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The Goss From The Boss...

Welcome to Talbots Solicitors Senior Partner, Martyn Morgan's blog...

Welcome to [Talbots Solicitors](#) Senior Partner, [Martyn Morgan's](#) blog. Martyn specialises in Residential Property and is a Member of the Practice's Strategic Management Team, which has collective responsibility for looking after the day-to-day details as well as the challenge of developing the long term direction of the firm.

Follow Martyn as he blogs about his views and opinions on recent media events, changes in the law, and his day-to-day encounters being Senior Partner of a successful UK Law Firm. Oh... and the odd mention about [Aston Villa Football Club!](#)

Tuesday, 15 February 2011

[From Bangkok To Phuket - Thanks...](#)

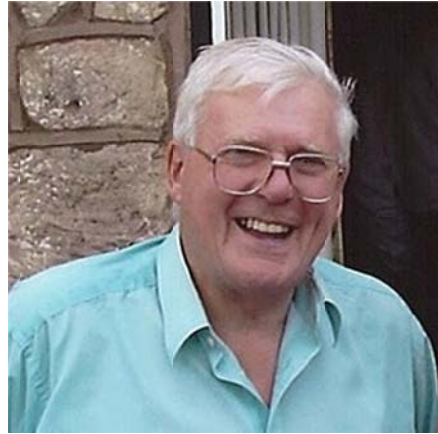
Sorry, me again. I feel I must pay tribute to some people who have assisted me

Firstly, my thanks to [Callum Haynes](#) my Agent, Social Media Manager, Client Relations Manager and Office Stud No 2 (Guess who is No 1). He has had the patience to upload and manage this Blog while continuing to strut his stuff about the office and I remain eternally grateful as I appreciate that much was done in his own time. If there are any spelling or grammatical errors, they are HIS!

To Martin Brot, his wife, the wonderful Rosita, Cheng the Driver, and, of course, the delectable Lewdy Rudi, and all at Siam Bike Tours, thank you so much for making this a trip of a life time, one that may, just may, push the New York Marathon into No. 2 slot and the memories will stay with me for the rest of my life. Your organisation and commitment was second to none and the patience you showed in trying to convert me into a true cyclist's commendable. Thank you so much

To my fellow cyclists, and yes that includes Yak Yak too, a private joke, thank you for making me feel so welcome, for showing the patience in training me to your standards, and for being such wonderful company. In particular the English speaking contingent of Dutch Martin, the Vikings from Norway, Roy and Roger, ex rock star John "PJ" from Canada with his partner Marni "Mickey Mouse" and Derek the Swede, a true athlete, and one I related to most, capable of being a great friend, if he were not so pig headed. I hope you are reading this now, as I have just about forgiven you for failing to turn up for dinner on the last night. GIT!!

But the real hero of this story is my wife, Mary. She lost her father, Alf during the second stage of this ten day trip after he had battled against a long illness. We had previously discussed the possibility, and whether I should cancel in advance or fly back early to offer whatever support I could. Mary would have none of it and said that is what her father would have wanted. Mary has had to grieve alone, without support, and take on the mantle of making arrangements and supporting other members of the family in her usual selfless and assured style. Mary, I salute you sweetheart, and dedicate this Incredible Journey to a wonderful person, not Alf Tupper, but Alf Kyte...



Tuesday, 8 February 2011

[From Bangkok To Phuket Part 3 - And they're Off](#)

Yes, the big day arrives, the start of the tour...the epic adventure for which I had been in training for, for..... well, for a while.

The previous evening, we had been introduced to our fellow competitors, sorry, companions. It's not about winning and losing, I keep reminding myself. Martin Brot, a Swiss former professional cyclist, the founder of [Siam Bike Tours](#) had been running these trips for several years, normally comprising 6 to 10 people. This was to be the biggest Tour yet with 25 competitors, sorry, cyclists. We came from 8 different countries, mainly from Germany, Holland, Switzerland, Austria and Scandinavia, a husband and wife from Canada (this was to be John's third Bangkok to Phuket trip) and a paunchy, balding wannabe athlete from Stourbridge...oh, and me too. Nervously, we all exchanged tales of our respective training regimes. 10,000 kilometres in a season, seemed to be the norm. I nervously asked if a season spanned six years but was told that it was six months and my 5 miles in nine months looked a little short of the rest, as I skulked into the corner mumbling something about the New York Marathon in 1999.

We were transported by minibus out of the city to the Team H.Q, a trip that lasted one and a half hours. This part of the tour was relatively easy, and I saw no problems in completing the 544 miles if this were to be the mode of transport.



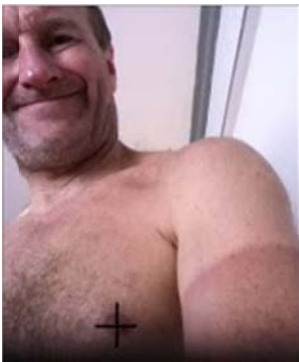
Alf Tupper didn't need fancy footwear to win a race!

We were all given our team jerseys, a yellow and orange combination to resemble the colours of the rising and setting of the sun in Thailand, or, runny fried egg mixed with Ketchup, and introduced to our bikes, our soul mates for the next week or so. Imagine the confidence ebbing away further when I noticed that there were no stabilisers on mine. This was going to take some supreme effort on my part to finish in a placing higher than the New York Marathon...6,641. Come on, keep up! I had set myself a target of finishing in the top 25, a daunting prospect. Worse was to follow. As we all changed into our "specialist" cycling gear, mine from Decathlon, special offer, the rest of the Team in specially branded or sponsored shorts and shirts, I realised that I was the only one wearing normal cycling shoes, trainers, when everyone else had cleats and pedals made to measure. I felt like the [Alf Tupper](#) of the cycling world.

To be serious, (do I have to?) the arrangements by Martin and his team were carried out with Swiss like precision. All the bikes were in perfect condition and adjusted to our individual requirements. Martin and a team member would cycle with us and there would be support vehicles for photos, drinks, sadly only non-alcoholic, bananas and running repairs.

After the obligatory photo shoot, we were off cycling through the streets of Phetchaburi, a snaking line of yellow and red, waved on by the locals, who have got used to such sights now on a monthly basis. I shall not bore you with the detail as you can see this on the [attached link](#) if you are really that interested. However, we did start at midday under a burning sun in temperatures over 30 degrees but I refused to accept that I was more acclimatised to the conditions than the Swiss and Scandinavian members of the race. The first day was intended to break us in gently, and it certainly broke me. We covered the 45 miles in a sedate 3 hours, through pretty unspectacular countryside, stopping for lunch after 2 hours. Now, I was expecting the Thai equivalent of a Mars Bar or some fruit, so imagine my surprise when we were served with sticky rice, chicken and pork, hand turned on a spit over blazing embers and mixed vegetables.....all to be eaten WITHOUT cutlery, using only our sweaty fingers. Apparently this is how the true Thai folk eat.

We arrived at our first stop, Hua Hin at about 3 pm, a quick shower, and a long relaxing snooze by the pool accompanied by a large Singha beer, as we are encouraged to take in plenty of liquids to replace all those lost. The apprehension was beginning to subside. I could do this, I said to myself Later that evening, I decided to stretch my legs and walk into Hua Hin, and then to the beach, in search of that elusive seafood restaurant (Editors Note: I thought this Blog was supposed to be about law related matters, or at least your cycling experience in Thailand, not a rival to [The Good Food Guide](#)) be quiet, Ed and read on. Now, fellow gourmand, I have this habit on holidays of always searching for a better restaurant, having read menus of numerous establishments on my 5 mile trek, always believing that there is a better offering around the corner. Well this time, at long last, I won the lottery and stumbled upon, but only because I had been walking so long, a little Thai sea food restaurant on a jetty overlooking the bay. The service on offer was first class, and they even provided anti mosquito candles and spray for the guests. Anyway, four White snapper fish cakes followed by chicken (ok it looked like fish) red Thai curry, extra hot, a plate of fruit, two large beers, a coffee and a brandy, at less than the equivalent of £9. Excellent quality too. I felt so overwhelmed, I left a large tip, demanded a photo with Phonsi, the proprietress, and got a peck on the cheek to go.



Tan Lines even Lance Armstrong would be proud of!

Now today I saw the beginning of the real Thailand and looked forward to the remainder of the race, tour, ok, holiday then with great relish and, as you can see, I now qualify as a real cyclist

[From Bangkok to Phuket Part 4 - Stage 2. The race begins in earnest Third or is it fourth time lucky!!!](#)

Today we start the daily routine. My alarm is set for 6am, showered and ready for breakfast by 7am after several laps of the pool, a light 5 mile jog along the beach and a few stretches. Then I wake up from that nightmare and stuff myself with omelette, fruit, juice and coffee.

Our bikes are prepared for us, tyres pumped up to the maximum, water bottles already filled by Rudi and his team, and our shoes and helmets laid out in readiness. I cannot praise highly enough the organisation and preparation of this team.



There is a monkey in there... honestly!

The ride today is far more interesting and as [the link](#) describes, we do indeed pass through countryside that is far more picturesque, through the National Park and past shrimp farms, skirting the coast as we snake south through Thailand. Often we are exposed to the sun, and feel welcome relief when passing through coconut plantations, where the road is shaded by the tall trees. Our first stop is in the National Park for refreshment. The monkeys, running wild, try to steal some of the bags, and take an unhealthy interest in the red glow emitting from the seat of my pants, thinking that I may be one of their brethren.



My new best friend. Note the pink handle bars...
and the smoke off the rear wheel.

After our first stop, Martin creates panic in my mind. He says that we can split into 2 groups for the next stage, to allow the speed merchants on the trip to stretch their legs. He is relaxed about where we choose to go as we set off together. However, I, Macho Man, and budding Olympic Cycling Gold medallist, am in a quandary. Do I continue to feel my way with the majority at a comfortable 25 Kilometres per hour (note how I have changed to metric as this sounds much quicker) or do I push myself to keep up with the leaders averaging 30 to 35 kph. Man or mouse? Of course I go with the speed merchants. After all, I am here to win, as I keep reminding myself, though, strangely others seem not to care.

I am pleasantly surprised how I make the transition from an average of 25 to 35 kph, albeit on flat roads. My fellow competitors, sorry, companions, snigger at my "football shoes" as I tuck in closely behind the cyclist in front of me, in a vain attempt to mimic the changing of gears. This, however, has the added benefit of falling into the slip stream, which really does pull me along. As I progress, I learn even more and search for the biggest and widest rider to afford the best protection.



Lunch

Lunch is taken at a beach side restaurant where we are served the most delicious shrimp, straight from the sea, cooked I hasten to add, followed by either chicken or, yes, you guessed it, shrimp fried rice. How is it that food and drink abroad never tastes quite the same when you try the same items at home, and our local take-away at home will learn a great deal from these Thai restaurateurs, though I guess the shrimp from the sea rather than from the "Cut" in Stourbridge will assist.

The afternoon session, as ever after such lunches, is limited to 25-30 kilometres and we arrive at our Hotel in Hadthong at 3 pm, once again, meticulously planned, to allow those of us who must to shower, lie by the pool for a couple of hours, with a couple of beers and light snooze, frantically trying to merge the brown coloured arms with the white coloured torso of the experienced cyclist.

Don't you just love the names of these places. I went to great lengths to explain that I do not, in fact, have such items of apparel, but, judging from my sweaty cycling attire, I did wonder whether our next stop may be at Bad Pong.



Hadthong. Or is it Gibraltar? I knew we should have taken a right turn at the last junction!

We were all flattered to arrive at our hotel, me in second place now, inwardly excited, but nobody seemed to notice nor care, to be greeted with a huge sign overhanging the entrance to the Hotel reading " Hadthong welcomes Siam Bike Riders"

After a Thai buffet at the hotel comprising 8 or 9 different dishes at the knock- out price of about £4, some of us walked along the front to explore the night Market selling local artefacts, food and the ubiquitous tat. I was very tempted to barter for the purchase of a solid teak dining table and benches to seat 16 people, but when I found that I could not lift one end of the benches off the floor, I gave up on the idea, as I am fully aware of Health and Safety legislation preventing Airline cabin crew from assisting passengers in lifting luggage into the overhead lockers.

So, over 100 kilometres completed today, and feeling ok and determined still!



Sunset in Hadthong

[From Bangkok to Phuket Part 5 - Stage 3,](#)

Today's [stage](#) is less spectacular for the cycle ride, or maybe I am becoming blasé . It is a shorter journey in total, but certain incidents remain implanted in my mind.

Martin our Team Leader gives us a military-style briefing each morning, detailing our route, what we shall see, where we will break for drinks and lunch and when we can split into groups. However, he did not prepare us for the crossing of an air runway strip shortly after leaving Hadthong. Almost without warning we found ourselves in the middle of this vast plain (pardon the pun) of Tarmac, dodging a Jumbo jet here and a 747 there. How I wish I had taken a picture, but when you have an Airbus chasing your butt down the runway, you don't stop and say " Smile for the camera please"



Traffic Hazard

Not long after, our trip takes us onto the Highway, the M1 of Thailand . Imagine our shock and delight as we enter the busy slip road to join the Highway, when Rudi and his driver expertly manoeuvre the minibus and trailer across all three lanes, stopping traffic to allow our chain gang of 25 to enter the Highway without so much as a change of gear or squeeze on the brakes. Moreover, the traffic does not take out its frustration with the cyclists, but urges us on with waves of support.

Martin expertly manages his troops leading the way, managing the speed, his little legs pumping away effortlessly in metronome fashion. Sometimes, he drops down the line to check on individuals, leaving others to lead the way, but miraculously appearing out of nowhere to give directions when leaders are approaching a junction. Yes, the organisation and support is second to none.

There have been several punctures in the two days to date. Now I have this thing about punctures, one of the reasons why I have not been on my bike for nine months... because I have a flat tyre. Ever since I was a child when I attempted and failed miserably to repair my punctures with Sellotape or Elastoplast, I have been just useless with them. So you can imagine my respect when I witnessed Martin and his team repairing them with the same sort of speed that you see when a Formula One mechanics Team changes a set of tyres. And that is not all. There are gear and brake adjustments and I have even seen Martin replace an entire gear cable, during his lunch break



Iced Coffee

Now I have always considered myself to be a bit of a coffee aficionado always striving to find the perfect blend or brew, and have, therefore, turned up my nose at the offer of Iced Coffee. Well, sorry, but I am now hooked. I was introduced to it at our first break today and told how good it is for long distance cyclists. It is so refreshing, especially when we find ourselves (lost yet again) in temperatures exceeding 35 degrees. Bring it on!

This stage, a shorter one, concludes before lunch, but the hotel truly is a gem. We are all shown to our respective rooms, individual bungalows on the ocean front and comprising a lounge shower room and TWO bedrooms each containing TWO single beds. Pressure! Which bed do I sleep in?

There are 2 pools on site and a spa. Following my disappointments in Bangkok, I decide to seek to restore my faith and order a Thai massage in coconut oil. Clearly, my Thai was not quite perfected, as I arrived and started to undress with a tad too much enthusiasm. My masseuse indicated that there was no such need. I wondered how she was going to smother me in oils over my tee shirt and shorts. I soon realised that I was having the cheaper version, a " simple " Thai massage without oils at the staggering price of £5. My masseuse explained that she was called Po. I asked her to spell it and was amused with the reply P.O.R.N. ! She then proceeded to twist my body into impossible and unnatural shapes, chuckling each time she heard a creak or wince . She used her fingers, her hands, her elbows and even the soles of her feet which were as soft as her hands, but the best was when she laid me on my front, knelt on my buttocks, held both my hands behind me, and then attempted to pull me back so that the back of my head was touching the heels of my feet. I felt like a paperclip, and left the spa like a Chivers jelly, but relaxed, inspired and faith restored



Temple Prachuap

At 4 pm, those who wanted some culture were able to get a lift to the Kings Temple overlooking the beach, with a huge bronze Buddha standing guard. What a wonderful sight this proved to be as you will see from the photos and in the running for [Talbots](#) next branch office. Now this is where Rudi, or is it Lewdi, came into his own. Did I mention that Rudi is more gay than the gaiest Hussar, and in comparison, makes [Graham Norton](#) look like the next candidate to play James Bond. Anyway, bless his cotton socks, in addition to looking after every whim of the riders and in particular the 19 male riders dressed in Lycra, peeling 60 tangerines for the next break, buying fruit at the Market for the day's ride, ensuring that water bottles are filled at each break, he also acted as an expert guide, giving us all the facts and figures and history behind the temple. He is a star, even though I had to constantly remind him about my three wives and 5 children



Thai Tom Yam Soup

Another joint meal with all the team in the evening overlooking the sea. The highlight of this for me, apart from the Red Snapper fish was that I and Roy and Roger, two brothers from Norway each ordered the [Tom Yam soup](#). This is a Thai speciality that can be made with meat or seafood, but in either case, there is an abundance of chilli and spices. All three of us struggled as our lips began to blister, and one by one, the Scandinavians began to waver. Roy ate one third and Roger about half, but victory would not have been complete if I did not eat the full amount. I did it, trying desperately to conceal the tears rolling down my face, and there was not a great deal of conversation for the rest of the evening. Nonetheless, England 1 Rest of the World 0

[From Bangkok to Phuket Part 6 - Stage 4, Party Night!!](#)

We continued our journey south from Bangkok down the [east coast and the Gulf of Thailand](#). Once again, stunning scenery, perfectly timed breaks and great exercise to boot. We tend to ride in pairs, moving up and down the line, giving us further opportunities to make acquaintances as we pedal, although, by now, most of us knew who each were, what they did last year in kilometres for training and their inside leg measurement... And the Mad Englishman who had gained the reputation/ nickname of Steam Hammer, as I continued to push myself along to keep up with the speed merchants, notwithstanding the lack of cleats, proper cycling clothing, no training and, yes I have to say, a very sore rear end.

Professional cyclists such as my fellow contestants, sorry, mates, acquire a certain toughness in their nether regions simply by putting in the kilometres in the saddle. Novices, like me, soon realise the benefits of a training regime prior to such an epic journey, but do we do anything about it? Certainly not. My embarrassment was apparent at the end of the second day, when after a long day in the saddle (sounds like John Wayne) many of us ended up by the pool. I was gagging to jump in, bum first, to cool the pain emitting from down below, but the embarrassment of a plume of steam engulfing everyone in the vicinity prevented me from doing so.



Whack-a-day reaches Thailand.

Let me try to explain the pain so that you too can experience it. Imagine standing on your head with your legs splayed apart, and here, I have to digress once again. [Claire Bourne](#) and I often have a competition each Christmas, as we both have this uncanny ability to stand on our heads for a period of time. The competition has lost some of its edge recently, as we tend to do it BEFORE and not after Roast Turkey dinner with chipolatas and all the trimmings for obvious reasons. Also, Claire has got wise to the real reason of the competition and now arrives in trousers and not a skirt, just in case she is challenged again. Anyway, focus on that position, and then imagine that horrible demented lady from [Misery](#) standing over you with a wooden mallet and systematically bringing the mallet down with all her force on that spot just between your Thingy and your Thingy. Not pleasant is it. Give me a bath in refrigerated Bird's Eye custard any day.



The Hustler

We arrived at our destination spot on 3pm and fell into the same regime of shower, pool, beer, snooze, and dinner with my new found friends, always sitting next to different people, and trading experiences, although I was conscious that my story of the New York Marathon was wearing a bit thin. Dinner was not at the hotel but in a local restaurant along the road... With a Pooltable. Now the food and ambience and service were great, but I was becoming increasingly aware that there was a World Cup of Pool being arranged. Martin, our Team Leader was organising and won his first two games but steadfastly refused to play the Englishman, clearly as he thought all English were experts at Pool and he may lose. Now Pool really is not my game and, often, I struggle to think what is. However, as competitive Martin, where have you heard that expression before, took a back seat, I was more than happy to take the undeserved plaudits that the Englishman's reputation bore. Then panic struck again, as I was thrust into a competition with Dutch Martin, yes, he with the cap, or at least Bandana. A really lovely guy who took early retirement some 4 years ago and is pursuing his interest in cycling. He appears somewhat older than me and I hope, Martin, if ever you read this, I am not doing you a disservice, but he is as strong as an ox on his bike. He does have the misfortune of having the whitest body on the beach, and so I am more than happy to have my photo taken alongside him. Martin and I arrived at the table egged on by our multi-national friends. I admit I made up some of the rules as we went along, as most people thought that an Englishman knew all the rules about Pool, but the game was mine with 5 balls to spare, and did I celebrate? I was then thrust face to face with another mate, Roger from Norway, who, as you may recall had arrived with his brother, Roy and were great company. The Brothers Grimm or Hansel and Gretel, or was that a different country. Roger claimed that he had never played Pool before, a likely Morganesque excuse, which soon evaporated when he took me all the way to the black, which I potted to win the game to a huge uproar from all and sundry. At least I like to imagine so. There were no more takers and team leader Martin skilled off into the distance. England 2 Rest of the World 0

[From Bangkok to Phuket Part 7 - Stage 5, 6, and 7, In The Home Straight!](#)



Steamed Dim Sum

After the rest Day at Chumphon, and having completed almost half of the journey, we prepared ourselves for the final 4 days. This took us [further south](#) on the longest trek of the Tour covering 140 kilometres in temperatures reaching as high as 37 degrees. The highlights of the day were a stop in a small sleepy village which looked more like a town out of a Wild West movie, and the only item on sale at any number of shacks lining the route on both sides were steamed dim sum. These were fluffy marshmallow steamed buns filled with minced pork, fish paste or bean curd and were a delight. In fact, so tempting and soft and luscious were they, that I was sorely tempted to grab a few and line my shorts with them to protect a certain part of my anatomy.



Beats "The Cut"

After lunch and eating up more asphalt, we stopped at a waterfall for a welcome dip and cool off before a monumental climb up a hill resembling Everest, at least to me, and coasting down to our overnight stay in Ranong. Shattered and exhausted, but hardly surprising as we had now crossed from West to East coast of Thailand.

A couple of amusing anecdotes from Ranong. There was a taxi that actually had a Notice in English " No farting in this car, please" What a reputation we must have as the was no similar notice in Thai. Also, at the night club, adjacent to the hotel, there was a sign forbidding knives, automatic pistols and, get this, hand grenades. No mention of air to surface nuclear missiles, however.



I specifically asked for a room with a view!

The following day took us [further south](#) through the rain forest and jungle and the first road signs for Phuket, but another 127 kilometres and extreme temperatures. It was worth it as our overnight stop was in a splendid hotel on the top of a hill in the jungle, overlooking the lake and with individual guest bungalows dotted around the grounds. Two of the riders had spotted snakes, one said to be a 5 meter long black cobra, so I spent most of the evening stuffing my dirty washing in every nook and cranny of my room, and balancing the TV, the heaviest object I could find, on top of the closed lid of the toilet to prevent any unwanted visitors entering my abode. When I did venture out for dinner, [Usain Bolt](#) would have been proud of the speed in which I covered the distance between room and restaurant. The journey back to the room in the evening was aided by sharing a bottle of [Jaegermeister](#) smuggled in by my mate, Swedish Derek. Strange to be drinking something associated with ski resorts in the jungles of Thailand.

While on the subject of alcohol, I have survived on the national Thai beer called [Singha](#) throughout my stay. Now Singha, like many foreign brews, is tasteless, high in alcohol content, but refreshing, so I made the most of it as not many barmen had heard of [Bathams](#) or [Enville Ale](#) when I asked for it over here. I guess good beer is renowned for not travelling too well.

The [penultimate day](#) was a breeze, a mere 74 kilometres, with a stop at a wonderful bakery for cake and iced coffee, before arriving at our resort hotel on the beach in Khao Lak. This epitomised one of the many attributes of the Tour, namely the quality of the hotels. We were able to relax by the pool after a gruelling three days in preparation for the last stage, to our destination, Phuket. This was said to be the toughest stage, finishing the last stages of the 120 kilometres with three or four hills, or are they mountains. Great! Can't wait



Can anyone smell feet?

I prepared myself, like any top athlete, by visiting a fish spa, where, for twenty minutes, sipping an iced americano coffee, I sat with my feet in a pool, allowing hundreds of tiny fish to nibble away at the dead skin on my feet, ankles and legs. This was said to be extremely healthy but my view was that it would reduce the weight that I would have to carry over this mountains the following day. I have to say I did have to overcome the tickling sensation initially, and wondered what fun it would be to invite my fellow competitors to the fish spa and then surreptitiously

[From Bangkok to Phuket Part 8 - Stage 8, The Final Countdown!](#)

The hotel at Khao Lak was magnificent, and after a full breakfast, naturally for re-fuelling, on the beach, we were ready for the final 114 kilometres of our 850k Incredible Journey that started several days ago and was due to conclude in Phuket

I felt that the journey had taken us from the hustle bustle and excitement of Bangkok through the hinterland of Thailand, the real Thailand, before concluding at the Tourist resort of Phuket, but what a Tourist Resort

Many of my competitors, sorry companions, were taking this rather more seriously than me, and were measuring the amount of calories expended per day, average times and body fat content. Me? I know that I had sweat buckets and thought that I was guaranteed at least a minimum weight loss of two stones and would end the trip with a stomach like an old fashioned wash board or a six pack, but sadly the only pack was the six pack of Singha beers consumed on a regular basis, and I could still just about make out my big toe if I looked directly down, although sometimes I could see the nail on my second toe, if I cheated and leaned forward a little!

Martin gathered his troops at 8am sharp for the final push, the final de-briefing on this Incredible Journey. We would take two breaks, each after 45k and then we would tackle the final 25k, the hardest part of the tour, climbing and climbing in temperatures exceeding 35 degrees. What a way to finish.

I calculated that I was lying a credible sixth at this stage. I did not have a watch and nobody else seemed in the slightest bit bothered, but I estimated that I was, give or take an hour or two, exactly 58.3472 seconds behind the leader but the Yellow Jersey just had to be mine



Alf Tupper didn't need gears to win a race!

At our first break, re-fuelled by copious amount of Coke Zero, Iced Coffee and water, and Lewdy Rudi's banana, I asked Martin to check my gears again as they appeared to be slipping when changing between 2 and 3. He raised his eyebrows and looked to the skies. On a previous occasion the Englander Steam Hammer in football boots, as I had become to be known, had complained about gears slipping. Martin, an expert bike mechanic, as well as a supreme athlete, had attempted to adjust my gears on one of our beach side drinks stops. In front of the entire Team, he removed my rear wheel and sprockets, washers, nuts and any thing else went flying in every direction as Martin bellowed " Too much Power " to the Steam Hammer, and I nervously asked one of my colleagues how one changes gear. The expression " Steam Hammer had derived from my lack of technique, style, class as a cyclist, but just keeping up with the elite through blood, sweat, tears and guts a la my hero [Alf Tupper](#).

Expertly he tightened something or other. A kind colleague also pointed out a bulge in my tyre. I apologised after flattening him as I thought he was being personal about my waist-line, and within seconds Martin had fitted a new tyre.

We were now down to the last 70k as our snake of yellow, orange and black wove it's way through the countryside. Nerves were now firmly inset, as the only sound hissing from the snake was that of the swishing of the cyclists tyre on Tarmac, the synchronised clicking of the change of gear, and the odd "ouch" as the Steam Hammer found yet another pot hole. We were a Team. No longer was I the tail of the rattle snake, waving from side to side, but moving effortlessly with this bunch of professionals. I was one of them, at long last, well almost.



Sarasin Bridge View

We crossed Sarasin Bridge, leaving the mainland of Thailand behind, before entering the island of Phuket, the Tourists paradise. It was like crossing the suspension bridge over the Menai Straits entering Anglesey, but a thousand times better...and not a welshman in sight.

We were entering our final stages and I was making little headway on the distance between myself and the leading pack. In essence, the tyre change at the drinks break had slowed me down, until such time as I had worn in the new rubber, but grit and determination kept me in with the race, sorry, holiday.

Then.....dan, dan, dan.....DISASTER !!!!

I hit a pothole, again, as they seemed to be particularly partial to me and my privates. I found myself (now, habitual readers of this column, if there are such people apart from myself, will be aware that I keep getting lost) flying through the

air like that little Ginger nut in [The Snowman](#) or the guy with the Speedos in [Superman](#) I land in a heap, separated from my bike for the first time in 10 days. I feel excruciating pain in my ankle and look down to see a piece of bone jutting out from beneath my football socks and shin pads. The rest of the group are compassionate and supportive, as they leave me in their wake with a synchronised one figure salute to the Englanderr Steam Hammer with Football Boots. My dream is over

Then... Wait for it... Who should come to my rescue in the support vehicle with Cheng the Driver but... Lewdy Rudi, my hero. Not only is he a superb guide who pandered to our every whim, a David Bailey trained photographer, a Cordon Bleu cook, a magnificent peeler of oranges, but, it transpires, he is also an orthopaedic surgeon! Expertly, he puts my right leg into a splint. I explain that it is my left ankle that is broken. He has a strop, purses his lips, curses me several times and retires to the rear of the van before appearing to put my left leg in a plaster cast. I plead with him to stop when he reaches my knee, and he throws another tantrum.

The tail enders of my group are now out of sight and my dreams fading rapidly as I mount my badly damaged bike, peddling one legged with the left leg resting on the handle bars

I peddle for my life and finally see the familiar Team Colours of the rear end of the Snake. We reach Patong Beach, the major tourist resort in Phuket. Now let me say this. Throughout our Incredible Journey, we have been urged on by passers-by, school children, road side workers, people at bus tops, all apparently used to this Tour passing through their villages and giving such vocal and encouraging support. Martin has the ability to marshall his troops and command the respect of the traffic merely by a steely look or a growl or, on one occasion, a bark, and that was a tourist oblivious to the respect afforded to Siam Bike Riders. But Patong was something else. It seemed the whole traffic was brought to a standstill by the Snake, allowed to pass through this normally busy thoroughfare totally unhindered. There were people lining both parts of the street clapping in encouragement, and cheers erupted after each corner we took. There was even a policeman who saluted us. The whole episode was both surreal and emotional!

Anyway, back to the race as it is now reaching its crescendo and I guess you are all gagging to know who wins. Bet you can't guess!



On the home straight!

We have reached the last 25k of The Incredible Journey, and it is all down to this. Several hills of unspeakable dimensions and my competitors from Scandinavia, Switzerland and Austria clearly hold the advantage as their training regime over the last 5 or 6 years through the Alps etc clearly holds an advantage over my 8k ride around [Kinver Edge](#)

I am on the tail of the leading pack of 6, but am making no headway given my singular cycling action and the added burden of the weight of Lewdy Rudi's cast. To the tune of [The Eye Of The Tiger](#) and [Chariots of Fire](#) I tear at the plaster cast with my bare teeth, until it falls, discarded on the road side, comfortable in the knowledge that if any police car were to give chase to arrest me for littering the countryside (see volume 15, chapter 9, para 3) the only donation to their coffers that they would receive from me would be the smell of burning rubber from my tyres.

The first hill was a gradient of one in one, it seemed, and lasted a whole kilometre. With both legs pumping the steam, I caught the pack, as you may have guessed, and left an Austrian and Dane behind, cooking bacon. By the time we reached the second hill, a 1.5 k rise with a sneaky 250 metres at the end, just as you thought you had reached the summit, it was a three horse race between team Leader Martin, well he has done this before and it is his tour, an ex Olympic Gold Champion, some guy from America caked [Lance Armstrong](#) and little ol me, the Steam Hammer. Did I say three horse race. Where's that calculator.

The second hill was a killer, and I had urged all the competitors to seek advice from our [Trust and Estates Department](#) regarding making a will as we offer a very complete , efficient and slick service (there we go, Cal, got that plug in at long

last). The ex Olympic Gold Champion went off to practice his crocheting and Armstrong disappeared to Lance his boil. That left our hero, Martin, and the real hero, Martyn, neck and neck as they entered the final kilometre of the Incredible Journey from Bangkok to Phuket, 849k eaten up, one to go. I dug deep, into my final reserves, but the Steam Hammer was running out of steam. Slowly, I managed to inch ahead and with the winning line in sight, I was ahead by a nose, which, with my nose, is a very long way.

My dilemma! Do I make a statement, like Tom Courtenay in the film "[The Loneliness Of the Long Distance Runner](#)", and stop one inch before the finishing line, allowing all of the remaining competitors to pass me in a patronising and superior manner?

The heck I do!

I took the tape to a tumultuous uproarfrom one guy who was passing the shop of Siam Bike Tours with shopping which I almost knocked out of his hand as I wobbled up to the shop.

I did it. The prize was mine!!

There was much hugging and kissing, to Lewdy Rudi's delight, as all competitors gathered at the end over a beer or two, back slapping, exchanging of addresses, so that I could return the saddle kindly loaned to me by Martin once I had returned home and had it surgically removed from my posterior. And then that was it. We all went our separate ways, after our Incredible Journey, with most wonderful memories, but , possibly, never to pass the same cycle paths again. True friends joined together with one goal and one passion.

La Gon Knuckleheads (Thai for Farewell, my Friends)

I have had an Incredible Journey, and, like the blessed New York Marathon of 1999 (have I mentioned that before.) it is very personal. There may have been a small amount of journalistic and legal licence in the script, but I hope you have enjoyed this tongue in version view. If you ever have the desire and opportunity, JFDI!

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