

# Champions of the Wheel!



*The great roads, these days and nights, are never short of romance, but it may be doubted whether they are the scene of anything so marked with good sportsmanship, as when an attempt is being made to break a cycling record.*

It is fascinating to see how the great cycling record-makers go about their work, mounted on the newest pattern racing bicycles or tricycles, and well able to maintain an average of 18 to 20 m.p.h. for ten and twelve hours on end.

The racing cyclist is made of heroic stuff, and presents as magnificent an example of endurance, enthusiasm, and pluck as can be found in any branch of sport.

Attempts to break records are planned with very great exactitude, and members of famous cycling clubs, all picked men, turn out to lend their aid. And the work of the checkers and helpers is not light, for there are long vigils at given points, where trained control agents are on the *qui vive* for hours.

Take a single or tandem London-to-Bath-and-back record attempt, with the racers rivalling a swift motor on points and average. This has to be at night, when the town streets and country roads are clear, or fairly so. The whole track is marked out by men who know every stone of the highway which runs via Maidenhead and Marlborough to Bath.

There may be a moon, but the moon is uncertain, and there will be misty stretches

in the Kennet Valley for sure. The time-keeper and his helpers are at their posts. About every eight or ten miles are pickets, or checkers, with extra look-out men, for the old Bath Road has some awkward bends.



Chosen men are stationed at intervals along the route to provide the cyclist with refreshment.

The worst of those are at Thatcham, Marlborough, and Chippenham. Here special watchers have to be ready to warn any traffic, so that the racing wheelmen can take the hairpin curve on the off side, and so avoid a spill.

Racing events usually commence soon after dawn, the riders being started at minute intervals. Nothing is overlooked. The racing bike is fitted with quick-release wheels; if a puncture occurs, then the wheel can be slipped out in lightning style and a new tyre fixed, the whole operation occupying under three minutes.

At every five, six, or ten miles down the route, which may be 25, 50, or 100 miles, or even more in a time trial such as a 12-hour handicap ride, are the helpers with hot tea, lemonade and claret, or other drinks, handed up in aluminium bottles with wide necks.

There is the man with the liquid refreshment who runs alongside the cyclist and thrusts the bottle into the rider's hand; the racer does not slacken speed, but he gets the drink. All refreshments have to be handed in by men on foot.

A second doughty helper hands the champion a big chunk of stiff rice pudding, served on a piece of paper! The rider takes this and eats it, dropping the paper tray as he swings on his way. The bottle is also heaved "overboard." Meantime a third energetic personage has filled the cyclist's pockets with sandwiches, bananas, and so on.

On the watch there is a fourth man, who has a wet sponge ready for the competitor to pass over his face and sweating wrists. The used sponge discarded like the other "helps," the rider goes flying on, his light little racing bike eating up the miles as he



Another helper is the look-out man, whose job is to warn cyclists when taking a bend, of approaching traffic.

glides away through the night. He may be troubled by night-moving lorries, or by cattle or sheep; but as a rule his road is clear.

The checkers wait at key-points, and sign time-check papers in the case of record attempts. Perhaps, in some cases when record attempts are being made, there will be a long vigil with the watcher, "ticker" in hand, suspecting something is wrong. So-and-so is a minute behind scheduled time. The observers are all alert. Not a sound breaks the stillness. A thin mist over all, the world is a shadowy place of romance.

Then far away down the road appears a light, which comes nearer and nearer. It is So-and-so—only three minutes behind on the schedule, after all!

Only three minutes! It is a lot, but the helpers race by his side, swift as hares, and he is speeded on his way refreshed, while the patrol stands ready for the next!

# GREYFRIARS CHARACTERS IN FANCY DRESS.

"Leading lights" at Greyfriars  
characteristically attired, as seen  
by the HOLIDAY ANNUAL  
artist.

