

Wilmslow, Cheshire, October 5 2014

Cheshire Cobbled Classic



COBBLED CLASSICS ARE a staple of the springtime cycling calendar with many running a sportive alongside the race, but in the UK such events are rare. After riding the Tour of Flanders sportive, V-Sprint club wanted to recreate a similar course in Cheshire

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Louise Mahé

On a chilly morning with the sun trying to peek through — typical conditions for the springtime Classics — we set off from Wilmslow Leisure Centre to tackle the inaugural Cheshire Cobbled Classic. There were only three kilometres of regular roads to get our legs spinning before hitting the first cobbled section of Horseshoe Lane, and barely a kilometre later we were straight onto the first cobbled climb of Woodbrook Road. This short, sharp ascent was a sign of things to come for the rest of the ride, as, despite only being 300 metres long with a maximum 20 per cent gradient, the effort needed to get up it put

Distance

65 miles

Total ascent
1,800 metres

Participants
150

most riders into the red.

Gradually the route saw us winding out east through little lanes including some longer cobbled sectors, with one stretch over one and a half kilometres — a rare treat on English roads.

The first feed stop at the Robin Hood Pub was quite early on at the 25km mark, so much so that we decided to skip it and crack on despite the large amount of climbing we'd already done.

After some sheltered descents we came to two more cobbled climbs, including Beeston Brow, where again it was pretty much maximum output just to get up.

The sectors saw a combination of road surfaces, including well-known larger cobbles called setts, smaller rounded cobbles, gravel

Entries for next year's event are open. It takes place June 7. tinyurl.com/l5seqhb



Who knew the Peaks could be so Flandrian?

Where to stay

If you need accommodation there are a wealth of hotels and B&Bs in the area. We've picked out a few all under three miles to the start.

Alderly Edge Hotel

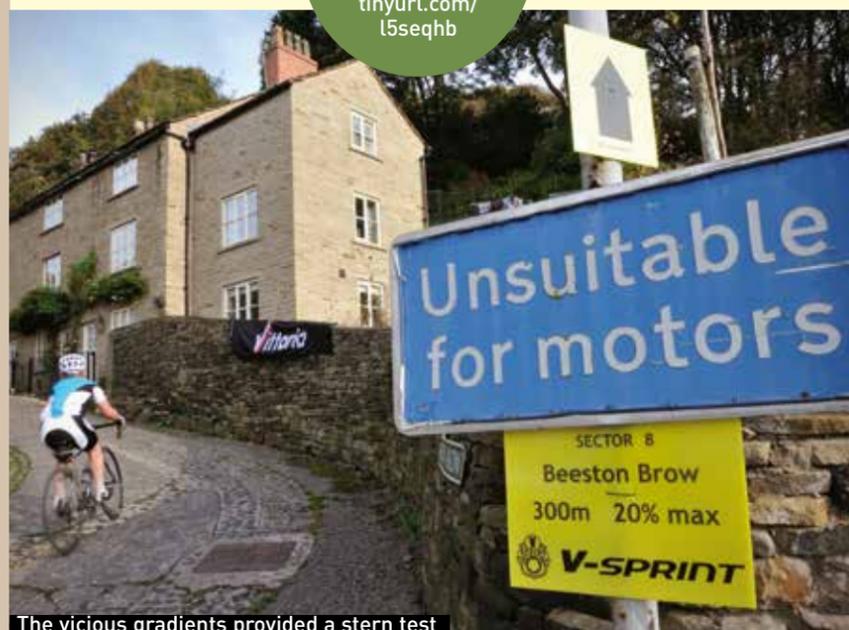
Macclesfield Road, Alderley Edge, SK9 7BJ
www.alderleyedgehotel.com

The Kings Arms

Alderley Road, Wilmslow, SK9 1PZ
01625 522187

The Merlin

Wilmslow Road, Alderley Edge, SK9 7QL
www.themerlin.co.uk



The vicious gradients provided a stern test

and bike handling it was back to slogging up the longer climbs that the area has to offer.

Fuelling the climbs

In all, the route had 1,800 metres of uphill, which all varied starkly, from short, sharp cobbled climbs to long, gradual exposed rises.

We came full circle through the Goyt Valley, passing the Fernilee reservoir along a cobbled sector lasting almost 2km. Although made up of hard packed stones, the substantial length tested our ability to tackle these tough surfaces.

The relentless terrain and copious amounts of climbing left us questioning whether skipping the early feed stop had been a good call after all. But luckily, as we passed the Errwood reservoirs and headed out of the Goyt Valley, it was only around 15km until we were back at the Robin Hood Pub. Here we stocked up on Belgian treats like waffles and chocolate, all of which were needed to see us through the final 30km home.

Retracing our steps from earlier, we headed back west towards Wilmslow, through Alderly Edge. It was here we



Autumnal leaves cover the road

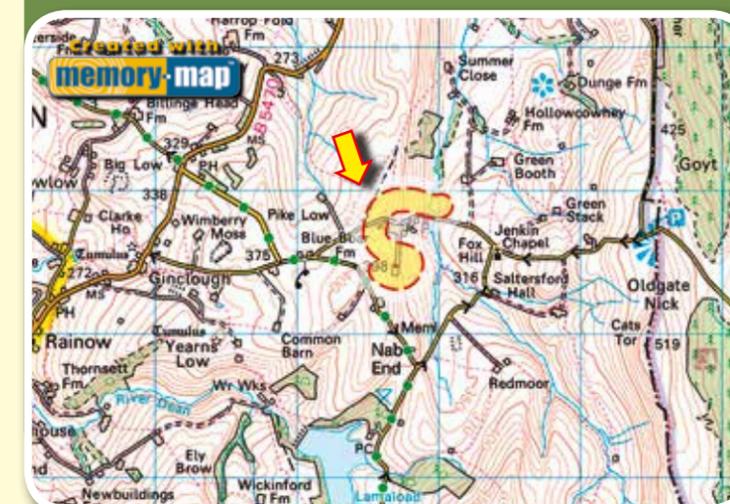
tackled the final sting in the tail — Swiss Hill. Used by Team Sky's Geraint Thomas as training for the Spring Classics, Swiss Hill was steep (maxing at 25 per cent) and double the length of the similar cobbled climbs from earlier on, and was especially tough at the end of an already gruelling ride.

Thankfully we were close to the finish — only 15km to go. Here we collected our commemorative cobblestone, reclaimed from the very roads we'd just ridden over, and had a much-deserved glass of a Belgian Leffe!

The best bit...

The Corkscrew

With special permission from landowners, the organisers were able to send the route up what must be the steepest cobbled climb in Britain. With a maximum gradient of 45 per cent but at only 200 metres in length the Corkscrew is rideable, but not for many. The challenge of getting to the top without grinding to a standstill or slipping on the mucky cobbles lured many riders into attempting the climb a number of times. But this was to no avail, and although there were rumours of a few people on mountain bikes managing to crest the climb, we witnessed none.



roads and broken tarmac. Despite the random amalgamation that made up the sectors, the rough terrain meant choosing our lines carefully was vital. Alongside this the twisting and turning route that took us up the smaller cobbled lanes meant it was hard to know what was around the corner, and being prepared with your gearing was a must so as not to come to a grinding halt.

After taking the left turn towards the Goyt Valley we left the cobbled lanes and were riding across the exposed and gruelling roads of the Peak District National Park. After what already felt like a mammoth amount of climbing, up next was the toughest obstacle of the day: The Corkscrew (see 'Best Bit' panel), where most riders met their match. After this short dalliance testing our raw power