

The Gemini[★][★]

Bulletin

Autumn 2023

It's that time of year again when the club assembles at Sophie's Choice restaurant in Sidcup for the annual dinner on 3rd November to enjoy each other's company and look back on and celebrate a season of successful performances, trips and events the Gemini BC has put on for its membership and the wider cycling community. The achievements of our trophy winners are again recognised with the 2023 recipients being:

Clubman of the year - Huseyin Vardal, voted for by the club membership for his racing performances throughout the year

Senior evening 9-mile time trial trophy - Huseyin Vardal who clocked the highest average speed over three events in the series

Senior 25-mile trophy - Huseyin Vardal for the fastest 25 mile time trial time in the season (55:15 on the Q25/3 course at the Medway Velo 25)

Hill climb trophy - Richard Friend for 3rd overall at the Waller Pain Hill Climb

Mercury Massed Start - Valentino Fontana for amassing the most BC points during the season (38)

Veteran road racing trophy - Valentino Fontana for finishing 3rd Overall in the Full Gas Masters Summer Series

Peter Elliott memorial trophy - Chris Beales, winner of the E/R/G/H category race

Russell Fenton memorial trophy - Matt Holmes, winner of the A/B/C/D category race

Mercury Trophy for outstanding performance on a bike - Huseyin Vardal for winning the Turkish national road race and time trial

Time Trials

Huseyin Vardal was the club's mainstay in open time trials in 2023 posting some fast times across the 10, 25 and 50 mile distances and getting in the top ten seven times, with a best placing of 3rd in the VTTA Kent 10 in April. James Hawkins also put in an impressive appearance with a win in the CC Bexley 10 road bike event on 3rd June.

Huseyin and James were also in the winning team in the Kent CA 25 3-up team time trial with Neil Harrigan on 2nd July. James recounts the day:

Having won the event in 2021 on road bikes, but subsequently failing to enter in 2022, I was keen to return in 2023 to see what we could do. Last year, I think Neil was away, and Chaz Hollosi was going to fill in but we didn't get our act together in time. But nobody was away this year, and Huseyin suggested riding our TT bikes - game on! Huseyin had been going well already on his TT bike, I had been out on mine for a few training rides, and managed to get down to an evening TT too, but I think Neil only managed to go out once on his before the race and didn't manage to get his disc wheel set up in time. So we were not best prepared to say the least. Tactics out the window, it was going to be a case of trying to hold Huseyin's wheel.

Race day started with a perfect sunny summer's morning. Barely any wind, not too hot - perfect conditions. We were racing the Q25/3 course, down at Hamstreet on the south coast. The course is on the Lydd Road, which is a national speed limit single carriageway. In the very early morning there is not much traffic, but towards the end of a morning TT the traffic does start to get busy. We almost didn't make the start as Neil's front light decided to jettison itself during our warm-up, but he got to the start with a few seconds to spare and we were off. Huseyin started at a blistering pace, almost dropping Neil and me. I remember looking down at my computer and seeing something like 650W on the screen. Ouch! We got to the first turn onto the main road together and settled in.

Each of us took turns on the front. Neil's turns were smooth and steady, Huseyin's were strong and unyielding. I did what I could, trying to start each effort as smoothly as possible, ramping up my speed once the other two were back in the shelter of my wheel. I remember one decent turn that I managed. Coming back from the first roundabout the road pitches up for about a mile, it's only about a 1% gradient, but it felt steeper at race pace. I felt strong and sat on the front drilling a high cadence and keeping the speed around 45kph all the way until the road went downhill. I spun my legs up to 110 rpm and we hit our top speed of the day of 70kmh. There was still about 10km to go, the hardest 10km. I was happy to let Neil and Huseyin take more than their fair share of time in the wind. When it was my turn again I managed to put out decent power, but only a minute or two at a time.

Heading towards the last roundabout we saw the teams ahead of us coming the other way. I'd considered the San Fairy Ann trio our closest rivals. Martin Kober always goes well, and Tom Rowing and Reuban Davey had been going well too, leading up to the race. So when we saw them coming towards us from the turn I tried to do the mental arithmetic to see if we were beating them or not, but in my hypoxic state my brain function was too limited. We made it around the last roundabout; I put in a dig on the front to bring us back up to speed but obviously wasn't going fast enough as Huseyin took over a minute later. Huseyin lasted about another minute when Neil's legs found another gear and led us to within sight of the finish where we all turned ourselves inside out, just to shave one more second off our time. We shared fist bumps and rolled back to HQ, my legs shredded and in tatters.

At HQ there was a bit of a wait until the results were announced, which meant we got to catch up with our time trialling friends and eat some cake. Eventually the results were announced, we'd taken the win with a time of 52:38, beating the San Fairy Ann guys by 1 minute 22 seconds. Martin, a true gent, congratulated us and took our picture for us.



James Hawkins, Neil Harrigan and Huseyin Vardal after their victory in the Kent CA 25 3-up team time trial

Open events		
Date/Event	Rider	Position and time
August		
20 th - Kent CA 10	Huseyin Vardal	12 th 21:48
July		
9 th - VTTA Kent 50	Huseyin Vardal	6 th 1:55:06
2 nd - Kent CA 25 TTT	James Hawkins, Neil Harrigan, Huseyin Vardal	1 st 52:38
June		
3 rd - CC Bexley 10	James Hawkins	1 st 23:21 (road bikes)
May		
21 st – Medway Velo 25	Huseyin Vardal	5 th 55:15
14 th - Gravesend CC 25	Huseyin Vardal	8 th 56:49
April		
30 th - Wigmore CC 25	Huseyin Vardal	4 th 57:00
23 rd - VTTA Kent 10	Huseyin Vardal	3 rd 22:33
16 th - Kent CA 10	Huseyin Vardal	5 th 22:40
March		
25 th - VTTA Kent 10	Huseyin Vardal	6 th 23:08



James Hawkins on the way to winning the road bike category in the CC Bexley 10 on the Isle of Grain

On Thursday, 15th June Huseyin came 1st in the Turkish Time Trial championship with a time of 15:08 establishing a course record. Then the next day he also won the Turkish Road Race championship with a time of 1:33:38. What makes the road race win even more remarkable is that he did this on a borrowed bike with slipping gears and couldn't stand up on it.



Huseyin Vardal topping the podium at the Turkish Championships road race (left) and time trial (right)

Richard Friend represented the club in a timed event on 11th June. He takes up the story here - I'm pleased to say that I wore my Gemini jersey in battle this year at the Waller Pain Hill Climb - it has been a long time since I did so. The Waller Pain is a charity event in Caterham as part of the Caterham Festival. The race was up Waller Lane which apparently was used for the Catford Hill Climb many years ago. As I live at the top of a steep hill training opportunities were plentiful and I took everything quite seriously. I was certainly the only one with a turbo trainer there and did you know Gemini shorts are heavier than Assos ones! Anyway, it wasn't much fun (no pain, no gain) but I managed 3rd overall and 2nd Vet. The funny thing is that my only aim was to be 1st Vet. Sadly the winner was also a vet. He had AX Lightness wheels and no bar tape. Perhaps that's the secret!?



Richard Friend at the Waller Pain Hill Climb

CC Bexley 9 TT

Gemini riders put in another strong showing in CC Bexley's nine mile local time trial series with Huseyin getting the most success winning three rounds, backed up with good rides from Kevin Curran, James Hawkins and Tim Kearley.

CC Bexley evening 9 series		
Date	Rider	Position and time
August		
23rd (hill climb)	Huseyin Vardal	7 th 1:34
16th	Huseyin Vardal	2 nd 19:49
June		
28th	Huseyin Vardal	1 st 19:28
21st	Huseyin Vardal	1 st 19:40
	James Hawkins	4 th 20:34
	Kevin Curran	5 th 20:41
7th	Tim Kearley	8 th 23:20 (road bike)
April		
26th	Huseyin Vardal	1 st 20:01
	Kevin Curran	3 rd 21:19



Huseyin Vardal won three rounds of the 2023 CC Bexley evening 9 mile TT series

Road and circuit racing

Valentino Fontana was the club's most prolific participant in circuit racing this season riding from December last year right through to September this year in the over 40s Masters category. He was consistent in his results throughout, finishing in the top ten on 18 occasions and came close to getting on the podium several times. He was 4th in round 5 of the Full Gas Winter Circuit Series at Hillingdon on 10th December and equalled that result at the recent BMCR Victoria CC Criterium at Hog Hill on 24th September. Val finished 5th in round 19 of the Full Gas Summer Circuit Series at the Velopark on 2nd August and was also 5th in round 1 of the Full Gas Autumn Cup Series at Hillingdon on 3rd September. Val underlined the success of his season by placing third overall in the Full Gas Summer Circuit Series with a total of 105 league points.



Valentino Fontana racing at Hog Hill and with his trophy for 3rd Overall in the Full Gas Masters Summer Series

Peter Elliott and Russell Fenton memorial races

The second running of these events honouring the memory of two of the club's stalwarts we lost in 2022 took place at the Hog Hill circuit in Redbridge on 18th June organised by Colin Smith. The occasion was made more poignant following the sad passing of Peter Elliott's father Fred and brother Paul in early February. Fred was a permanent fixture at Welling Cycles serving customers alongside Peter well into his 90s and working in the trade prior to that for Holdsworths Cycles. Paul was an accomplished time trialist with notable successes as a hill climber including wins in the Wigmore CC hill climb in 1980 and 1981 and at the Catford hill climb in 1981 where he set a course record of 2 minutes on Yorks Hill. He also had success in road racing, winning Kent League events in the 80s and also racing in Belgium.

In the over 40s A/B/C/D category race Matt Holmes (Arctic Aircon RT) defended his title from the inaugural Russell Fenton memorial. James Hawkins came in 7th and Ian Dawson 28th. Valentino Fontana suffered a puncture in the closing stages but determinedly struggled in 32nd so he could claim the lucrative prime he won earlier in proceedings. In the over 50s E/R/G/H/Ladies category race Chris Beales (Velo 1860) took the win in a solo move and the Peter Elliott trophy. Colin recounts the day's racing in more detail:

Fathers' Day brought out the best of the local British Masters Cycle Racing - BMCR riders to Hog Hill with some tightly fought racing across the categories. Racing kicked off in the A/B/C/D category event with Marco Coppola (Colourtech) and Paul Turner (Arctic Aircon RT) opening up a lead for the first seven laps and claiming the first two primes. The hooter went to signal another prime at the start of lap 6 and again on lap 7, which were taken by Andrew Besanko (London Clarion) and Steve Noel (Paradigm Cycles); and again another prime on lap 10 taken by Matt Holmes. The Gemini BC team were enjoying themselves handing out the primes, if not the punishment of deciding to create a Super-Prime of £30, only to find Valentino Fontana of the Gemini dangling off the front by 10 seconds as the hooter went and crossing the line a lap later to take the prize, (more on that later).

The bunch settled down a bit with Ross Courtneil (Essex RC) taking a prime on lap 16. Steve Noel (Paradigm Cycles) launched an attack going up the hill taking Matt Holmes and Os Assem (Finchley RT) with him as the prime hooter went yet again, this time Rob Brice (Trainsharp) taking the glory. With 20 minutes to go, Valentino Fontana, Andrew Buurmann (Rapha CC) and Gregory Smith clipped off the front establishing a 25 second lead at one point, with the lap board out after an hour of hard racing, Rob Brice and Matt Holmes kicked for home for the remaining four laps, with Matt taking the victory from Rob and Ross Courtneil winning the bunch sprint.

As the prize presentations were made, it went to a vote as to whether Valentino should receive the Super-Prime as technically he did not finish as he had punctured on the last lap. To complete the day Matt Holmes was presented with the Russell Fenton Memorial Trophy.

Eighteen riders took to the start line on a balmy Sunday morning for the E/R/G/H/Ladies category race. There was a fist-full of win-and-out primes on offer, kicking off with the two ladies taking part and Clare Simon taking that honour. It wasn't long before Chris Beales went into 'Antony Wallis' mode leaving the rest to scrap it out for the remaining primes – one taken by Olly McPherson (Kingsnorth Wheelers) on lap 13 and then it was Barry Simpson's turn to take the prime prize on lap 18 followed Julian Niles-Cunnington (Black Cyclists Network) picking up the final prime. After an hour and three laps, Chris Beales took a comfortable win with Peter Constable (Basildon CC) and Stephen Piper (Velo Schils Interbike RT) taking the next podium spots.

THE RUSSELL FENTON & PETER ELLIOTT MEMORIAL RACES



SUNDAY 18TH JUNE 2023

9:30 AM (EFGH) THE PETER ELLIOTT MEMORIAL TROPHY - 1 HOUR - 3 LAPS

11:30 AM (ABCD) THE RUSSELL FENTON MEMORIAL TROPHY - 1 HOUR - 5 LAPS

ENTRIES CLOSE 11 JUNE £15 VIA RIDERHQ

📍 REDBRIDGE CYCLE CENTRE (HOG HILL), IG6 3HP



Ian Dawson in the bunch during the Russell Fenton Memorial race

Isle of Wight trip

A long weekend in May saw the inaugural running of an epic trip by a group of hard core Gemini riders to the Isle of Wight. James Hawkins takes up the story –

Neil Pearson, James Drain, Tim Kearley, Colin Smith, Ian Dawson and myself all opted to embark on the first Gemini IOW weekend trip. I booked a static caravan for my family, whilst the other guys pushed the boat out and got a lodge, complete with hot tub. Ballers! Everyone dropped their bags over to me in the days leading up to the trip. My wife, Emma drove down later on Friday with my family and everyone's clothes, and some beers.

In the week prior to the trip a few of us had a training ride down to Rye, which put over 100 miles in our legs. It was a great ride - nice route, decent cafe stop, although it was marred by yours truly suffering a puncturefest nightmare. I had the same wheel off the bike probably 10 times. I'd just got a new bike with Schwalbe Pro-One tyres on it, which seemed to be made using tissue paper. When we got back I promptly swapped them out for some Continental tyres.



Getting the miles in on the way down to Portsmouth

The first day of the trip, Friday the 19th of May, we met up in Eynsford at 9:30am for, in my opinion, the best ride of the weekend. Conditions were changeable, but the tailwind amplified our enjoyment of the next 100+miles. We set off up the Shoreham road and along to Ide Hill where we - everyone still in high spirits - had a quick stop for a bit of food and our first selfie. We then headed down the fast descent; Ian showing the least fear and greatest talent (mass), blasted past me at a rate of knots. We then settled in with Neil taking some big, strong turns on the front. Then the rain started. Whilst it wasn't all that heavy, the water falling from the sky certainly was wet, and we got a mild soaking.

Thankfully the weather did improve throughout the rest of the ride. By the time we were heading through the lanes of West Sussex the sun was out and smiles were on everyone's faces. It was perfect, and everyone agreed, preferable to sitting behind a desk. We made a stop for breakfast just before Turners Hill, and then repeated our mistake on a much grander scale when lunchtime came around. We happened on a pub and dived into the car park, where we all ordered shandies and sandwiches. The bar staff asked if we'd been up the hill yet..? Food and drinks were promptly dispatched, and another group photo was taken. Then we discovered the joy that is Duncton Hill, which is about 1km at an average of 10% gradient. Everyone made it up, Ian proving that class is permanent, managed to get up it on untrained legs. But that seemed to finish him off somewhat, and not in a good way! After this we were in damage limitation whilst trying to push on to get to the ferry on time (not that it mattered really). I sat on the front, carefully watching my power numbers, trying to keep it under 200W.



Carbo-loading for the next leg of the trip

Soon enough we were at Chichester, where we joined the A259 - a straight, main road that heads along the south coast. Neil seemed determined to get to the ferry on time, and took to the front drilling a decent tempo. We got to Portsmouth late afternoon, and enjoyed a beer on the ferry. We disembarked with heavy legs on the other side of the Solent, found our way to the campsite and awaited Emma's arrival with the baggage.



Mission accomplished: enjoying the sunshine riding on the Isle of Wight

We enjoyed perfect sunny weather for the rest of the weekend. On Saturday James D, Neil, Tim and I went for a couple of hours spin. We met everyone else at a pub for burgers and "a couple" of beers. Everyone then headed back to the campsite to recover and more "rehydration".

I'd planned to do a loop of the island on Sunday, but wanted to stick with the group, so we did the first bit of my usual IOW loop which headed along the south coast road, up the climbs towards the needles (where a stage of the Tour of Britain was meant to finish), and then winged it from there. We ended up doing about 3 hours and 50 miles, which was probably a bit too much considering we had to ride 110 miles into the wind the following morning. Emma headed back that night with the kids and our belongings. So we had an evening in clothes that we were either going to throw or carry back.



The lodge, complete with hot tub; accommodation for the weekend

Monday came around all too soon. I cleaned our caravan, handed the keys in and went to meet the others in their "crib". With heavy legs, we now had the small matter of 110 miles into a headwind to deal with. Oof! We'd discussed the most optimal route home, trying to avoid anything too nasty like Duncton. We retraced our outbound route for the most part, stopping at Cadence Cafe just before Duncton hill. The descent down Duncton was fast. Ian, again showing off his mass of talent, blasted past everyone at 50mph.

Conditions continued to be perfect, sunny, but not too hot. The majority of the route was on quiet country lanes. We had our second puncture of the weekend (I think) somewhere near Horsham. With the best part of 3,000km ridden collectively, two punctures wasn't too bad! We then headed to Turners Hill, where the rush hour traffic started. Soon enough we were on familiar roads, and Colin suggested we head through Oxted and along Pilgrims Way. By the time we got to Oxted my legs were empty. I had to soft pedal for a few minutes and fell back from the group. I started feeling better once the road flattened out, finding my second wind I put a dig in and woke the legs up for the final push home down the Shoreham Road. With the end of the weekend in sight we all emptied the tank. Smiles on faces, we stopped for the last group shot of the weekend in Eynsford. We said our goodbyes and headed home where I ordered the takeaway I'd been fantasising about for the last four hours.

Track session

Neil Pearson again organised a track session for the club at the London Velodrome on 31st May. A group of ten riders were put through their paces for a couple of hours, on and off, by one of the Velodrome's coaches. The guys who got to ride the boards were current and former club members and guests from other clubs including from the Gemini - Neil Pearson, Ian Dawson, Colin Smith, James Drain and James Hawkins; Matt Smith (Colourtech RT), Paul Turner (Arctic RT), Martin Kelly (4T), Michael Stanley (Elitecycling) and Runar Peters (Dulwich Paragon).



Gemini riders and guests at the London Velodrome



The guys lapping the boards (photos by Rhys Jones - Elitecycling)

Gemini BC mountain bike report 2023

Murray Taylor summarises the club's activities in this discipline this year:

With no 24 hour racing on the cards for 2023 as organisers of the two most popular races pulled the plug for this year I was at a loose end to discover something that could give a reason to keep riding during the summer. I found an event that looked to be an endurance challenge and enjoyable at the same time. It was the British Heart Foundation London to Brighton Off-Road ride on 23rd September. Given that Tony Cavender has recently had a heart attack and remembering Russell Fenton it seemed to be a good idea and a way to raise funds. It was a 90km route from West Kingston to Brighton, with the majority on bridleways and gravel paths and the opportunity to raise some money for heart disease research.

I chose a 7am start time and with the weather playing nicely for once as I started off along the Thames Path heading west. The section along the Thames had the feeling of a dawn lap at a 24hr race, the sunrise was glorious with house boats emitting the smell of bacon and log burners, a low mist over the river and swans drifting by. We rode through heathland an abandoned air field and along the 'Downs to Downs Way'. The Downs way runs, unsurprisingly, between the North and South Downs along the route of a disused railway. This makes for a tedious 20 miles of gravel path; just right if you had an e-bike or a gravel bike which I did not. The final sting in the tail was the South Down's off-road equivalent of Ditchling Beacon; the reward being a fast descent into Brighton and a welcome beer.

The day was well organised with plenty of artisan coffee stops, villages and bridges over rivers, which made for a very tiring and enjoyable day's riding. The ride time was 5:50hr with 979m of climbing for the total distance of 90 km. In total, over 2,000 riders raised £500,000 on the day. There is also a night ride along the same route, which I may challenge myself to complete next year. If you would like to donate to the British Heart Foundation then go to the Just Giving website and search Murray Taylor and you should be able to locate my page.



Murray Taylor completing the British Heart Foundation London to Brighton Off-Road ride