

West and East Sussex, March 1, 2009

The Puncheur



The Puncheur is a new event in the south-east of England which might just redefine early season sportives. *Huw Williams* investigates

THE first Puncheur took place on March 1 2009, a date that could prove memorable in the sportive calendar in years to come.

The brainchild of Brighton Mitre's Morgan Lewis, the Puncheur is a very specifically targeted event, eschewing as it does the notion of gruelling hills and arduous hours in the saddle in favour of a more 'sporting' course. It was marketed as a faster event, aimed at wannabe racers looking for a chance to blow away the winter cobwebs and stretch their legs on a course which offered as much in the way of fast, flat riding as it did in climbing. So the hills were demanding rather than daunting and though it shared some of the terrain (and at 68 miles, a similar distance) with its close neighbour the Hell of the Ashdown, The Puncheur strenuously avoided any of the kind of satanic labelling which is guaranteed to attract legions of riders looking for the toughest events purely for the satisfaction of completing them.

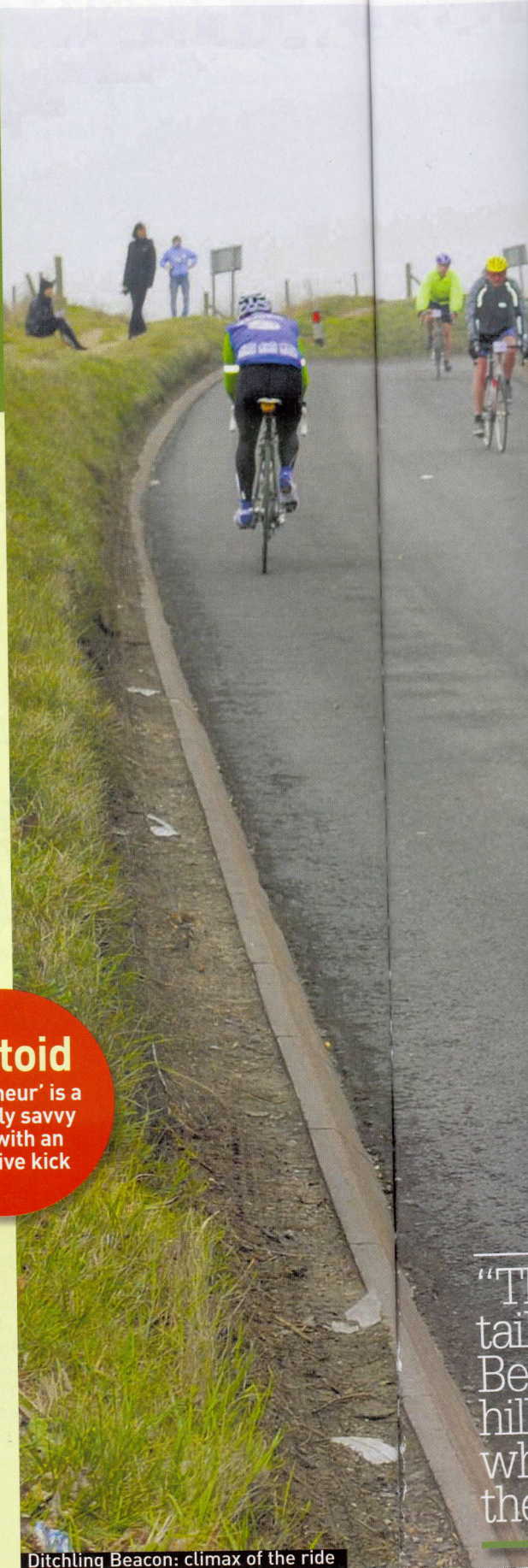
Beginning just a few miles outside Brighton in the shadow of the South Downs, the course swept north in a series of fast, rolling lanes before climbing gradually into the scenic Ashdown Forest. A long descent and some draggy climbs took riders to the halfway feed station and around the scenic reservoirs of East Grinstead and Ardingly. After the stunning views of the Balcombe Viaduct, the return leg was a rolling back-roader's paradise through picturesque villages with surprisingly hard-edged drags. The sting in the tail was Ditchling Beacon, the biggest hill in the area, which was where the event finished. A recent warm front had given way to cold overcast conditions for most of the ride and riders finishing inside the gold standard time of four hours didn't get the later sunshine. On a cold, grey spring morning a large percentage of the 300-rider limit turned out, camaraderie was good and everyone was in high spirits.

Factoid

A 'Puncheur' is a tactically savvy rider with an explosive kick



Sportive watching: this short, punchy event is a rare breed



Ditchling Beacon: climax of the ride

SOUND BITES

**Marek Siwicki**

Time: 3-42-22

"HOW many sportives have you been to where you are offered a round of applause as you enter the HQ at the finish? I was asked if I would like a bowl of pasta and offered a cup of coffee, which was milk and sugared for me. I was then offered a bag of cashews and a chocolate brownie. I ain't kidding when I say that this was better service than you would get in some of the finest restaurants in London. Great event, well done to the organisers."

THE ORGANISER

Morgan Lewis

"I'VE always wanted to put on an event and as I'd used sportives as race preparation in the past I had a fair idea of what riders wanted and expected. I just wanted the riders to finish feeling like they'd been looked after. When I came across the word 'puncheur' I knew straight away that's the kind of rider I wanted to target."

"The sting in the tail was Ditchling Beacon, the biggest hill in the area, which was where the event finished"





Your personal
challenge

Cyclo-sportives

RIDES | Puncheur

SOUND BITES



**Simon
Usbourne**

Time: 4-00-57

"I'm here with a team from the *Independent* newspaper and we're doing it as part of our training for our first Etape du Tour, this summer. It was a really great event and very well organised. It was a bit harder than I expected though."

Factoid

There wasn't a single incident for the event paramedics to deal with



The hills are suitable for riders of all shapes and sizes

MY... Puncheur

Huw Williams *Cycling Weekly* reporter

Time: 3-48-53

AFTER the snowfalls and winter lurgies, this was my first big ride of the year and a chance to have a look at a new event. Mighty impressive it is too. Everything in advance of the ride was so smooth, informative and helpful that by the time I set off I was wondering if I would even need to pedal the bike. The answer was definitely in the affirmative as a small group of riders pinned their ears back on the road out of HQ and started talking about gold-standard, sub four-hour times just minutes into the event. That's the kind of talk I like so I

"There's nothing steep enough to make you slow down and save energy, but the higher speeds are a challenge to maintain"

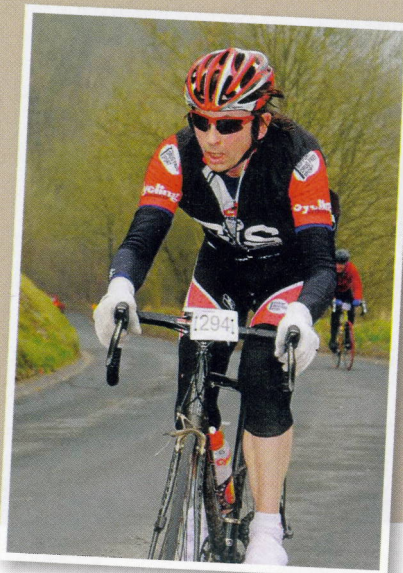
jumped in and got ready to enjoy the ride. Whiplashing through the lanes south of Ashdown Forest was a joy and testament to how well thought out the route was, with a lack of cars but also excellent road surfaces. The terrain was challenging for all the right reasons. There's nothing steep

enough to make you slow down and conserve energy for a six-hour grind but the resulting higher speeds were a challenge to maintain in themselves.

The feed station was well stocked but only a brief distraction as a small group of quicker riders caught us and the pace lifted again across to Turners Hill.

By the time we reached the descent to the reservoir at Ardingly there were only four of us left in the group as we tackled the hardest and, for me, best part of the circuit, the series of short climbs, which led us around the reservoir. Rural

life was abundant and we were offered brief respite from the speed as we had to pick our way between hedge-trimmers, small groups of horses and their riders before the sight of the towering viaduct at Balcombe both inspired and reinvigorated as it marked the point at which we were about to turn south for the home leg. Just two of us shared the 25 miles of work through the rolling lanes south to Hurstpierpoint and finally Ditchling Beacon itself, finishing inside four hours after a hugely enjoyable ride. Everything from pre-event rider briefings via email to the on-course signage and the food at HQ was spotlessly efficient and I'd certainly recommend it to anyone.



Cycling WEEKLY

The Punctureur

110KM [68 MILES]

Balcombe Viaduct carries the main London to Brighton rail line, has 37 arches and is 100 feet high. It extends for 1,500 feet and comprises 11 million bricks

Ashdown Forest, perhaps best known for housing Hundred Acre Wood, the home of Winnie the Pooh (who didn't enter the Punctureur)

At 248m (814ft) in height, Ditchling Beacon is the third highest point on the South Downs in south-east England, behind Butser Hill (270m; 886ft) and Crown Tegelaze (253m; 830ft)

SOUND BITES

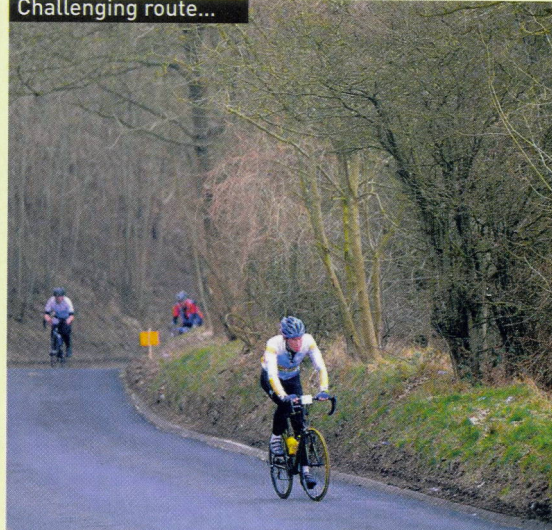


Keith Lea

Time: 3-38-45

"A GREAT sportive. A hilly route without doing every worst hill in the area. Really good signposting with the reassuring feature of an orange ribbon in a tree after each turn to confirm you took the correct route. I'd keep an eye out for any other events the Punctureur organisers run — if this ride is anything to go by, it'll be worth doing!"

Challenging route...



... with a tough finish

