

The rising popularity of Cyclo Cross saw three significant events in the last season. 1. The recognition of the West Midlands as a standalone area to provide a West Midlands Regional Championship. 2. The formation of a Leicestershire Cyclo Cross League and 3. The provision of a Women only race.

Despite two predominantly Sunday Leagues in the middle of the country to choose from, the West Midland Cyclo Cross League again reached its upper limit of 800 registrations with a percentage split of 63% over 18's, 3% Junior, 13% Youth and 20% under 12s. It's fantastic that we are still attracting so many young riders with the gradual decline in numbers through Youth and Junior being perfectly natural as riders specialise in other disciplines, find studies take priority or natural wastage, hopefully to other sports and not a sedentary life. Our Juniors and Young Seniors may be a small percentage of the overall League but what a talented group they are. I won't name them all individually but these riders have beaten their more senior riders throughout the season, represented Great Britain in World Cups and World Championships and I don't have to remind you that one of our regions riders is World Champion. They should be proud of their achievements as we are and give our thanks to the clubs and organisers who have nurtured and provided opportunity for these young people.

Our thanks to Gordon Siers who took on the lead role in organising the regional Championship but it was a shame that this event had the lowest number of participants at 244. It was a central location on a well drained course and it's hard to pinpoint why this wasn't better supported? Obviously this race cannot be classed as an out and out West Midland League counting event as due to BC regulations, riders must reside in a distinct postcode region and excludes some registered club riders. A club could have an address in our region but some of its members could fall outside our region due to the club being close to a region border. This will account for a small number of missing riders but other reasons could be, a) online entry only, a large percentage of our riders are against online entry, b) unable to award full ranking points, c) average points is misunderstood and d) misinformed riders and Chinese Whispers suggested riders would be pulled out of the race if lapped. Communication via the British Cycling email tool, the Website and Facebook certainly gave plenty of advance notice, the end of season survey suggests the majority of riders want events to continue until the end of January and correct information is easily available from the website, the British Cycling rulebook or a direct question to the Committee via email, Facebook or even telephone.

The creation of a Leicester League made perfect sense to ease issues of parking and finding venues to cope with increased participation and the WMCCL made a donation of course marking stakes to help the new League as after all, these riders have contributed to the WMCCL over the years. The effect on numbers competing was reduced as expected with participation slightly down with 3 events dipping below 400 with the highest number of riders being in sunny September topping out at 445 at Henley in Arden. Our lowest number being around 320 riders but the reasons here could be location for Wyre Forest and bad weather for Baggeridge round 8 which is a normally well supported venue and had over 400 riders in October. Unfortunately we also suffered with the weather for a new organiser and venue in December and round 10 was cancelled due to access and safety issues with the League making a contribution towards the committed financial costs.

The provision of a Women only race decided at last year's AGM proposed so passionately by Isla Rowntree was groundbreaking and was eventually mirrored at a National level but like the National series some events suffered badly with participation. At a regional level we have such a vast range of ability that when you mix the best that the UK has to offer with novice riders and only attract 12 riders we are not showcasing but rather detracting from what Cyclo Cross is and can be, an exciting inclusive sport. How many times this winter at an Elite World level did we witness much more gripping races from the Women rather than the Men? We are at times trying to cram a "quart into a pint pot" during our race days with so many events and providing course practice time and I see that we will have to refine our offering. We want to provide our Elite Women with meaningful competition (against the V50 men again perhaps?) yet still provide novice riders an opportunity to access this wonderful sport. I am sure we can find a way to provide our Elite female riders a chance to race and hone their skills in rider on rider competition which is what is wanted and also a race for other female categories. A proposal to the AGM is to provide a Fun/Novice category which will allow male riders from Senior/V40 and V50+ categories to drop down from racing in the League proper to ride in the same time slot as the female categories not racing Elite. Our season end survey suggested that this would be welcomed.

Our season end survey was well received and had a very high response. The majority want the season to start in September and want it to end at the end of January. The majority are happy with the number of races that the League offers but there is frustration that there are gaps in the season. Now obviously these responses cannot all be implemented or rectified without change, we cannot run to the end of January unless we have more gaps or more events. Some responses ask that we provide more interesting or technical courses, some ask for only one visit to a venue. We have to accept that venues to cater for our level of participation are getting harder and harder to find and a venue such as Aldersley which we lost this season can make more money from hiring out a small room for a coaching course that has very little impact on it's parking provision for other customers, compared to us swamping a car park. Providing technical aspects such as planks to bunny hop can often be the last thing on an organisers mind if he is only allowed access on the morning of the event and he is waiting for daylight to set up before we all demand practice at 9am.

One of the big topics from the survey was parking charges. As a League we have tried to standardise as much as we can, entry fees that are pretty much the cheapest in the country, race day schedule which is the same week in week out, electronic prize fund payments etc but what we cannot control is the cost incurred by each of our clubs who are good enough to organise races for us. Fillongley came out high on the ratings for best course but this is our most expensive venue and also carries the very real threat of reinstatement fees if we make a mess of the grassland. This venue can only be viable for the organising club if there is a car parking charge and in my case, I would rather pay £3 car parking than have to pay a higher entry fee per rider for the 6 competitors travelling in the van which would be more than £3 in total. Each venue is unique in it's cost to the organiser, Baggeridge is cheap to hire but individuals pay metered car parking, my venue at Shrewsbury Sports Village is expensive to hire but due to Council policy we cannot charge for parking and if the cycle track is unusable after a muddy event we will be charged for lost track time. Our largest turnout was at Henley and to accommodate us, Johnsons Coaches have to pay coach

drivers to move coaches offsite and return after we have left. We cannot provide some venues without this parking charge and critics should also remember that the clubs who organise are in the main just breaking even and not making anywhere near the large profit that people imagine. As a League we must encourage more organisers and enable them to at least break even, no clubs should be making a loss.

For the 2017 - 2018 season the League continued with its bursary scheme for riders looking to progress and the feedback and results have been very pleasing. We continued our association with Madison Cycles through it's Ridley and Lazer brands and we thank them for their continued support. We updated the website and I would like to thank Andy Whitehouse for providing images for the website and Ben Goddard for writing race reports with supplementary images from David Perry. Whilst on the topic of the website on behalf of the League I would like to thank Andy Jones of Wolverhampton Wheelers, our webmaster of many years, committee member, organiser, rider and master of the League tables who stands down from the committee at this meeting.

Finally I would like to thank everyone associated with putting on League events, Commissaires, Adrian our commentator, Julian at Blacksheep, Mick Davies and Andy Jones for rankings, tables and all sorts of things that happen in the background, our committee, especially secretary David Garrett and treasurer Gordon Siers but most of all, our organisers, clubs and marshals.

Dave Mellor
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