

British Cycling North West Region – Women’s Racing Sub-Group

Update for the Regional Board, 23 August 2018

Original Position

The original aims of the group were to look at ways in which we could encourage more women to get involved with cycle racing on the road and in circuit racing, by seeking to remove barriers and help develop racing and training opportunities.

The original group consisted of Iain Walker, Len Woffindin, Alan Roper, Heather Bamforth and Ruth Taylor. Iain Walker subsequently stepped down at the end of 2016.

Our initial idea was to look at promoting a “Big Day Out” concept which would potentially appeal to riders that did not see themselves as “racing cyclists”.

Increase in Training Opportunities through British Cycling

In 2017, British Cycling began to push their “Women and Girls” sessions at the closed circuits in the Region which proved popular with those new to the sport. This meant that the “Big Day Out” concept became less critical as there was now an opportunity for women to access the circuits, which had not been possible before.

These sessions were publicised through the women’s cycling participation channels at British Cycling, mainly through the Breeze programme and social media, which was a large part of the demographic with whom we were originally trying to engage.

As a consequence, we enlisted the assistance of Danielle Riley to include her in the discussions, as she was one of the main coaches at the popular Tameside sessions. At the same time, Ruth Taylor stepped away from the sport.

Change in Direction

Through 2017, we were monitoring the participation numbers in the road races in the North West. Mid-week numbers were increasing at Tameside and Salt Ayre, by having races less often, which was a positive, however the numbers road racing began to reduce.

During 2017, we reassessed the make up of the sub-group and reviewed what our goals should be and we realised that there were a number of issues which appeared to be affecting the numbers racing, in particular, the implementation of restricted points for women’s racing. As a consequence, through the Racing Chance Foundation, we put forward a change to the women’s points banding at the North West’s AGM in September 2017 so that a proposal could be put forward to the Road Commission to introduce the same points banding as the men’s sport. This was subsequently rejected by Road Commission, as a consequence it seeded the idea for a national women’s strategy group which was subsequently formed.

In early 2018, Heather and Danielle were invited onto a new women’s strategy group at British Cycling, which was to look at how the sport could increase the numbers of women riding bikes, from Breeze rides through to National Series. There are approximately 10 members of the group and the

North West has three representatives in Heather, Danielle and Gemma Sargent (the latter sits on the Road Commission as a rider representative).

As there was still good participation at the sessions at Tameside, for 2018, we encouraged organisers who were holding races at Pimbo and Bickerstaffe to consider handicapping races to see whether this would assist with numbers. Southport CC's event at Bickerstaffe in April was run as a handicap and it had the largest number of new racers than we had seen for some time.

There was a knock on effect for the remaining races held at Pimbo, with the new riders also entering the Racing Chance and Croston Velo events, although all three events still suffered with low numbers.

We have also had approval from the Region to pilot a Road Academy for young women over the winter of 2018/19, and we are going to be inviting riders to the Academy shortly. The first session is scheduled for 23 September 2018.

The Plan for 2019

As can be seen, the group now has more of a co-ordination role for the women's cycling events. We have been monitoring participation for the past two years and there has been a distinct issue with retaining riders. We believe this is due to there being a lack of racing opportunities at the relevant level which has meant that there is no community for the women.

In 2019, we are planning to launch a league for women to see whether this will assist with rider retention and building a community. We have canvassed the opinions of the organisers who have promoted races for women this year and all of the organisers (with one exception) have come back to support this. We are hoping to have a number of road races (maybe six) with additional circuit races included.

To assist with participation, women signing up to the league will be invited to women's only race training sessions at closed circuits in the North West. These will also be open to women yet to sign up to the league, those new to the sport and those keen to improve their confidence.

We anticipate emailing all of the women who are British Cycling members in the North West to advise them of the plan for 2019, which will hopefully encourage them to sign up.

We are also proposing to ask Deborah John from Cold Dark North/Lune RC to join the sub-group, as she is an organiser of women's events and a commissaire and therefore is well-placed to provide input into the group.

At the same time, we will continue to feed into British Cycling's women's strategy and feed back to them on what we are seeing at a grassroots level.

Len Woffindin, Heather Bamforth, Alan Roper