

## Yorkshire Dales

# Le Tour de Yorkshire — on three wheels

Leave the hard work to Sir Bradley and co — if you want to explore the race's Yorkshire stages jump on a trike, writes **James Ellis**

**T**he road beneath our wheels begins to climb sharply, leaving behind grass-filled valleys, tiny villages and stone barns and giving way to bracken-capped limestone hills. The asphalt rises steeper still over the next two miles — our breath forming mist trails from the chillier air — until we reach the 2,000ft hill summit where rainwater has carved into the limestone beneath us to create a series of cooling caverns on the Buttertubs Pass which unites the two valleys of Swaledale and Wharfedale in the Yorkshire Dales National Park.

When the Tour de France graces this part of the world in July next year, this will be one of two King of the Mountains sections in Stage One. When Sir Bradley Wiggins, Chris Froome and the other riders reach this point even they are likely to be short of breath.

We, on the other hand, have no such difficulty. Our chariot might have handlebars and a single wheel at the front — but behind us are two further wheels and a 1.6 litre Zetec engine, the same size and type as used in a Ford Focus. We're on a Boom Trike, the latest in a number of ways in which visitors can travel uphill and down dale on the routes Le Tour will take next year. I don't even have to steer, thanks to the presence of "chauffeur" Jason Richards, who has two elevated seats behind him for our comfort.

Jason and his wife, Judith, put their "real" jobs as a computer programmer and primary school teacher on hold earlier this year to launch Yorkshire Trike Tours — a company that offers trips around the Dales on Jason's custom-built trike, the only one in the country with a licence to ferry paying passengers.

"We had to get a special dispensation licence from Leeds council," the burly biker tells me. "They even had to create a new category for us," he adds with a little disdain as he shows me the plate on the back that bears the legend "Novelty Vehicle".

The company offers a range of tours around the Dales, from one-hour samplers to five-hour trips that take in the lion's share of Le Tour's Stage One from Ilkley to Harrogate, missing out only the urban sprawl of Leeds — and Jason and Judith are happy to pick up wannabe Easy Riders from just about anywhere around the route.

We decide to launch our own assault on the Yellow Jersey from Middleham Castle, the childhood home of Richard III, and cover a three-hour 50-mile circular stretch around what many call the prettiest part of



James Ellis on the trike. Below left, the Tour picnic

the Dales, returning to the castle in late afternoon.

A quick safety briefing — which amounts to "wear this helmet, strap in and enjoy the ride" — and we are off with a satisfying roar of the engine, soon eating up the miles with ease.

As we head down the narrow Dales roads, Jason's earlier description of the trike — "it offers the freedom of a bike and the safety of a car" — rings true. The wind rushes against my face and the wide visor on my helmet offers panoramic views of the gorgeous countryside passing by, yet there is a comforting feeling of stability thanks to the three wheels. Novelty vehicle? I don't think so.

Another thing soon becomes apparent: the trike commands respect. Passers-by look and wave, and other motorcyclists



nod as we pass. When we are caught in a tight spot with a car coming in the opposite direction, the driver is left mouth agape as Jason throws the trike into reverse to make room for him to pass. At our first stop, the raging butterscotch-coloured Aysgarth Falls, a group of walkers stops to chat to us before one of them, Sheila, asks if she can jump on the seat beside me for a picture.

Every so often, Jason stops to explain the history of the area: there are 18 major dales — or valleys — in the 680 square-mile park and most of them are named after the river which flows through them, with the exception of Wensleydale — which is named after the market town of Wensley. The best bits are undoubtedly the open road and the chance to drink in the views that have me recall the Tour director Christian Prudhomme's thoughts when he sanctioned the race's arrival: "I knew Yorkshire... but I did not realise that it was so gorgeous."

Midway through our ride and Jason pulls a surprise. The trike's boot pops open and out comes a hamper packed with Wensleydale cheese, pork pies and thick, warming potato and leek soup.

It's delicious and unexpected, but surprisingly, by the time evening comes round, I can still find room for an eight-course taster menu at my base for the weekend, the Devonshire Arms Country House Hotel in Bolton Abbey. By that time Jason and Judith have roared off, and I am left to devour dishes such as marinated scallops and honey-glazed duck and matching wines. It's a wonderful meal to celebrate my own Tour victory.

## Alternative Tours . . .

Trikes aren't the only way to see the route of Le Tour: several other companies are offering innovative ways to visit the Dales.

### Taste Le Tour

It's unlikely Chris Froome will be fuelling up on Dales charcuterie and Yorkshire wines . . . but that doesn't mean you can't. Yorkshire Food Finder (01904 448439, yorkshirefoodfinder.org) offers a two-day Taste Le Tour cycle ride for £395pp, including B&B, cycle hire and lots of stops that tempt the tastebuds.

### Go electric

Head up hill and down dale on two wheels — and when the going gets tough, flick on a switch to let an electric motor take the strain. E-bike (01539 568163, e-bikehire.com) offers a number of Dales tours from £35. The ones that take in the best bits of Le Tour route are the Wharfedale Wobble and Buttertubs or Bust! itineraries.

### Try a tandem

If it's true that a problem shared is a problem halved, then becoming king or queen of the mountains is easier when travelling in tandem. JD Tandems (01756 748400, tandems.co.uk) in Gargrave offers tandem hire from £50 per couple and the store is just a short ride from both Yorkshire stages.



### Trusty steeds

Trot around Le Tour stages sitting in a different kind of saddle with a hacking tour on horseback. Draughton Riding Centre (01756 710242, draughtonridingcentre.com) offers group trips from £25 an hour or £55 for five hours. Riders should be comfortable with walking, trotting and cantering.

### Yorkshire 4x4

Come rain, shine or snow, the Dales' beauty changes with the seasons. Don't miss out in inclement weather with a trip in a customised Land Rover that will let you go off piste from Le Tour routes. Yorkshire 4x4 Tours (01757 638479, yorkshire4x4tours.com) offers Dales Day Out tours that start from Bainbridge for £50 per vehicle for two people.

## Need to know

James Ellis was a guest of the Devonshire Arms (01756 710441, thedevonshirearms.co.uk). One night's dinner, bed and breakfast in The Burlington Restaurant is from £262 per double room. Yorkshire Trike Tours (0113-258 5055, yorkshiretriketours.co.uk) offers tours of the Dales from £74 per person. The five-hour Tour de France trip is £225 per person, including a picnic lunch. For more information on Yorkshire's Grand Départ in July 2014, see [yorkshire.com/letour](http://yorkshire.com/letour)