

Completed! El Gordo, finito!

BY GORDON MILLER



Gordon Miller set a new Guinness World Record – the greatest distance covered by an electric bicycle in one week (1706.85km) – by cycling from Cadiz to Mallabia, Spain, between 1 and 8 October 2021. Here he recalls the purpose of the ride, the highs and lows of the challenge and reveals how he overcame three punctures on the first day and a crash on the last day to set the new record

14.32 Day one.

Puncture #3 in the space of 30 minutes. I'm off-road and 2km from the support vehicle who can't get to me. So, the only option is to walk down with my bike. Already falling behind schedule, I'm now two hours down. My inner chimp makes his first appearance, telling me my world record attempt is over before it's really even begun.

Dr Steve Peters' book *The Chimp Paradox* will be familiar to many cyclists. I'd heard about it but hadn't read it. However, on the penultimate evening before my challenge I had the great good fortune to have a video call with Ed Clancy OBE. Ed has worked closely with Steve and distilled for me the chimp paradox as fact, logic, reason (FLR). This was to become my mantra as I battled my way through Spain to set a new GWR.

As I interpreted it, FLR overcomes our emotional reaction (the inner chimp) to challenging circumstances and situations. The aim is to manage the chimp. In the GWR context, the 'fact' is I've done the training (working for six months with Ali Slater, a cyclist and coach at Ed's Clancy Briggs Cycling Academy), the 'logic' is that I'm fully prepared, and the 'reason' is therefore it's completely doable to set a new record. The inner chimp put in his box, in theory.

20.15 Day two.

The Wahoo froze today, and I lost several kilometres before I realised. It's been a hot (30°), long (10 hours in the saddle and 12 from start to finish) and lumpy (>2,350 metres) day,

and by dusk I've fallen short of the daily target by 20km. I'm now 60km down after two days. With a daily average target of 240km for the next five days to stay on schedule to break the record, it's hard to see how I'm going to make up the shortfall. There are under 12 hours of daylight a day (ideally, I don't want to cycle in the dark from both safety and navigation perspectives) and I'm already on the road from 07.30-19.30 just to achieve the daily required average). My inner chimp is in the ascendent.

My motivation for taking on the GWR challenge was threefold: 1) to have an incredible and enjoyable personal adventure, and set myself a cycling goal to keep me physically and mentally healthy with something to work towards; 2) to raise awareness of my advocacy work to end modern slavery that I began three years ago when I founded the not-for-profit social enterprise Ride For Freedom; 3) to fundraise for Freewheel by Ride For Freedom, a programme I initiated to help survivors of modern slavery to cycle. My purpose drives me on during the challenge and helps to quieten my inner chimp when he is at his most agitated.

19.48 Day three.

280km in the bag. I've clawed back 40km. I've got this! The chimp is back in his metaphorical box. It was also my longest and favourite ride ever, through the beautiful Cabo de Gata National Park – green hills overlooking, in parts, the sparkling Mediterranean Sea – and three climbs each in excess of 4km.

Gordon Miller is a human rights advocate, communications strategist, social entrepreneur and CEO of Sustain Worldwide



STATS:

- **New GWR:**
I set a new #cycling GWR of 1,706.85km (1,060 miles) for 'the greatest distance covered by an e-bicycle in one week'. The previous record was 1,662km
- **Distance cycled:**
1,673km in seven days; daily average 239km; plus 33.85km before 7.45am on day eight because I started at 7.46am on day one.
- **Elevation gain:**
15,524m; daily average 2,217m
- **Moving time:**
71 hours 20 minutes; daily average 10 hours 17 minutes
- **Average speed over seven days:**
23.1kmph
- **Longest daily ride:**
280km from Almeria to Los Alcazares
- **Calories consumed:**
36,015; daily average 5,145
- **Average daily wattage:**
110
- **Average daily hours sleep:**
6.5

Defining and Delivering Sustainable Mobility

We help achieve sustainable, healthy and socially inclusive mobility, contributing to the design of smart and liveable cities and regions. By integrating pioneering measures, ideas, knowledge and technologies

from our international research into our UK portfolio, we ensure that local development planning projects capitalise on these solutions. Climate change, social diversity and gender equality underpin all of our projects.

www.vectos.co.uk | marketing@vectos.co.uk | linkedin.com/company/vectos-ltd | twitter.com/vectostp



Mishaps

Day 1

Three punctures in 15 minutes on an off-road trail 2km away from my support so I had to walk down the trail.

Day 2

Wahoo on bike computer froze so lost navigation and some accrued mileage. I got it restarted.

Day 3

None. Perfect day cycling through the Cato do Cabo national park and on to the Mar Menor.

Day 4

Wahoo froze again. Got it working in short order.

Day 5

Set off without water bottles so rode for two hours dry. Not ideal but not catastrophic.

Day 6

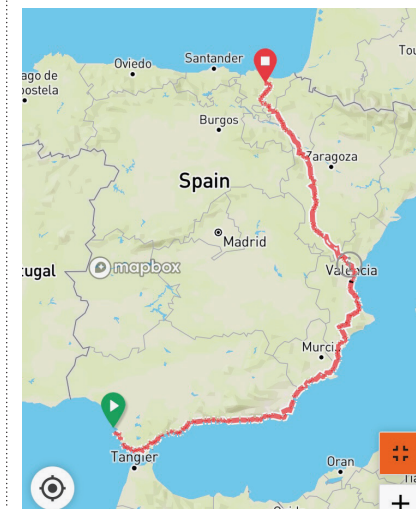
Back-up battery not charged and the sky was overcast so recharging not possible. Also lost rear light.

Day 7

Fell off the bike. Tiny tumble that left me with a few scrapes and a puncture. Lost a bit of time but not ultimately critical.



Orbea on the beach – Miller and his steed. Below: the route from Cadiz to Mallabia in the north



I began planning the ride, which I named ‘El Gordo’ both because it’s a play on my name and because translated from Spanish it means ‘the big/fat one’, in January 2021. I selected the specific roads to cycle because they are a documented route for human trafficking (a form of modern slavery). I’m an ambassador for Orbea, so I wanted to end the ride and break the record at its HQ in Mallabia, between Bilbao and San Sebastián. I decided to ride an electric bike because I knew that undertaking a GWR attempt would raise the profile of the challenge, and this was the only GWR I could find that ticked all boxes while fitting in with the limited time I could be away from home. My one-week GWR attempt was part of an 18-day, 2,900km ride from Cadiz to London, via France.

09.47 Day six. 20mph headwind. Freezing cold. Overcast sky. The top-up battery on the bike hasn’t charged overnight. My support vehicle is an hour or so away. I’m in a world of trouble. More than 200km to cycle today with a headwind and without sun meant no chance of charging the battery. My inner chimp has grown to gorilla-sized proportions. Electric bikes polarise. Undoubtedly, going uphill they are transformative and take the strain. But on the flat the assistance cuts out at



25kmph (15mph) so above that speed they are a heavy weight (approximately five kilos heavier than an average carbon bike). They are also limited in their range. I cycled on an Orbea Gain M20, with another as a back-up. The integral battery has a range of approximately 60km, while the range extender/top-up battery gives around 40km. I averaged 239km a day for the first seven days. My support vehicle had two PV panels and an inverter so the batteries could be recharged and rotated (I had three) during the day – but only when the sun shone – and it didn't always on days five to seven. When it didn't, I was on my own pedalling a considerably heavier bike than most of us would choose to ride. I call this 'the electric bike paradox' in homage to the 'Chimp Paradox'.

18.36 Day seven.

I've just clocked up 212.1km in the day to break the existing GWR of 1,662km cycled in one week on an electric bicycle, finishing the day on 1,673km, a new record (pending official verification). I'll get up early tomorrow and put in another 30km or so before 07.44 (I started the ride at 07.44 on day one and so have until 07.44 on day eight to conclude one full week) to give me a buffer in case there's any discrepancy with the mileage from the

The electric bike paradox' – heavier, but with boost... while it lasts



LEARNINGS:

- **Plan your routes well. I didn't! Too much gravel and off-road slowed me down and caused punctures that put me massively back, and almost scuppered me on day one.**
- **Have an immense support person/team who can cook, navigate, take photos etc. I was supported by James Aubry of Humble Hedgehog Productions. I categorically couldn't have achieved the record without him.**
- **Good nutrition was fundamental to the successful challenge. I ate vegan for the week (usually no meat or dairy) and had no coffee/tea or alcohol. So essentially rice, pasta, veggies and fruit. My go-to snacks on the bike were two HumanFood bars a day. I also took daily Bio-synergy supplements, with omega3, glutamine and B12.**
- **Learn how to channel your inner chimp (emotional self) for motivation and don't allow him to get the better of you by applying fact, logic and reason (FLR) to keep you focused. I used this on several occasions when my chimp was jabbering that there was no way I could achieve the daily mileage target.**
- **Having a purpose (raising awareness of modern slavery and fundraising for Freewheel by Ride For Freedom) and a goal (a GWR attempt) power you on.**



It's been hugely impactful in raising awareness of modern slavery"



GPS readings. My inner chimp is well and truly put to bed.

During the GWR challenge, I'd never been more 'in the zone' in my life. Seven days of complete focus on one goal. It was an out-of-body experience. I question whether I could do a similar feat again. (My inner chimp is back!) But I have ambitions to try other endurance rides in 2022 and beyond – I'm seeking sponsors. Overall, it was memorable (lifetime memories created), challenging (there were many times when I didn't think I'd make it – more to come about that in the documentary being made), and enjoyable (c'mon, cycling the length of Spain!). It's also been hugely impactful in raising awareness of modern slavery. There were more than 20 press articles, a roadside interview with BBC Radio London and knocking on one million social media impressions, including 30,000 reactions to my LinkedIn post announcing I'd unofficially broken the record.

Postscript

13.18, 2 December 2021. Official confirmation from Guinness World Records: 'We are thrilled to inform you that your application for "greatest distance covered by an electric bicycle in one week" has been successful and you are now the Guinness World Records Title Holder!' ◦



Riding For Freedom, a documentary by Humble Hedgehog Productions of Gordon's Guinness World Record-setting cycle, will be released in 2022.

Gordon Miller is the founder and team leader at Ride For Freedom. The not-for-profit social enterprise's mission is to harness the universal appeal of cycling to raise awareness, educate and forge partnerships to end modern slavery, and to provide remedy to survivors.

Freewheel by Ride For Freedom empowers survivors of modern slavery to cycle to support their mental and physical wellbeing, independence and mobility. You can donate via Just Giving.