

Ride to the race: Ultracycling becomes our climate conscience

Published Aug 20, 2020 • CALEY FRETZ (HTTPS://VELO.OUTSIDEONLINE.COM/BYLINE/CALEY-FRETZ/)



(https://www.velooutside.com/sharing/shares.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.velooutside.com%2F2020%2F08%2Fride-to-the-race-ultracycling-becomes-our-climate-conscience%2F)

u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.velooutside.com%2F2020%2F08%2Fride-to-the-race-ultracycling-becomes-our-climate-conscience%2F)



PHOTO: BRAKETHROUGH MEDIA

Heading out the door? Read this article on the new Outside+ app available now on iOS devices for members! Download the app (https://outsideapp.onelink.me/wOhI/6wh1kbwv).

GBDuro sees riders traverse the length of Great Britain following a 2,000 km route from the island's toe to tip. It is run by The Racing Collective (https://www.theracingcollective.com/), a not-for-profit bikepacking club founded on the belief that professional cycling is not just an innocent bystander, caught in the crossfire of climate change - it's an active participant.

In December last year, they announced riders must get to the GBDuro start line without flying.

Svein Tuft, recently retired from over a decade in the WorldTour, subsequently rode 1,000 km to the start, and another 1,000 km back home. Following this year's edition, the hosts filed this essay reflecting on how ultracycling, free from the burden of fossil fuel sponsorship, is returning to the ethos that made cycling great in the first place.

The Tour de France was invented to sell newspapers. Harmless enough. But somewhere along the way, professional cycling started selling aviation, cars, oil, gas, other petrochemical products, and so on. In short, carbon-intensive products that exacerbate climate change, which in turn increases the frequency and severity of extreme weather events.

Now, in a cruel twist, riders and races are falling victim to the weather they are helping to propagate. Extreme heat, freak storms,

Keep Reading! 4 stories left

Upgrade for unlimited digital content and more. [Join Outside+](#)

underway; another race with an eye-watering carbon footprint, sponsored by an oil and gas major and an airline. And just last week, riders and fans scrambled for cover as giant hailstorms hit the Dauphiné leaving some riders covered in welts. Tying any one event to climate change is difficult, but the trends all point in the same direction.

Within pro cycling, climate change has become the elephant in the room, reminiscent of doping in the Armstrong era. No one wants to talk about it because everyone is enjoying the ride. If it does get mentioned, the conversation focuses on how races can be adapted to accommodate the new normal weather. But this misses the point. Sport is about progression – driving forward solutions, not accepting our fate.

Free from the traditions and vested interests that often hold pro cycling hostage, ultracycling is showing another direction is possible. The Transcontinental Race, for instance, brings back much of the ethos revered about the original races such as integrity, autonomy, history and community. And with no ties with the fossil fuel companies (or non-cycling related brands at all for that matter), no team cars, buses or media helicopters, the race has a comparatively small carbon footprint. The event organisers, Lost Dot, also subtly impose environmental values into the fabric of the race, for instance by selecting checkpoint volunteers based on the carbon intensity of their travel.

ADVERTISEMENT

“I fell for the Transcontinental because it's a daring and thoroughly modern take on how bike racing used to be back in the 'heroic' era,” said Jack Thurston, a writer and broadcaster. “By putting the lost virtues of adventure and self-reliance back at the heart of a bike race, the Transcontinental is a breath of fresh air in the increasingly bland, commercialised world of modern cycle sport.”

So why did we at GBDuro single out flying? To stop temperatures from rising further we need to get to net-zero emissions. That means globally, per person, we need to get to 1 tonne of CO2 per year (for context, the average European currently emits ~11 tonnes of CO2 per year). Flying is incompatible with that as a return flight from London to New York emits ~1.8 tonnes of CO2, blowing our personal carbon budget for the whole year. GBDuro riders commuted from Switzerland, Ireland and across the UK.

“Using the small carbon budget we have left to remain below 2oC on non-essential activities such as flying or eating beef/dairy will be looked back on in the years to come as irresponsible. Yet Governments are reluctant to take that freedom away from citizens due to a potent cocktail of short-termism, scientific illiteracy, and fear of rejection – the parallels with COVID-19 should not be overlooked. If we are to move the dial on climate, it will be through determination and innovation. Professional cycling has these attributes in abundance; the question is, can it sever its ties with the fossil fuel industry in time?” – The Racing Collective

So how did the 2020 GCDuro unfold?

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, the event changed format from self-supported to self-sufficient. In other words, riders were not able to use any commercial services, buildings, or outside assistance – an effort to help limit the risk of transmission. That meant riders had to carry all their own food and source their own water throughout the 2,000 km journey. In addition, in an effort to reduce plastic waste, riders were unable to dispose of any non-biodegradable waste throughout the trip, in line with the ‘pack it in, pack it out’ ethos of backcountry travel.

Josh Ibbett made it to the finish first, reaching John o' Groats in the early hours of August 9 in a time of 7 days 17 hours and 44 minutes. He averaged 260 km and 4,000 m of climbing per day on road and gravel, much like in the earliest bike races. He won nothing.

Josh Ibbett was the first to the finish line, winning him precisely nothing. Photo: Dan King

And just like in the original races of the early 1900s, GBDuro was littered with stories of riders fixing their own mechanical problems. Irish K2 and Everest summiteer Jason Black was threatening Josh for the lead up to the midway point when his saddle snapped clean off its rails, which the community of dotwatchers (those dedicated folks who watch GPS dots work their way slowly across an online map) presumed spelled the end of his ride.

But Jason simply remarked “one thing's for sure: if I have to stick the seat post up my ass I will make it to John o'Groats.” True to form, he made it to the finish, cycling over 800 km while nursing the delicate bodge he had made and standing up for much of the way. Unfortunately, he also had some GPS issues that later led to his disqualification when he could not prove he had followed the correct route.

The technology might be different but again the stories from the original races reverberate to the current day.

Gail Brown's pannier rack snapped near Bristol. At a mere 400 km into the route, it looked like a bodge would be short-lived. She then went on to cycle 1,600 km over some of Great Britain's harshest terrain with a rack held together with duct tape, glue, and cable ties, finishing third overall and becoming the first-placed woman.

Things didn't work out so well for Tuft (the raised-by-wolves mountain-man who retired from WorldTour racing in 2019 with 13 Grand Tours under his belt) as he was forced to scratch following a bout of food poisoning about 600 km into the route, most likely from drinking from a dodgy stream. Once recovered, he casually rode back home to Andorra. The bike is not just a machine for racing; it is the Swiss-army knife of sustainable living used for commuting and carrying kids, groceries and other cargo. Sustainable travel is within our grasp if we chose to embrace it like Svein.

ADVERTISEMENT

Last year Lachlan Morton won the inaugural edition of GBDURO describing it as: "The hardest bike race in the world, it's a beautiful beast." At the finish, Lachlan's measured fatigue was higher than it had been after the Vuelta a España in 2017, a three-week Grand Tour.

Young, ambitious riders like Morton are already forging an alternative path fuelled by confidence in their own ability and desire to live life to the fullest. Technology, particularly social media, is also changing the rules of the game; meaning sustainability does not necessarily have to come at the cost of profit.

Just as well - everyone knows selling newspapers is an old man's game.

GBDuro Gallery

Thanks to Dan King of [Breakaway Digital \(https://breakawaydigital.co.uk/\)](https://breakawaydigital.co.uk/) for these gorgeous shots.



ADVERTISEMENT

Similar Reads



Amber Neben Diary: Back to the beginning in Idaho (<https://velo.outsideonline.com/road/road-culture/amber-neben-diary-back-to-the-beginning-in-idaho/>)



Gaimon's win the culmination of unconventional road to the big show (<https://velo.outsideonline.com/road/road-culture/gaimons-win-the-culmination-of-unconventional-road-to-the-big-show/>)



Chad Haga Journal: Welcome to the WorldTour (<https://velo.outsideonline.com/road/road-culture/chad-haga-journal-welcome-worldtour/>)



Bobby & Jens: Cherie Pridham Is Headed to the Women's WorldTour (<https://velo.outsideonline.com/road/road-culture/bobby-jens-cherie-pridham-is-headed-to-the-womens-worldtour/>)

ADVERTISEMENT

TAGS

- [FEATURES \(HTTPS://VELO.OUTSIDEONLINE.COM/TAG/FEATURES/\)](https://velo.outsideonline.com/tag/features/)
- [GBDURO \(HTTPS://VELO.OUTSIDEONLINE.COM/TAG/GBDURO/\)](https://velo.outsideonline.com/tag/gbduro/)
- [ULTRA ENDURANCE \(HTTPS://VELO.OUTSIDEONLINE.COM/TAG/ULTRA-ENDURANCE/\)](https://velo.outsideonline.com/tag/ultra-endurance/)

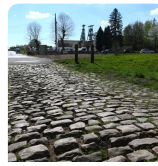
ADVERTISEMENT

Popular on Velo



Who Earns Most in Pro Cycling? Report Ranks Salaries, from Pogačar to Van der Poel and Beyond
(<https://velo.outsideonline.com/road/report-ranks-pro-cyclist-pay-from-tadej-pogacar-to-van-der-poel-and-more/>)

(<https://velo.outsideonline.com/road/report-ranks-pro-cyclist-pay-from-tadej-pogacar-to-van-der-poel-and-more/>)



(<https://velo.outsideonline.com/news/race-organizer-receives-three-month-suspended-sentence-after-death-of-stef-loos/>)

Race Organizer Receives Three-Month Suspended Sentence after Death of Stef Loos
(<https://velo.outsideonline.com/news/race-organizer-receives-three-month-suspended-sentence-after-death-of-stef-loos/>)



5 Gravel Bike Trends We Expect to See in 2024
(<https://velo.outsideonline.com/gravel/gravel-gear/5-gravel-bike-trends-we-expect-to-see-in-2024/>)

(<https://velo.outsideonline.com/gravel/gravel-gear/5-gravel-bike-trends-we-expect-to-see-in-2024/>)



(<https://velo.outsideonline.com/road/racing/santos-tour-down-under-stage-5-oscar-onley-delivers/>)

Santos Tour Down Under stage 5: Onley Delivers on Willunga Hill, Williams Edges into Lead
(<https://velo.outsideonline.com/road/racing/santos-tour-down-under-stage-5-oscar-onley-delivers/>)

[VeloNews](#) [Road](#) [Road Culture](#)

SPONSORED CONTENT

How (and Why) to Join a Virtual Cycling Community

The best way to achieve your cycling goals is not to change your diet, start a new training plan, or buy a new bike. It's all about the people you surround yourself with.

PRESENTED BY Zwift



(<https://www.zwift.com/share/direct?p?u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.zwift.com%2Fblog%2Fhow-and-why-to-join-a-virtual-cycling-community/>)



PHOTO: ZWIFT

Finding success with fitness goals is all about staying motivated. And what could be more motivating than a group of like-minded individuals moving toward similar goals? Cycling clubs or communities offer accountability and the inspiration to push yourself further than ever before. When you first start looking for a biking club or community, you might be surprised by just how many options are available, especially in the virtual world. Here's how to find the perfect group for you and why it's so crucial if you want to take your training to the next level.

Welcome to Watopia

Indoor training was once a lonely endeavor. Now, virtual training platforms like Zwift let you connect with thousands of riders from around the world—all while training indoors. Zwift is the largest virtual training community on the market. Millions of users ride, run, train, and race in Watopia (<https://sr.studiostack.com/c/link?!=1475828&s=1475826>)—one of Zwift's virtual worlds—and Zwift's virtual renditions of real-life cities. And since Zwift users come from around the world, you'll find riding companions any time of day. Jump on the trainer at 5 a.m. EST, and you'll likely run into riders from Japan and Australia. If you prefer spending your lunch break on the trainer, you'll find thousands of riders in Europe doing their evening workouts.

Find Your People

Zwift users come from all walks of life. Whether you are a complete newbie, a busy parent, or a seasoned professional, there is a biking community out there for you. Looking for an inclusive, no-drop community? Join a ride with [the Herd](https://sr.studiostack.com/c/link?l=1475830&s=1475826) (<https://sr.studiostack.com/c/link?l=1475830&s=1475826>), a group whose leaders commit to holding a stated pace throughout a group ride, so you know exactly what you're getting into. Balancing training and fatherhood? The riders of [DIRT \(Dads Indoors Riding Trainers\)](https://sr.studiostack.com/c/link?l=1475832&s=1475826) (<https://sr.studiostack.com/c/link?l=1475832&s=1475826>) can relate. The group is all about supporting fellow riders to balance cycling with the demands of family life by offering social rides, group workouts, and organized races. Many Zwift communities have spilled over into IRL (in real life) meetups, so you can get to know other riders in your area or meet up with virtual community members at IRL events.

Zwift communities are also a great way for new riders to engage with more experienced riders. [AHDR \(Aussie Hump Day Ride\)](https://sr.studiostack.com/c/link?l=1475834&s=1475826) (<https://sr.studiostack.com/c/link?l=1475834&s=1475826>)—a popular group that started as a weekly ride and has grown to a community of hundreds of riders with multiple weekly events—is led by veteran rider Tim Searle, who holds the record for the most logged distance on Zwift, with more than 300,000 kilometers as of November 2023. The ride aims to stay in the 2.3 to 2.8 w/kg pace range, but Searle's team of experienced "keepers" circle back to help dropped riders return to the group. Not sure if you'll be able to hang? The best way to find riders of similar ability is to test your functional threshold power (FTP). Sounds complicated, but you can actually perform a simple FTP test, like the Zwift Ramp Test, on an indoor trainer. Once you complete the test, Zwift will automatically calculate your FTP, which you can then use to find your race category. If your FTP is 2.8 w/kg, for example, you are a Category C rider on Zwift. Then, you can join group workouts and races geared toward Category C riders so you can train with riders who are just as strong as you.

Joining Zwift's virtual community will help you stay engaged and motivated during your workouts. (Photo: Zwift)

ADVERTISEMENT

Community Engagement and Motivation

Whether your goal is finishing your first Zwift race, finishing all the Zwift Academy workouts, or completing a 100-mile gravel grinder, your biking community can help you unlock your full cycling potential through motivation, accountability, and inspiration. No matter how much you love the sport, cycling is hard work. There will be days when you are exhausted from work, you're dealing with family stress, or your body is sore.

Luckily, real people are behind the avatars you ride with on a platform like Zwift. They know how you feel because they've all been there too. On the toughest days, your biking community will help lift you up and motivate you to get on the trainer when you'd rather be on the couch. Joining a group ride or workout is a lot different than motivating yourself for another solo ride. Of course, there's the accountability that comes with meeting at a set time and (virtual) place. But you'll also benefit from a little friendly competition that enables you to push yourself harder when riding in a group.

ADVERTISEMENT

[Zwift](https://sr.studiostack.com/c/link?l=1475836&s=1475826) (<https://sr.studiostack.com/c/link?l=1475836&s=1475826>): *Indoor cycling made fun. Work out anytime, ride with friends, and discover training plans for everyone.*



ADVERTISEMENT

ADVERTISEMENT

TAGS

- [INDOOR TRAINING \(HTTPS://VELO.OUTSIDEONLINE.COM/TAG/INDOOR-TRAINING/\)](https://velo.outsideonline.com/tag/indoor-training/)
- [NATIVE \(HTTPS://VELO.OUTSIDEONLINE.COM/TAG/NATIVE/\)](https://velo.outsideonline.com/tag/native/)
- [ZWIFT \(HTTPS://VELO.OUTSIDEONLINE.COM/TAG/ZWIFT/\)](https://velo.outsideonline.com/tag/zwift/)
- [ZWIFT RACING \(HTTPS://VELO.OUTSIDEONLINE.COM/TAG/ZWIFT-RACING/\)](https://velo.outsideonline.com/tag/zwift-racing/)

ADVERTISEMENT

Popular on Velo

(<https://velo.outsideonline.com/gravel/is-kasper-asgreen-riding-a-new-specialized-diverge-gravel-bike/>)

Is Kasper Asgreen Riding a New Specialized Diverge Gravel Bike?
(<https://velo.outsideonline.com/gravel/is-kasper-asgreen-riding-a-new-specialized-diverge-gravel-bike/>)

(<https://velo.outsideonline.com/road/racing/i-still-believe-strade-bianche-dreams-start-down-under-for-quinn-simmons/>)

'I Still Believe': Strade Bianche Dreams start Down Under for Quinn Simmons
(<https://velo.outsideonline.com/road/racing/i-still-believe-strade-bianche-dreams-start-down-under-for-quinn-simmons/>)

(<https://velo.outsideonline.com/road/gear/cycling-related-products-from-ces-2024/>)

Cycling Related Products from CES 2024
(<https://velo.outsideonline.com/road/gear/cycling-related-products-from-ces-2024/>)

(<https://velo.outsideonline.com/road/racing/the-sports-too-small-to-hold-grudges-caleb-ewan-fine-with-tour-de-france-pause-in-jayco-alula-comeback/>)

'The Sport's Too Small to Hold Grudges:' Caleb Ewan Accepts Tour de France Pause in Jayco-AlUla Comeback
(<https://velo.outsideonline.com/road/racing/the-sports-too-small-to-hold-grudges-caleb-ewan-fine-with-tour-de-france-pause-in-jayco-alula-comeback/>)

An American in France

An American in France

What's it like to be an American cyclist living in France? Watch to get professional road cyclist Joe Dombrowski's view.

Keywords: [Native](#) | [Willier](#)

Related content from the Outside Network

One Way South

[\(https://velo.outsideonline.com/video/one-way-south/\)](https://velo.outsideonline.com/video/one-way-south/)

Mountain Bikers React to Their First Taste of Non-Alcoholic Craft Beer

[\(https://velo.outsideonline.com/video/the-trailhead-taste-test-biking-edition/\)](https://velo.outsideonline.com/video/the-trailhead-taste-test-biking-edition/)

Video review: BMC URS 01 Two gravel bike

[\(https://velo.outsideonline.com/video/video-review-bmc-urs-01-two-gravel-bike/\)](https://velo.outsideonline.com/video/video-review-bmc-urs-01-two-gravel-bike/)