

CLASSIC DRIVER

[Tweed Run 2011: A Quiet Revolution](#)



The 2011 Tweed Run, a sort of ‘Eddy Merckx meets Sherlock Holmes’, was held on Saturday 9 April. Classic Driver’s own *tweedista*, Philip Rathgen, was on hand to give a handlebar-level view of the cross-London cycling event...

The event started on a sunny April morning, at the steps of St Paul’s, in the City of London. Dressed from head to foot in finest worsted, the entrants in this year’s Tweed Run made their way – either wobbling or riding purposefully – across Paternoster Square to queue politely for registration for the 2011 event, the third year of its running.

In 2009, London-born Ted Young had the idea of a transferring a Birmingham-originated concept – that of running a bicycle event for Edwardian-era machinery ridden by period-dressed ladies and gentlemen – to the Capital. What began as fun among friends soon became a successful event. If 250 cyclists could start the 2009 Tweed Run, wouldn’t it be possible to have 500 in 2010? In 2011, after just five minutes, all the starting places had been allocated online.

“For me, it was a unique opportunity to be with like-minded enthusiasts,” said Young, who works for Brooks, the famous British saddle and cycling accessory maker.





After a group photo in front of St Paul's, at 11:45 the stylishly dressed field is released into London's Saturday traffic. With bicycle bells gaily ringing, the Tweed Runners make their way to Blackfriars Bridge, thereby crossing the Thames into uncharted 'South of the River' territory.

Quietly, as a single mass of bohemian bikers, the Run effortlessly takes over London's roads. Cars, cabs and lorries defer to the cyclists, and it's thanks to the many brave volunteers manning the route that collisions are avoided - with a friendly firmness they exerted their control over London's four-stroke population.





Soon, it's back over the river and the pre-War peloton is rushing past Buckingham Palace. Deerstalker, flat or bowler, all hats are raised to HM The Queen as the field sets off down The Mall. A distinguished gentleman, bewhiskered and dressed head-to-toe in hand-made tweed rides a penny farthing.

He is a representative of British cycling's equivalent of the Royal Automobile Club and has entered every Tweed Run since its inception. "You know this event is, in its way, quite revolutionary. Apart from having fun, we want to promote the benefits of cycling in a city, and to make it safer. If we can make people smile when they see cyclists, that's one step further towards our goal.

"We have taken over the roads this morning – and yet no one minded. If this is 'revolution', we should have one every week!"



The behaviour of other road-users is exemplary. Drivers inconvenienced by the mass of hairy cyclists accept the short delay with stoicism: truly an example of the British spirit of a 'stiff upper lip' and 'keep calm and carry on'. Bystanders greet the Run with a cheery wave while other, non-competing bicycle riders nod in appreciation.



At three o'clock – a little early, perhaps, for a true English tea – the pack reaches Lincoln's Inn Fields (the home of the British legal establishment) in time for an Aubin & Wills-sponsored tea break. The thought of a cup (porcelain, of course) of tea with a cucumber sandwich appeals to the perspiring riders, and soon a queue of 500 forms neatly alongside the bandstand. Whether British or German, a tweed-wearing cyclist needs his or her refreshment, with a little wait in the queue a reason to form new friendships.





And after the enforced tea break it was *mount up!*, and back on the Run for the final leg, a few miles to Shoreditch. On this section, the camaraderie of cycling made itself felt as a fellow competitor became *hors de combat* due to a flat tyre. Fellow competitors, including cycling enthusiast Ewan McGregor, rushed to the rescue.





By six o'clock most participants had reached the very egalitarian, final destination of this year's Tweed Run: the Bethnal Green Working Men's Club. Where, once upon a time, hard-working manual labourers or factory workers relaxed with a cigarette, a pint of beer and a pack of cards, the venue was now packed with gently steaming middle-class cyclists, celebrating their day in the saddle.





Due to the overwhelming demand for places on this year's April Tweed Run, the organisers have decided to organise another event in London this autumn - in addition to Runs in New York and Tokyo. For further information, see www.tweedrun.com.

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