

THE E2E CHALLENGE, LONG DISTANCE BASICS

Part 3: Clothing

This article outlines clothing appropriate for the early summer e2e Challenge. Specific comments and tips on various items follow these points:

- The Sun's rays can be quite fierce in the UK in July.
Use sunscreen to cover exposed areas, i.e., the back of your hands and neck, nose, cheeks, forehead, chin, arms, thighs and calves. You may want to bring a long-sleeve top. (I carry a handkerchief to wipe perspiration and trickled-down sunscreen from my eyes.)
- You also need to cater for wet and cool weather.
Early in the morning it can be rather chilly, especially nearer the northern reaches of the British Isles; there is also a high probability of rain or drizzle.
A water/windproof jacket, arm-warmers, leg-warmers or long-legged bib-tights, and lightweight neoprene booties will suffice to match most unforeseen turns in the weather. Arm-warmers are most useful. In the cool morning arm-warmers can be donned, and later, as the day warms up, they can be rolled off and slipped into the jersey pocket.
I have found that water/windproof jackets made from breathable material (e.g., Gore-Tex) *reduce* inside wetness (from entrapment of perspiration) and provide greater comfort.
- It is better to wear clothing that you have tried out before and has proven comfortable over long distances and during different weather conditions – and, before wearing new clothing, make a point of washing those garments that are to be worn in direct contact with your skin.
- Avoid excessively loose fitting clothing.
Wind to the body causes about 70% of the resistance you have to overcome when cycling. Fabrics that have stretchy, slippery properties (e.g., Lycra) are the cyclist's cloth of choice. (In cold wetness Lycra must stand aside for wool or polypropylene as these materials provide much better thermal insulation.)
- The type of pedals you choose will determine the type of your shoes. For better efficiency your feet must be secured to the pedals. If you pedal flat-footed you will quickly fatigue. Feet secured to the pedals enables "round pedalling", i.e., pushing forward at top stroke, then transitioning to pushing down, then pulling back on bottom stroke, and following through with pulling upward then transitioning to pushing forward, etc.
You can go "clipless" or resort to toe-straps. "Clipless" pedals secure the foot without toe-strap pressure and therefore win hands-down over toe-straps. The biggest disadvantage of toe-straps is that, over a few hours, constriction to foot blood flow is more likely to occur (its happened to me) and this leads to pins-and-needles or numbness of parts of the foot.

Aim for comfortable, lightweight, brightly coloured, and not too loose fitting clothing.

Shoes

Cycling shoes with stiff soles make energy transfer through the pedals efficient and also minimise foot fatigue. Road shoes are lighter and have a stiff sole for optimum power transfer. High mileage road-riders opt for road-bike shoes for their efficiency and weight. Mountain-bike shoes are designed to accommodate on / off bike use typically encountered in technical off-road terrain. They have under soles with treads and sunken cleats for easier walking. They are heavier and more flexible than road-bike shoes and are therefore less efficient. Most road-riders find them too hot for long distance roadwork.

It is bound to rain and shoes take some time to dry. Drying can be accelerated appreciably by removing the insoles and stuffing the shoes with crumpled newspaper. To further speed up the drying process replace the soggy newspaper after an hour or two. Don't place soaking wet shoes near a heat source – I have seen good shoes ruined through this process. If you have a spare pair of cycling shoes (and since there will be support vehicles) take them along for those day-after-rainy-days.

Helmets

Thankfully, in the decades of my cycling sojourns I have fallen very few times, and every time my bicycle helmet has saved me from serious injury. I therefore regard this as essential kit. To afford proper protection your helmet must fit properly and be worn with chinstrap fastened. Don't wear the helmet pushed far back exposing the forehead unless you plan to fall only on the back of your head (!) – most damage that I have seen or experienced has been to the front and front-side of the helmet; the forehead and temples must be protected. Also ensure that the helmet cannot slip over your eyes on bumpy surfaces.

Daybreak in the early days of July can be quite cool, especially when venturing further north. I have found that on these cool mornings, wearing a baseball type cap (with peak removed) under the helmet helps my body conserve heat and enables me to cycling longer in comfort.

Tops / Jerseys

The well thought out designs have longer backs and deep rear pockets. The backs don't creep up and, in the pockets, you can safely store your mobile phone (best kept in a protective bag), arm-warmers, handkerchief, fruit and energy bars.

Wear a vest or t-shirt under your cycling top. The undervest helps to lessen fluctuations to your core body temperature by providing a thermal buffer – rapid movement of air removes your body heat, be this on the flat when riding at any half decent pace, or when descending, or when riding into headwinds – further cooling is caused by evaporation of perspiration. An undervest will also wick perspiration from your skin making you feel more comfortable.

Shorts

Cycling shorts have a padded crotch to absorb perspiration, some road shock and to prevent chaffing. They are always worn without underwear; the seams in underwear in the saddle contact areas make for tearful rope-burning torture! Many riders prefer the bib-tight design to the waistline shorts, due to disliking pressure on their stomach from the waistband.

Cycling shorts must be washed regularly, i.e., after every long ride. Some riders find that using a cream such as Assos Chamois cream aids their personal comfort.

These creams were introduced for their antibacterial properties and to maintain chamois suppleness and elasticity. Creams have been developed to neutralize acid in sweat, and lubricate rubbing surfaces to minimise chaffing. Most of us wear shorts with synthetic padding and will find that direct application of the cream to the skin quite adequate.

Socks

Comfort takes precedence over fashion and therefore cycling socks are highly recommended. *However it is uncool to wear mid-calf length bobby-socks.* Socks wick away perspiration, regulate foot temperature, and prevent chaffing.

Gloves

Cycling gloves give comfort through padding and provide a better, safer grip on the handlebars. They protect your hands in the event of an accident and enable you to brush debris from your tyres (this action frequently stops puncturing). The soft cloth padding on their back is there to wipe sweat from your eyes and to dab water drops from your nose.

Protective eyewear

Good riding glasses come in colours from clear to charcoal. They are designed to protect your eyes from airborne grit and flying missiles, to filter out UV and prevent eyestrain, and to enhance visibility by brightening up greyness.

Choose branded wrap-around riding glasses that are shatterproof, have excellent ultraviolet ray filtration properties, which are lightweight and can be adjusted for optimum comfort.

