

STC Transition Talk with Paula Edwards

Transition Talk is back! Today we talk with Paula Edwards, group ride leader who thought she wasn't good enough – and now helps others start on their triathlon journey.

STC: Hi Paula, and thank you for agreeing to do a Transition Talk for us! Most people will know your name through the monthly group rides that you lead with Nicola Heaton. Tell us how that came about?

Paula: We've been running the steady group rides for almost exactly a year now. Nicola and I came up with the idea while chatting at the AGM in 2017. We felt there was a gap in what the club was offering and that for some, particularly new or less-confident members, there could be too big a barrier in joining a group ride. Sometimes people haven't ridden on busy roads before, or in a group, or maybe they're anxious about being too slow. The aim of our rides is to encourage those riders to come out and find their feet so that they can progress and go on to join the regular club rides. No one gets left behind on our rides.



STC: Is that something that's close to your heart?

Paula: Yes, I am a BC Breeze ride leader, along with Nicola. The sole aim of the Breeze project is to break down barriers to encourage more women into cycling. I have simply taken this ethos and applied it to the club. My partner Matt (Reed) had been a member of the club for several years so I knew some people socially, and I had supported him doing triathlons so had seen how it all worked. But I had reservations about joining as I thought I might not be good enough, so in the end he joined me as a member about two years ago – without actually telling me!

STC: So that was it? Then you did your first triathlon?

Paula: No! Because I had supported Matt on quite a few, I entered the Sundowner Sprint, which was one of the Tri Club's champs weekend. My sole aim was to not finish last – and I didn't. I've done two more since then – a further sprint distance and my first standard distance last year.

STC: Did you enjoy it?

Paula: (laughs) Afterwards.... No I did, but I think it takes a little while for it to sink in sometimes.

STC: Ok, fair point... What was the toughest thing about your first triathlon and what advice would you give to a first-timer?

Paula: The open-water mass start was the biggest challenge. I'd watched them before and asked others of their experiences, but I still felt like I was going to drown. My advice for your first mass start swim would be to think carefully about your position at the start – maybe hang back a bit and choose your line. Think about where the first few buoys are, and try not end up on the inside of a corner like I did! Also, remember that you can always do breast stroke, or even stop and tread water if you need to clear your head for a few moments.

STC: You're not exactly selling it! I guess by the end of a race, the swim is well behind you though. Is cycling your favourite of the three disciplines then?

Paula: I enjoy them all in their own way. I love open water swimming, but cycling, especially out in the beautiful countryside around Sheffield and in the Peak, is where I feel most free and relaxed. I am an Active Travel Officer so I even get to ride my bike for work – the closest I'll ever be to a professional cyclist! Up until around 5 years ago I'd only ever done bits and bobs on a mountain bike. Then I went on holiday to Mallorca with Matt, who hired us posh bikes (worth around 3k), clipped in (to the pedals) for the first time and off I flew... I absolutely loved it!

STC: No looking back?

Paula: No, but an injury put future riding and training in question. Around year after that holiday, I had an accident in a cycling sportive. I came off taking a corner downhill in the rain when I hit some gravel in the road. Amongst other injuries, I seriously damaged my hip. In the process of treating my hip, it was also discovered that I have a bone condition in my lower vertebrae called modic endplate changes. There are three stages to this condition, I'm a stage 2 where the inside of my bones are basically mush and is the cause of much pain and discomfort. To cut a long story short, it took me around twelve months to recover from the accident, but because of the endplate condition, I will always have to take it easy with the running. I have had to re-educate myself about pain and, with my physio's backing, know I'm ok to do what I can without making it worse.

STC: But since then you've cycled the Pyrenean coast-to-coast!

Paula: Yes! 640km over 6 days, with over 40,000 feet of climbing, summiting some of the iconic cols like the Tourmalet, Peyresourdes and the Aubisque! I was so determined that my accident and my back condition wouldn't stop me from cycling. I achieved this in 2017 after gradually building up and carefully training to suit my needs. It's one of my best and most memorable achievements to date – plus it gives me bragging rights over Matt when we watch the TdF.

STC: Absolutely! So what's next? What do you have planned for the year? Where will we see you?

Paula: I'll be playing it as it comes this year in terms of triathlons as my home life is very busy, which gets in the way of training! I'd like to do another Olympic distance, but it'll probably be a late entry if I do. In the meantime, I'll be at the group rides, and I'll be swimming at Graves on a Saturday and Rother Valley when the sessions open. Matt and I also have a trip to a training camp in Mallorca booked which I'm really looking forward to – back to where it all started!

STC: Thank you Paula, and we hope you have a great holiday!