

# PEDAL POWER



## Tales of a champion



Alan Kemp has raced internationally and nationally

■ Father, 66, describes 50 years of undertaking several epic cycling challenges

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A DRAMATIC tale of disappointments, disasters and racing glory is the inspiring story behind a cyclist who lives in Leftwich.

Dad-of-two Alan Kemp rode the national Milk Race and international Peace Race in the 1970s and has won more than 155 road races since he made a comeback eight years ago aged in his late 50s.

But the 66-year-old's cycling journey began, as many do, with his dad.

Alan's dad was a member of Birkenhead North End cycling club and regularly rode between Cheshire and Birkenhead to visit his parents with Alan on a seat perched on the top tube of his sit-up-and-beg bicycle.

"He always used to talk about cycling and I was so inspired by it," Alan said.

It was not long before Alan was making the journey himself, aged just 11, and he joined the then newly formed Weaver Valley Cycling Club in 1963.

His first foray into racing, aged 15, was a lesson in bitter disappointment.

"I nearly won the Manchester Cyclo-cross for schoolboys," he said.

"I had half a mile to go and my plastic derailleur gears just snapped.

"I was nearly in tears.

"I walked the last half a mile and everyone passed me, I was absolutely heartbroken."

Not to be deterred, Alan won his first race, a 40-mile road race at Oulton Park, when he was 16.



Alan Kemp leading the Scottish Grants Girvin in 1976, going into the last stage

His training consisted of riding to and from work, as a chef at Manchester Business School, with bricks in his saddlebag to make it as challenging as possible.

Alan was first picked for the Milk Race in 1972 but disaster struck in 1974 when he was cycling to work and his front wheel collapsed.

He suffered a ruptured liver and ruptured spleen.

"I was in hospital and very very seriously ill," Alan said.

"They didn't know whether I would pull through."

But just 12 months later Alan rode the gruelling 14-stage Peace Race through Warsaw, Berlin and Prague, which he described as the Eastern Bloc's answer to the Tour de France.

"I went from being in a critical condition to riding the hardest race in the world and getting through it," he said.

"It was the greatest cycling experience

I ever had, 70,000 people were in the stadiums at the finish."

He rode the Milk Race again in 1976 but broke his collar bone and this, plus moving to shift work at ICI, spelled the end for the first stage of his racing career.

He aimed to make a comeback when he was 40 and planned to win the Percy Stallard Series, a national series of 12 events, which he did in that one season in 1989.

But disaster struck yet again when he was involved in an accident with a car when riding to work and broke his knee cap.

"I was told I wouldn't be able to race again," Alan said.

"But luckily I have been able to."

His competitive cycling took a back seat for nearly 20 years as he and wife Steph brought up their two daughters Sally, 25, and Lucy, 24.

It was fellow Weaver Valley Cycling Club members Nick Butterworth and Dave Astles who convinced him to give it a go again in 2007.

He has gone on to win around 155 races and 19 national road race championships, including eight consecutive TLI (The league International) championships and eight League of Veteran Racing Cyclists (LVRC) championships.

"Every year I've said 'I'm not racing next year' but then I have done," he said.

"Now I've stopped saying it - I say 'never say never' instead."

And although Alan epitomises determination, focus and ability, his ethos is simple.

"Racing is something I can take or leave," he said.

"It's a very small part of the cycling experience.

"It's been a big part of my life but considering I've been cycling since I was 11, most of it hasn't been spent racing.

"I just love riding my bike."