**CHASING THE SUN 2019**

After an evening of faffing and 2 hours sleep the 2.30 alarm sounds, I am like a kid at Christmas excited to see what the day will bring.

Hopefully 206 miles and a pat on the back, this was to be my biggest challenge since a bad day last September.

Really not too sure how my back and neck would hold up throughout but hopeful.

Mr Milsom, through his network of friends had managed to arrange accommodation at the west coast finish line and bag transportation...top man!

So the plan is, wake up my better half, drive to Marks where his friend Ian (accommodation source) has stayed overnight, add two more bikes to the rack and all set off to Sheerness for a 4.41 sunrise start.

We all arrive to a very busy Sheerness, some 700 bikes and a great vibe, bags handed over to another friend of the Milsom network. Then all required to text a secret code, photo shoot time and tie a nice orange ribbon to rear of bikes which matched Marks - felt very nicely 😀.

All now lined up somewhere in the middle of the chaos, air horn blast and we are off!! Mayhem and a little dodgy to start but settles down quickly and the ride towards the West is underway.

So how do you pace your longest ride? Steady effort as you would on any long ride and see what happens later seems as good a plan as any.

We manage to stay as a three through the ride as we head off to our first stop, Crystal Palace in the bag and only one puncture picked up through our local lanes. Coffee and cake then on to Richmond where a friend of Ian’s is waiting to join us.

Now a four we continue on to the compulsory mid-way pub stop at the 101-mile, Mark mostly riding to the pace of the weaker cyclist. Another code word to text, a pint of cider, Mark is a terrible influence lol and then a regroup.

Mark and I prove to be a little stronger on the bike and after more regrouping we decide to get through the last 80 or so miles as a duo. So, the Marks are off, passing many cyclists and me still buzzing like a child. A few short breaks of 5 to 10 minutes on route and then the beauty of cheddar gorge, wow absolutely stunning!

The miles are still ticking away nicely as we near the big 200, my first 200 ever and pleased to have got there, just 6 more to go.

We can hear the cheers and the crowds now as we take the last few turns onto the sea front, lots of welcoming cheering and applauding for the finishers, a friendly hand shake from the mayor of Burnham on Sea and the necessary day light photo shoot at the water’s edge.

Another code to text and a pat on the back from each other and then....

Yep he's at it again, cider time while we wait for a regroup for a nice curry with more cider!

What a lovely summers day for such an epic ride, hoping to do this again next year, fantastic event.

Mark O’Brien