

Ride: A commuting challenge

Start: Gowerton

Finish: Castle Square

Distance: 5 – 7 miles

This memorable challenge took place in Bike Week in June 2011. This description of it will hopefully inspire you to commute by bike if you are not already doing so. Accompanying articles suggest commuter routes from the east, north and west of Swansea.

At 8.15 on a Wednesday morning nine challengers, using different modes of transport, set off from the large car park just west of the Commercial Pub in Gowerton bound for Castle Square. This time and place was chosen to be convenient for scheduled bus and train departures. The route taken was left entirely to the challengers.

Their arrival in Castle Square was timed. This was not a race but a scientific experiment to compare the different modes. These were: train, bus, car, bicycle, kick-bike* and foot (running).

Choosing the best route posed a dilemma for the self-propelled: should it be short but hilly or long and flat? The flatter alternative along the Clyne Valley and round Swansea Bay was some two miles longer.

Only one cyclist (me actually) went this way. The rest took more direct routes via Killay. (I think all avoided the marginally shorter but hillier route via Cockett.) The results are as follows. (The numbers are times in minutes):

Claudine (cyclist)	23
Rob (kick-bike)	25
Alison (cyclist)	27
Mark (runner)	31
David (cyclist)	31
Nick (car)	34
Chris (runner)	37
Colin (train)	37
Mike (bus)	40



The obvious conclusion is that a bike is the fastest; even an old man (me) taking a longer route was quicker than the car! (And this included being careful of pedestrians and dogs on the shared -use paths. There were however few of them at that time of day.) Mike was handicapped because his bus was significantly behind schedule. Colin on the train also had the handicap that the railway station is some distance from Castle Square. Mark's impressive time can be attributed to him being one of Swansea Harriers top runners. The picture shows the self-powered challengers.

* The kick-bike (on left in the picture) has neither pedals nor seat. One 'kicks' on alternate sides, jumping to change feet. As Rob's time demonstrates a skilled rider can go very fast.

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