traffic along two tracks in two places but the diversions were on gravel. I stayed on the road to avoid having to slow my descent. My ascent took from 14.30 to 18.10 and the descent 18.30 to 20.00, 25km to the top.



Kevin Speed