

My Hour

"No looking at the clock or the lap counter; no other thoughts during that hour, just this consciousness of an exhilarating lightness of being." On breaking the Hour record. But whose words?

WORDS

Ian Cleverly

PHOTOGRAPHS

Harry Dowdney



"It was a great feeling: pushing along the straight and being carried round the bend, time after time – a marvellous rhythm.

"In my body was the quick rhythm of pedalling, the slow rhythm of change of direction and the equilibrium given by the gyroscopic wheels. In my mind, there was music as an accompaniment to the magical feeling of levitation.

"On the track, my job was to keep the pace comfortably constant and concentrate on following the black line – no looking at the clock or the lap counter; no other thoughts during that hour, just this consciousness of an exhilarating lightness of being."

These are the words of the Hour record holder on his successful attempt at the Olympic velodrome in London. His rock-steady upper body had maintained its position for the full sixty minutes, while the legs below whirred away, always staying on top of the gear; always sticking to schedule. Poetry in motion.

But it's not the words of Bradley Wiggins, should the florid prose of the usually plain-speaking knight of the realm have taken you by surprise. And the music was Beethoven's 9th, not The Who.

This is Sidney Schuman talking.

Before you click on the UCI website to check our facts and see who this imposter might be, we can you assure Sidney is the record holder.



Had you scrolled down the UCI page showing the various Hour records in existence, as Sidney did last year, you will have noticed a yawning chasm of opportunity in the age-related records.

Jim Turner of the USA held the 75-79 title with a distance of 38.494km set in Mexico. The amazing Robert Marchand of France, not satisfied with his 24.251km set to mark the occasion of his 100th birthday, added another two-and-a-half kilometres two years on.

And in between these two men? Nothing. Nobody between the ages of 80 and 100 had set a mark.

Sidney, 84 years young and a decent middlemarker time triallist in his day, spotted a way of getting his name in the history books.

There were a couple of minor problems to be overcome, the first being his diminishing fitness. As a member of the now-defunct North London CC in his twenties, Sidney had broken the club '100' record "because the guy who would have won it was in Canada at the time," he says, modestly, but that was a while ago...

"Back in the day, we used to compare mileages. Some guys in the club would be doing 15,000 miles in a year. And I'd be close to that – certainly ten or 12,000. Now I'm lucky if I do a thousand.

"I was pretty fit right up until my late seventies, then at 80, down came the window. I lost my strength, just like that.

"One of the things I was good at before was climbing. When this idea came up of a world record on the track, I thought that's good – no hills!"



Then there was the small matter of having never ridden a track to be overcome. Weekly sessions at the Olympic velodrome took care of that and, by September, Sidney was ready.

“I was doing ten or 20-minute rides, then a couple of times I tried the hour and I was around Robert Marchand’s level. I thought I had to do better than that.”

With an extended steerer column on the standard-issue Condor hire machine to give him a more upright position, plus his own preferred saddle, Sidney was “completely comfortable on the bike and that makes all the difference” – with one final adjustment.

“I didn’t like their high gears. There was an 86 on there, then it got put up to 90 inches. I wanted to ride what I always used in a time-trial, 81.”

With the gear sorted, he was away. “The whole family were there, banging on the boards and cheering me on, and that had an effect.

“It was marvellous. I was ecstatic. I didn’t push myself too much, just rode round to my comfort level. Apparently, my pace was completely consistent throughout the hour: 28.388kph.”

A new world record. That must be a great feeling. He’s still smiling, as you can see.

Nine months on and Sidney and his daughter Julie were back at the velodrome to see Wiggins do his stuff in front of 6,000 supporters. “The noise was phenomenal, it nearly lifted my head off. That put the final word on my puny effort, seeing Brad do the record,” says the ever-modest Londoner. “He did nearly twice as far as me.”

But he’s less than half your age, Sidney. And a Tour de France winner. And Britain’s most decorated Olympic medallist, need we remind you.

To top off the evening, Sidney got taken track-centre, chatted to David Millar, got a selfie with Miguel Indurain, then headed backstage to join the throng in congratulating Sir Brad.

What did the two record holders talk about? “He wondered if my bum had been as sore as his after the record attempt. I could have replied that it was only half as sore, because I only went half the distance.

“That might have happened in a dream, but in real life I remained speechless. I still am.”

Never meet your heroes, they say. But sometimes, 'they' are wrong.

Sidney now has a personalised jersey courtesy of Rapha, using the same gold lettering as Wiggins' own jersey that he wore within minutes of setting his record in June. He has retired from track cycling now, content with his lot. "Here's an interesting question," he says to finish. "Whose record is going to get broken first, Brad's or mine?"

"I'm surprised nobody has had a go at it yet..."

Come and have a go if you think you're old enough. And hard enough.

