

# CHATTIN' CHAINS

DECEMBER 2025



SEE PAGE 4!



THE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS ARE BACK IN PERTH: **VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!**

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## MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

As I've said before, the newsletter aims to include articles about our club, about cycling, and articles that might interest you beyond the confines of cycling. The subject of Mens Shed was raised and I did try to include some material on the movement. If any member belongs to one and would like to describe its activities, I'd be happy to include it. I note they are now being named 'Community Sheds' and embracing both sexes, although the original idea of providing an environment for men to talk together still holds good.

President Nev Taylor talks about the upcoming AGM and the need for fresh faces on the committee. Many of our members have been on club committees, so if you haven't yet played a role in managing this club and you've got ideas to share, make sure you nominate for a position. Nev also reminds us of the RoadNats coming up in January and their search for volunteers. If you do attend as a volunteer, you could be contributing to Club coffers which in turn help pay for Club Events.

One of which is the Club's Xmas party. Those attending will have seen Jane Perkin and Shirlene Scanlan presented with their prizes; front and rear Cycliq cameras. Stick close on future rides, and you'll be on record.

Who remembers Fran Watson when she was a member of our Club? Her story was shared by WestCycle.

Blood donors are important people playing a critical role in our health system. They provide a vital service to a range of patients with critical needs for blood and blood products.

If you haven't donated and can, please respond to the appeal at the end of the article.

Design Simon Ray-Hills  
FISHBIRD DESIGN - SIMONJRH@MAC.COM



For the first time music has been included in the newsletter, in the form of handbells. There's a thriving following in WA and beyond and you could be part of it if you choose. The first step is to read Carol Davis's story and see if it resonates with you.

The final story on rescue tugs in WW2 I found to be absorbing, a branch of the war effort that I'd never heard about until my

cousin Hugh Hoffman told me about his research. Hugh has also done research on statues around his home in Scotland. I'll let that one stand for the time being. If you've written or got any stories you'd like to share, let me have them.

**Graham Baws**

Newsletter Editor

newsletter@o55perth.bike



# THE CLUB

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

Christmas is fast approaching and on behalf of the members of the Committee, I wish all Club Members and their families a safe and enjoyable festive season.

May your Christmas sparkle with moments of love, laughter and goodwill.

The Westbridge Funds Road National Cycling Titles are being held from 7-11 January 2026 and there'll be an opportunity for volunteers from our Club to act as officials for this event to be held in Perth. Last year's racing was an amazing experience. Your participation can generate a contribution to the Club's coffers.

Details will be advised by Club e-mail, see also the article later.

The Club's Annual General Meeting will be held on Wednesday 4 March 2026, so this is an opportunity to think about how you can give back to the Club by volunteering for a position on the Committee.

All positions on the Committee become vacant as the tenure is only for 12 months.

Cheers

**Nev Taylor**

President



## FROM THE RIDE CAPTAIN: REPORT FOR SEPTEMBER-NOVEMBER 2025

It was still all about the weather in September and October and there were still wet days. Were they only on Saturdays and Wednesdays, or not?

During these last months there were a few single-rider accidents. All required ambulance transfer to hospital as their injuries were serious and required monitoring or surgery. They were all single-rider events without any vehicles or other riders involved. However, September was accident-free so **Congratulations and Very Well Done, everyone!**

An approach was made to include an off-road or Mountain Bike Ride as an official ride option on one Wednesday ride. Seven riders, led by Richard, rode in the Swan View area. Ride Captain approval was given as this provides another style of bike riding as well as new routes. New members may be interested, and hopefully existing members can enjoy a different style of riding.

The Rides Calendar of events has been quite busy with the Australind Camp in October. Members expressed the wish to repeat the camp next year, and that has now been approved. All rides were updated with the work on the Wilman Wadandi Highway being completed this year. Coffee stops and wonderful meals at the golf club and tavern were highlights that around 60 of us enjoyed.

The North/South Combined Ride and BBQ lunch. This was a successful event, which provides members, who only ride on Saturdays, the opportunity to meet up with other members.

### The Equipment Watch Roster

Thank you to all the Volunteers who have taken their turn this year and some have taken multiple turns. Everyone's effort and time is greatly appreciated and it is a real help to know that someone is coming in to be there for the morning. For those that still might think that they don't need to be involved, this roster is an important part of being a member of our Cycling Club.

We need to look after the equipment, mainly the PA system which is worth around \$800. So check this Roster when you turn up, then either sign up then or take a photo and let the Ride Captain know when you could be there.

The Ride Team continues working to enhance the riding experiences for all Club members. We follow the many other committed and enthusiastic members, who have already contributed, and continue to contribute, to make this a great cycling club.

**Sandra Patullo**

Ride Captain

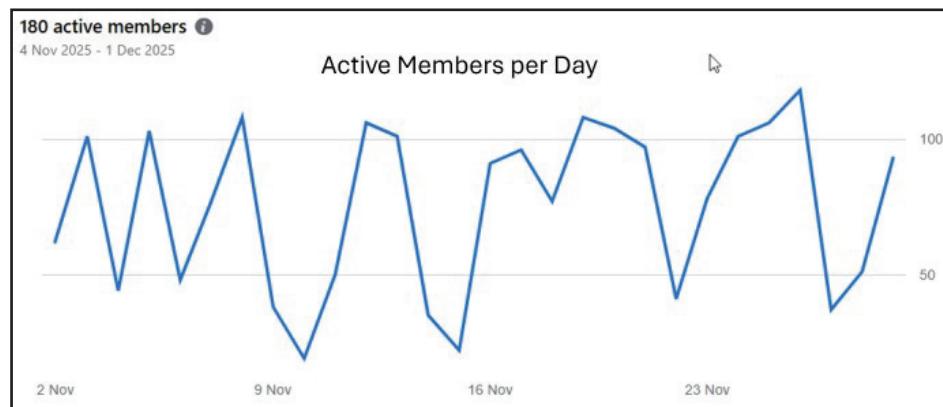




## FROM THE STATISTICIAN

Our 'Members Only' Facebook page is going strong. Some 180 members were active during November, with an average of 75 accessing the pages each day. Generally, up to three new posts are made daily. This includes the weekly tabulation of ride figures for each ride group.

If you are not already signed up, then go to <https://www.facebook.com/groups/055cyclistsPerth>. If new, you will be asked to join with a few simple questions. (Having your own Facebook account is a requirement.) You can treat it as 'read only', you don't ever have to post although of course you're free to do so. It's another useful way of keeping in touch with club matters. The more it's used, the more effective it becomes as a communication tool.



**Cameron Blyth**  
Statistician



## CYCLIQ CAMERA/LIGHTS TWO PAIRS TO BE WON!

### ... AND WE HAVE A WINNER, IN FACT TWO

*They received their Cycliq pair at the Xmas party.*

Another competition had been planned for this newsletter, but the rather meagre (in numbers) response suggested Jane and Shirlene should both be awarded a prize. By the time you read this, they will have received their prizes at the Xmas lunch. Well done, Jane and Shirlene, and thanks for expressing your thoughts on the Cycliq lights/cameras.

Safe, illuminated and recorded riding to Jane and Shirlene. **Their entries are below.**

### IF ONLY *By Jane Perkin*

If only \_\_\_  
All dogs were on leads.  
If only \_\_\_  
All scooter riders used the road rules.  
If only \_\_\_  
All car drivers were caring and sharing.  
If not \_\_\_  
For the truth and proof, there's always my Cycliq.



### UNTITLED *By Shirlene Scanlan*

My Cycliq camera, guardian and storyteller,  
is more than a light or lens on my trusty bike.  
A beacon blazing with unwavering glow,  
ensuring each ride is seen and safely known.  
Rewinds and replays aplenty,  
turning fleeting seconds into timeless tales.  
I ride bold, knowing that no story slips away.

Enjoy the journey  
**CYCLIQ**  
cycliq.com



# CYCLING

## THE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS ARE BACK IN PERTH: VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

*Carmen Keed, Auscycle, Volunteer Coordinator*



Australia's premier cycling event is returning to Perth from 7-11 January.

As in 2025, the 2026 Westbridge Funds Road National Championships (as it is now known) will feature three disciplines: a time trial, a criterium, and a road race.

The winners will earn the right to wear the iconic green-and-gold jersey of the Australian champion.

World-class pros, including Luke Durbridge, Ben O'Connor, Jay Vine, Brodie Chapman and Amanda Spratt will be in competition on the streets of Perth.

AusCycling, the national governing body for cycling, is looking for volunteer course marshals and crossing point marshals to make the event a success.

All volunteers receive an AusCycling T-shirt, hat, bag, sunscreen, water and snacks.

No experience is required, but you must be able to give verbal instructions and fill shifts for several hours at a time on course, possibly near large crowds. Volunteers need to be 18+ or accompanied by a parent or guardian.

As part of volunteering with a club, for every shift completed as a course or crossing-point marshal, a donation of \$50 will be made to the club. The donation only covers these event volunteer roles, and a minimum of 10 shifts must be filled to be eligible.

Sign up to volunteer at this web page: <https://roadnationals.org.au/get-involved/volunteer>

AusCycling is responsible for all levels of cycling and riding in Australia. It represents more than 50,000 members and 450 road, track, BMX and mountain bike clubs. The organisation runs major events, including World and National Championships, as well as competitions and participation programmes down to grassroots level. AusCycling oversees the nation's high-performance programme, taking Aussie athletes to the Olympics, Paralympics, and more.

AusCycling's Perth office, which runs state-level events and programmes, and advocates for its WA members, is located at 63 Adelaide Terrace.



**<https://roadnationals.org.au/get-involved/volunteer>**



## BARGE & BIKE ADVENTURES

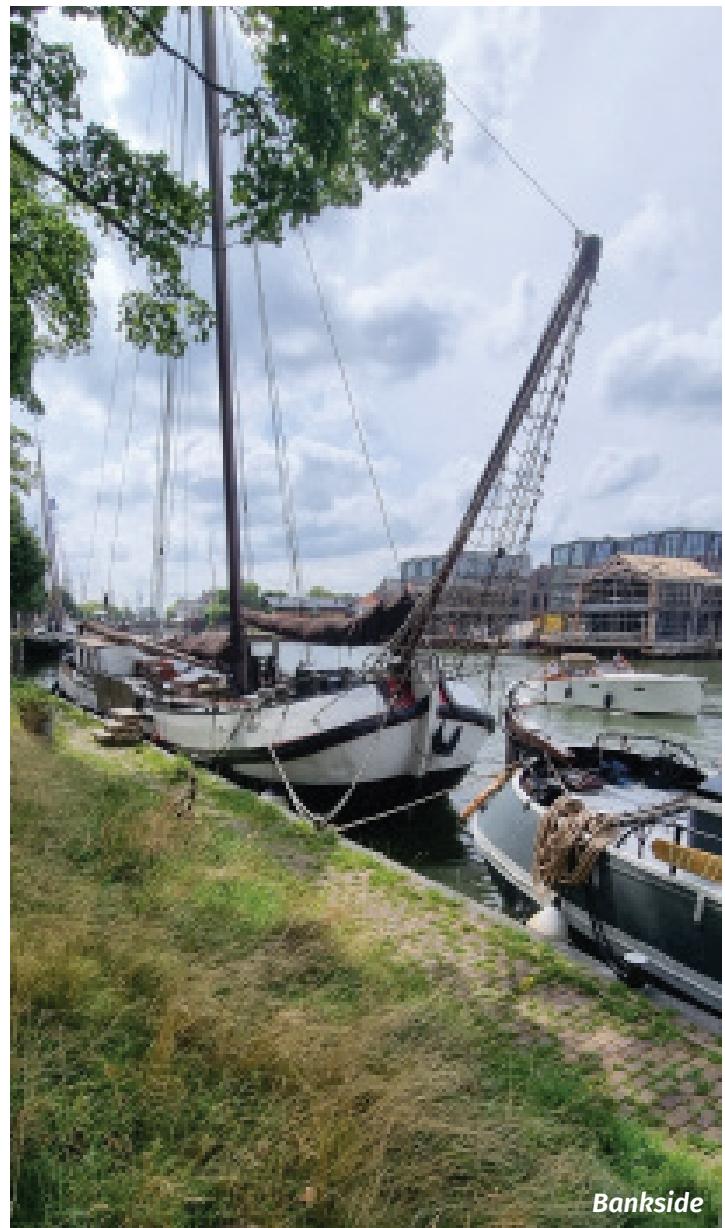
Hoping to escape Perth's brutal winter, I decided to sign up for two barge and bike tours of one week's duration each. I asked fellow members if they would like to share the adventure but was surprised to have no take-ups! Not only are we ageing as a group, but medical issues are the limitation when travel opportunities arise. I changed my choice of soap and deodorant in case there were other reasons of which I was unaware.

Both tours were in August and the weather at 20C with no rain was perfect, proof of the attraction of the northern European countries while the rest of the continent swelters. The first tour was from Heidelberg to Amsterdam along the Rhine. This trip was to relocate the barge back to Amsterdam for future trips so the passenger numbers were just 12 out of a capacity of 22. This resulted in my getting to know fellow travellers very quickly and very well.

The guided cycling went via riverside towns that had numerous Roman ruins from settlements of their era. The guide, who was the owner's son, had been studying Roman history and we benefited by not only visiting the ancient sites, but also having colourful stories behind their existence. The cycle path followed the Rhine and was colourful, to say the least, due to many flower beds and lush greenery with the river supplying a grand backdrop.

As we got closer to the coast, the historic emphasis changed to the Bismarck era. Castles became more prevalent as the Rhine now cut through steep hills. We took gondolas to the mountain tops to admire the grand statues of Bismarck, the victor of the Franco/German and Austrian wars that led to the unification of Germany. Towns like Düsseldorf and Cologne have moved their entertainment hubs to the banks of the Rhine and made it very vibrant, so when the barge tied up for the night the entertainment was close at hand. The arrival at Amsterdam by bike showed us the enormity of pathways that can be ridden in this city and made us thankful of having a knowledgeable guide.

The second barge trip was from Bruges to Amsterdam, so I travelled by train to Bruges. Bruges is a canal town that escaped the bombing of the Second World War so spoils all visitors with its attractiveness. Lanes and canals full of shops and entertainment. It is a must-see town. The second barge held a hefty 39 cyclists which was a bit overwhelming to start with and a big difference from the previous 12. I considered forthright chatting and my usual Australian outlook as the best defence, and it worked. Most passengers were groups



*Bankside*



from the USA and Trump was a no go topic. They were buzzy and focussed on having a good holiday so I was almost outdone on the talking front. Good thing I can rise to a challenge.

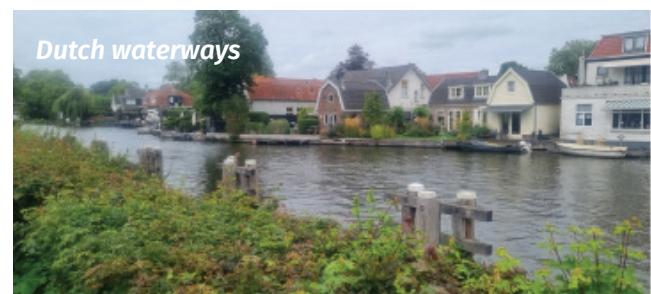
The rides were through the countryside, traversing lush fields and foliage that formed laneways that mostly followed waterways. We cycled through small towns and villages. Flat but enticing with almost no interaction with cars. The guide made sure we had our dose of windmills and stately manors with the odd castle thrown in to break up the countryside. Canals seemed to be everywhere and we watched while having coffee as the boats traversed the locks. The Hanseatic countryside, which we were in, is considered the best part of the Netherlands.

Riding in the flat but enticing fields was so peaceful that you got the feeling of floating along. No effort needed and the visual splendour of the lush countryside to put you at rest and perfect weather to seal the deal!

These two trips, summarised above, cemented my fixation with the barge and bike concept. A great way to see Europe without the hassle of constantly moving. The opportunities to meet future friends and enjoy their company is endless and I felt fulfilled when they contacted me when the journeys were over. May I enjoy more of this in the years to come.

Here is a selection of photos.

**Peter Mayall**





## THE LONG ROAD TO BALLIDU

On a whim, Ray and I decided to answer the call from WestCycle for Volunteers for the 'Bike it to Ballidu Gravel' cycling event. The timing was good, no real plans for the long weekend and with the weather looking fine, a trip to the wheatbelt seemed a perfect getaway. We took the shortcut via Toodyay Road, through the rolling hills of farming lands with lush-looking grain crops.

Our camp destination was the football oval at Ballidu. We parked up in a very convenient position (that means close to the amenities), along with Rosemary in her cosy tent and Theresa and Mark (and puppy Lucy) in their caravan.

An information session was held the evening before the big race, at which we were given our roles for the event. Our dinner was a delicious hamburger, compliments of WestCycle.



Sunday dawned cool and windy. The event village was located in the tiny town of Ballidu, population less than 100. What they lack in numbers, they make up for in enthusiasm. It looked like the entire town was in attendance, preparing the main street for their famous event.



The race began and finished in the town square. 560 riders entered the event, the 150 km and 82 km events also included a race for the first time with attractive cash prize money.

Ray and I were stationed at Pit Stop 2 which was midway along the 150km route. The Pit Stops offered water, plain or with added electrolytes, Winner's gel packets, bananas and snakes.

It was an interesting experience to see so many riders and their supporters descend on this tiny town. The routes passed through some private farmland, with spectacularly vibrant grain crops showing promise of an abundant harvest.

One of the 150km riders, exhausted at the halfway mark, summed up the experience very well. Throwing his arms wide, he exclaimed, 'what beautiful country'.

**Story: Shirlene Scanlan**

**Photos: Ray Scanlan**





## THE PRICE OF A COMFORTABLE SEAT

It is an interesting conundrum that many of us are willing to spend significant sums of money on the latest bike technology, but pay little attention to the humble bike saddle. Yet, at the end of a long ride, or when getting back into cycling after a few weeks' vacation, we often complain about our sore backsides, inevitably caused by the 'hard saddle'.

While most of us use padded shorts and some resort to chamois cream or professional bike fits to help ameliorate the problem, a few designers are going back to basics for a more radical solution. A recent article on the ABC News website (1) discusses two new saddle designs.

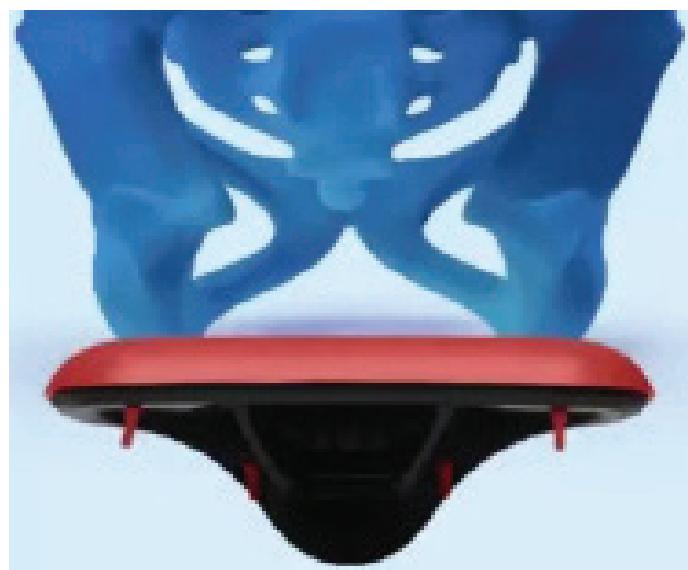
The first is the vabsRider (2) by Australian designer Robin Macan. It is described as a 'dynamic' saddle which moves as you pedal. 'It enhances your natural body movement, so it doesn't push against your body, but moves with it', Macan says. 'When you're riding a bike, everything is in motion, so your body should be in motion as well, rather than pressing into a static bike seat and then wondering why you're in pain'.

A pressure-mapping study found the vabsRider saddle reduced pressure by up to 80 per cent compared to a traditional saddle. The video of the VabsRider in action (3) is well worth a look.



The second new design is the Vseat from America (4). The designer, Ani Armstrong, said 'the idea behind the Vseat was that by removing the nose of the saddle, cyclists were more likely to put pressure where it belongs: through the sit bones rather than the perineum or other sensitive spots. Traditional bike seats, even the ones with holes in them, put pressure on the vital nerves and arteries in the groin, which causes pain, numbness and for some, with prolonged use, more permanent medical issues'.

While the Vseat can be purchased for about \$100 the vabsRider is ten times that! But if you are guaranteed a comfortable ride maybe it is worth every cent?



### Reference

1. Original ABC article <https://tinyurl.com/mvwep4a5>
2. vabsRider web page <https://tinyurl.com/3d8aryfk>
3. Video of vabsRider <https://tinyurl.com/4uhnju8s>
4. Vseat web page <https://tinyurl.com/4t7bc53h>

Paul Smale





Rob Wallace spotted this article in a recent copy of WestCycle's E-News

## FRAN WATSON: FROM CHRONIC FATIGUE TO WORLD CHAMP AT 50

By **Shane Starling** on 11 November 2025



*Objects of desire: The Colnago Watson rode to many medals*

For someone who took up riding relatively late in life, Fran Watson went all in.

She became a world champion on road and track 17 times over, a racing commissaire, and a powerful advocate for women's riding in our State and beyond.

'Thing was there just weren't a lot of women in my age group in those days so we had to go away to the eastern states or somewhere else to actually get competition', the 2003 WA Sportswoman of the Year Award nominee said. 'But look I've not got any talent. It's just tenacity and showing up!'

Her 2-wheeled odyssey began in 1990 while in her late 40s after a long period dealing with a crippling diagnosis of chronic fatigue syndrome while living in Harvey. She thinks it might have been linked to the pesky local estuary mosquito population.

"The specialist said, 'you're going to have to exercise' and I said, 'I don't exercise' and he said, 'well you're going to have to,' the 83-year-old told WestCycle.

'So I got on my little pink lady's bike that I used to take my daughter to school on, and I rode around the bridges here a couple of times with tears coming down my face, and I thought this is bloody silly; this won't do me any good. The reality is these chronic fatigue things come in, and then they magically just go away. I think that was 1990 and I was enjoying riding, and I bought a road bike, and I used to ride on my own'.

Soon enough, Watson, who worked much of her life as a general nurse and then a specialist nurse in an acute psychiatric unit, was regularly smashing out 300+ kilometres a week on one of what eventually became nine bikes that resided in various rooms in her Mount Pleasant home.

'I was riding six days a week but I could be lazy; I'd get the train to Mandurah and ride back to Perth with a south-westerly tailwind! And then I decided to go to the National Masters Games in Canberra in 1997'.

...the rest is quite outstanding cycling history.

### **Golden years: 'I've not got any talent. It's just tenacity and showing up!'**

Watson took a medal in that first participation at the biennial National Masters Games in what would become the first of many medals at National and World Masters events across road races, time trials and criteriums – as well as various track disciplines.

'That was my first medal, in the 50 to 54 age group', Watson reflected. 'A time trial. I didn't have any idea what I was doing really. But I soon did'.

With her chronic fatigue largely in recession, replaced by ever more power on the pedals, Watson found herself at the pointy end of most races she entered, winning a bunch of them! Her medal-laden glory wall is proof of that.

'Racing just became another chapter in my life – getting into all that stuff. It was some sort of life achievement – achieving those things. We'd go to World Championships, and we'd see these world champions, it was great just being around that. It was a good community! And riding around Perth – I always knew everybody! Riding has just been a good chapter of my life. It's been good for my health as well.'

In addition to her racing life that saw her ride and race in more than 20 countries with longtime Masters racing comrade Dennis Robinson, Watson became an influential administrator, track cycling commissaire, referee and advocate for women's cycling.

'I knew all the UCI (cycling's international governing body) presidents,' she recalled. 'They'd duck for cover when they saw me coming, because I'd have something to say. There were so few women in cycling then. I wrote to the UCI many times about encouraging women and not discriminating against them, and all the rest of it.'





### **West Coast Masters: "I had to ride against the men and they gave you no inch..."**

In Perth, Watson rode for **The Over-55 Cycling Club** for more than 20 years. She was the first woman to complete the Club's 200 km Achievement Ride from Perth to Mandurah and back.

She also raced with ATTA (Australian Time Trials Association) and the Perth-based West Coast Masters over-30s cycling club from 1997 – one of very few women doing so at the time. Through her involvement with the club, including as a referee, she helped shape the club's direction and inclusive approach that meant an ongoing commitment to gender-neutral, ability-driven racing.

'I had to ride against the men and they gave you no inch. I was the only woman in the club, pretty much, being thrashed for years. It's so great to see the progression – to see the amount of women riding now.'

Fran-tastic: Watson and her Masters compatriot Dennis Robinson raced and rode their bikes in about 20 countries.

### **On the road: Managing the spectre of chronic fatigue**

Watson said her bouts with chronic fatigue did return in the intervening years although she has not had a recurrence for several years.

'It's only in the last probably three, four years that I've stopped having the flare ups. And it's not just fatigue, it's your joints as well. They get really sore. It always seemed worse in the change of season. But there's nothing you can do about it. All of a sudden you just wake up one day and it's gone.'

'There were times when I'd have that fatigue two weeks before an event where I couldn't ride or couldn't train and I'd think, I've booked to go away. I'll have to go and somehow I've gone away and had success at the competitions. I think I got quite lucky with it in that sense.'

### **Chaperoning a golden generation**

After tasting so much cycling success herself, Watson was on hand as a commissaire at WA's Midvale velodrome to witness and guide the emergence of a golden generation of WA riders.

'I knew the kids well that came through the track when I was commissairing – Michael Storer, Jai Hindley, Luke Durbridge, Cameron and Travis Meyer. We knew all those kids from the track. That's why they're such good riders. They really learn how to pedal properly on their fixed wheel bikes.'

### **Helluva ride**

Heart complications mean Watson rarely rides these days – 'I've got a heart full of stents and all the rest of it' – although she still racks up 10,000 walking steps per day. She will never stop being an advocate for riding and celebrates the State's bike path network that enables it.

'Compared to other places like Sydney, we have got very good cycle paths in Perth,' she said. 'To be able to ride from Mandurah to Muchea on the principal path is a wonderful thing. They just need more connecting paths around the place. I just like seeing people out there on their bikes. It's a great sport. It's been a helluva ride.'

## RIDE GROUPS

**I'd like to include photos from your rides. If you've got one that captures the moment, please send it to the newsletter to be featured.**



This was taken by Kim Matthews on an early November day, sunny and no wind, at the Orange Box Café on Leighton Beach. The title: Let's ride, when we've finished our coffee. *Joe, John, Arthur, Tom, Dean, Kim, Simon and Mark.*

Two months ago, Colin Pearce had a serious accident at Burswood and finished up with a broken hip. Since then, he has moved hospital and is now recovering at an Aegis facility. Well, it was his birthday one recent Saturday, so in

time-honoured club tradition, we got together for coffee. He continues to show a happy disposition. This day, and for the first time, he was able to make his own way out to the verandah with a little help from the machine behind him.

Most faces will be familiar, the one missing is photographer Ray Scanlan. We also conveyed the best wishes of several others in the group who couldn't be on the ride.



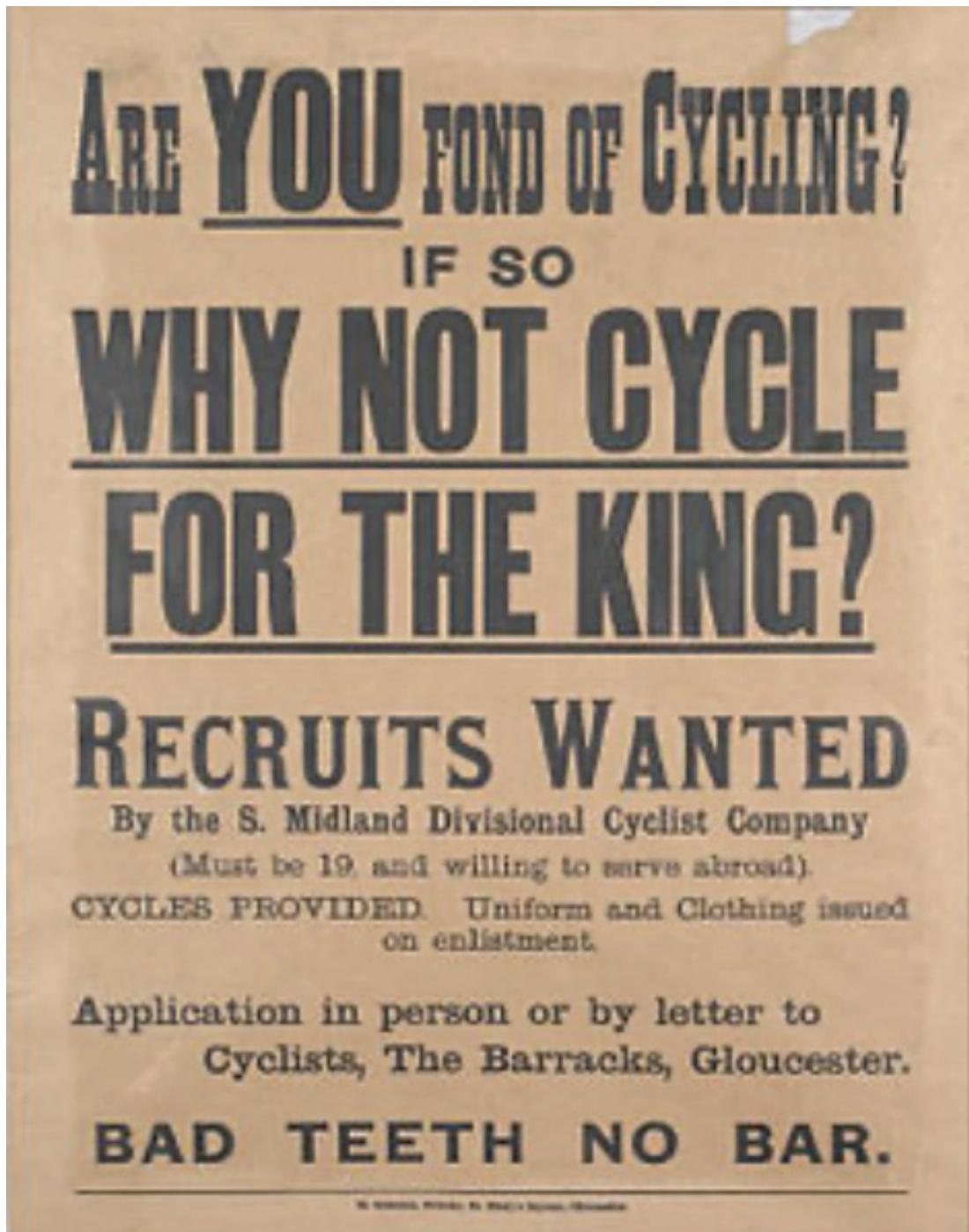
Photographer John Stace (he has other qualifications) took this shot at Burswood one bright morning recently. They're all paying close attention to Sandra; one wonders what words of advice she's imparting?





## A CAREER IN CYCLING

There's more than one way of making cycling a career, even if you haven't been to the dentist recently. Here's a 1914 recruiting poster for the 48th South Midland Divisional Cyclist Company in the UK during WW1.





# THE WORLD OUTSIDE

## THINK YOU'RE TOO OLD TO SAVE LIVES? THINK AGAIN!

Australia might have an ageing population, but with demand for blood and plasma at record levels, Lifeblood is calling on older Aussies to check their eligibility to donate blood and save lives.

At a time when older Australians might find themselves with more spare time, thanks to lifestyle changes such as a reduction in caring responsibilities or transitioning out of work, donating blood is a great way to give back and feel good, while saving up to three lives with each donation.

Blood donation can give a strong sense of ongoing personal health, an opportunity for social connection, and is an easily accessible way to give back to the community. Donors have reported that the warm glow of giving back is a key reason they donate blood.

However, many people mistakenly rule themselves out of donating because they are worried they are too old to give.

It might surprise you to learn that there are already more than 1,700 donors giving life in their 80s, and the oldest donor at Lifeblood is an impressive 93 years of age!

Lifeblood has found that donors aged over 50 are the most reliable and consistent. 80% of people who donate for the first time when they're over 60 come back to save more lives, compared to only 62% of those aged under 40.

Lifeblood researchers have been digging into why older Aussies might think they're not able to donate blood. Some people believe they need to retain their blood to age healthily when in fact your body replenishes donated fluid lost within just 24-48 hours. Healthy older donors replace cells and proteins at the same rate as younger donors.

Other people sometimes think that the quality of blood decreases with age, but there is no scientific evidence that blood quality changes as you get older. Lifeblood's team has actually found that donating blood can be a positive aspect of ageing.

Just one blood donation can save up to three lives, and all it takes is an hour of time. With a blood donor needed every 18 seconds in Australia, now is the time to check whether you are eligible to donate.

If you're making your first-ever donation, you must visit Lifeblood before you turn 76. For existing donors over 80, you can continue to donate with no upper limit, as long as you have donated in the past 5 years.

On the day of your donation, you should be feeling healthy and well. You should also be aware of any medication you're on that might impact your ability to donate. If you're unsure, you can always contact Lifeblood online or call 13 14 95 to answer questions about your medical history. In many cases, you can still donate if an existing condition is well-controlled, even with medication.

Your blood will go to help patients undergoing cancer treatment, major surgery, trauma, pregnancy and childbirth, as well as a range of other conditions.

So if you have been thinking about donating, but are worried you're too old to give, check your eligibility now and book an appointment. Age is no barrier to saving lives.

To book a donation call 13 14 95, visit [lifeblood.com.au](http://lifeblood.com.au) and download the Lifeblood App.





# BELLS OF MANY TYPES AND SIZES: - BICYCLE BELLS, TOWER BELLS AND ENGLISH HANDBELLS

By **Carol Davis**

Musical Director of 'Handbells in Peel', 'Enchanted Bells', and WA Representative of the Handbell Society of Australasia

## Bicycle Bells

Cyclists are required to have a bell on their bicycles to warn others of their presence. Cycling promotes physical activity and social benefits. Bicycle bells are not known for their musical appeal.

## Tower Bells

Tower ringers, or campanologists, pull bell ropes to ring peals on tower bells; one rope per person. In a peal, the bells are rung continuously in a mathematical sequence of changes displayed in a column of numbers. The length of a peal is determined by the number of bells rung and the complexity of the sequence. Peals can last for many hours requiring concentration, physical fitness and precise timing by the team of ringers. Competitions are held between towers and all socialising by campanologists takes place after completing their peals.

## English Handbells

Campanologists in England in the 1640s were responsible for the evolution of English handbells. These bells are portable and much smaller, allowing practice of peals in warmer places than draughty church bell towers in the winter. It could be described as early 'pub music', but it was not particularly tuneful.

The Whitechapel Bell Foundry, founded in 1570, cast tower bells and later English handbells until it closed in 2017 after nearly 450 years of continuous operation. Its most famous bells are the Liberty Bell and Big Ben.

From the late 1600s, Petit & Fritsen of the Netherlands, royal bellfounders, cast bells for clock towers and carillons. Later, they also made sets of handbells.

Handbells progressed to become musical instruments rung by tintinnabulators playing tunes such as Christmas carols. The early handbells were tuned with each other within a set for pitch and resonance. By the 1800s English bellringing competitions were being held and special steam trains ran to bring competing handbell choirs to the competitions.

## Handbell Performances in America

In the 1850s, the Lancashire Ringers, later renamed the Swiss Bell Ringers, travelled to the USA and toured there for 10 years. Handbell choirs began to form in the USA with bells imported from the Whitechapel Bell Foundry and Petit and Fritsen. An American manufacturer, Schulmerich commenced casting bells in 1962 and in 1973, Malmark



Bellmakers also started production of concert pitch handbell sets. Sets range from one to seven octaves. Today, many churches in the USA have handbell choirs and the Handbell Musicians of America is a strong and vibrant organisation supporting the industry.

English handbells have also become popular in Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore, with many large community, university and school handbell choirs ringing in these countries.

## Tintinnabulating in Australia

In 1865 the Swiss Bell Ringers travelled to Australia and performed in all states, and this led to groups forming in Australia. The most famous Australian group was the Lynch Family Ringers that originated in Geelong and rang Whitechapel handbells in Australia, and internationally from 1867 to 1926. They adapted to new media and made radio broadcasts in the 1920s.

Today there are active handbells choirs in most States. The Handbell Society of Australasia hosted its latest biennial international handbell symposium in 2018 in Cairns. Later international handbell symposia have been held in the USA and Japan, and the next is to be held in Aberdeen in 2026.

## Tintinnabulating in Western Australia Brookhampton Bellringers

The longest continuous ringing handbell choir in Australia is in Brookhampton, near Donnybrook. They formed in 1904 with Whitechapel bells which came via Victoria to the Coolgardie goldfields before arriving in Brookhampton. This handbell choir had two breaks during the world wars due to a lack of male ringers. Females did not ring handbells in Brookhampton until Christmas 1950 when the first ladies were part of a Nativity Play.

**Handbells in Peel** is a now a 15-member handbell choir based in Mandurah, formed in 2010 when eight campanologists decided to try tintinnabulating.





**Enchanted Bells**, Perth, is a husband and wife (the author) bellringing duo. They ring using a four-in-hand technique which covers eight musical notes which enables a wide range of music to be rung tunefully.

**Northern Lights Music WA** forms two Christmas handbell choirs in November each year at Heathridge and Rockingham for anyone interested in learning handbell ringing for around four weeks.

### What makes English handbells special?

English handbells are a unique percussion instrument with each bell tuned to a pure note on the music chromatic scale. The bell sounds when the clapper strikes the side of the bell. The sound is very captivating and the resonance is quite therapeutic. Each bellringer plays from one to four notes, but usually two handbells per person.

### HANDBELL RINGING IS NOT DIFFICULT!

- Each bell only rings in only one direction.
- A smooth, even elliptical motion is used.
- After ringing the handbell, it is dampened by gently touching the metal casting on the upper chest.
- Different techniques can be used to create different sounds such as: shake, echo, swing, martellato, thumb damp, vibrato and gyro. More fun than just basic ringing.
- **Frequently asked questions about handbell ringing**
  - Basic knowledge of music is helpful, but not essential.
  - Counting is important.
  - Each ringer only rings two notes, one in each hand ... or maybe just one.

- Music scores can be colour colour-coded for ringer's left and right hands.
- Teamwork is needed to ring a tune on handbells; practice required!
- Any genre of music can be played: folk, classical, pop, jazz, blues, ragtime, etc
- Practice at home? Don't!
- You do need cotton gloves to protect the bell metal from hand oils.
- Ringers learn to read music without realising it!
- Handbell choirs of eight or more tintinnabulators are impressive to watch. A combined group of 22 WA ringers performed in the Perth Concert Hall foyer prior to the Born to Sing 1000 concert in 2023. It was captivating.

### Bridgetown

Since 2020, a number of Bridgetown residents have mounted large bells outside their homes. At 12 noon and 6 pm each day, the bells are rung in a set rhythm and the sound can be heard throughout the streets of Bridgetown. For celebrations, a different rhythm is used. This practice originated in the hillier regions of rural Italy and was useful as a welfare check for residents.

Enchanted Bells is keen to establish a year-round bellringing group in the metropolitan area. If you are interested and would like to explore the art of bellringing, then consider booking a demonstration with family, friends or a social group, best with four or more. You can also book a demonstration or workshop. (See the contacts below, there may be some Ts&Cs)



Handbells in Peel members ringing for Christmas carols in 2024



## FURTHER INFORMATION

**Enchanted Bells**, Carol Davis, phone 0417 098 442, [enchantedbells.carol@gmail.com](mailto:enchantedbells.carol@gmail.com) or come listen to a performance advertised on our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/groups/839665050005297/>. Speak to us when we take a break from ringing.

**Handbells in Peel Facebook** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/705080300560420/>

**Northern Lights Music WA Facebook** <https://www.facebook.com/northernlightsmusicwa/>

**Angelis Ringing**, contact the Bridgetown Visitor Centre.



## RESCUE TUGS IN WW2

### Hugh Hoffman

*I mentioned this service at the coffee stop (as a change from discussing health issues and US politics) and two fellow-riders, members, said they had been on a rescue tug. I'll follow up with them to see if they have any stories to share. Editor.*

The Royal Navy Rescue Tug Service was one of the unsung yet vital elements of the Allied war effort in the Second World War.

Although largely absent from official histories, its men and vessels were responsible for saving millions of tons of shipping and countless lives, often in appalling conditions. Only recently has wider recognition begun to be given to their remarkable contribution.

Rescue Tugs were no ordinary harbour craft. Larger, sturdier, and fitted with powerful engines, they were designed to tow damaged or stranded vessels across the open sea. Their roles went far beyond simple towing: they fought fires, pumped out sinking ships, supplied fuel and provisions, salvaged cargoes, and even freed vessels trapped in ice.

Above all, they faced the merciless elements of the North Atlantic—violent storms, freezing temperatures, fog, and enemy attack. Such work required courage, seamanship, and resilience of the highest order.

The service was re-formed in 1939 with only four available tugs, but within a few years the fleet grew rapidly to almost a hundred vessels, drawn from British shipyards and the American Lend-Lease programme. They ranged from 700 to over 1,000 tons, were typically 100–150 feet long, and carried crews of 25–40 men, some Royal Navy, and many Merchant Navy men serving under the T.124T agreement. The latter, affectionately known as 'Tattie Lads', were merchant

seamen who volunteered to serve under naval command. Bases were established at Campbeltown in Argyll (HMS Minona), later at Loch Ewe, Oban, Londonderry, and even Iceland. From these centres the tugs fanned out across the oceans, to the Mediterranean, Red Sea, Pacific, and of course, the Atlantic.

The Rescue Tugs' duties expanded with the war. In 1943 they were officially attached to Atlantic convoys, sailing at the rear to render immediate aid to torpedoed or crippled vessels. On D-Day they played a vital role towing the massive concrete caissons of the Mulberry Harbours to Normandy, without which the invasion could not have been sustained. They also hauled the giant 'Conundrum' drums across the Channel to lay PLUTO—the Pipeline Under The Ocean, delivering more than a million gallons of fuel daily to Allied forces.

Individual tugs won renown. HMS Masterful, built in Texas towed a stricken freighter more than 2,700 miles from West Africa to Cape Town, a 23-day feat of seamanship. HMS Jaunty served through 19 months in the Mediterranean, towing warships and flying boats, rescuing hundreds of men, and even accepting the surrender of the Italian Fleet. Empire Samson battled for days to bring the ammunition-laden Empire Brutus safely into Lisbon after enemy attack.

Many crews received mentions in dispatches and awards for such exploits. Conditions were brutal. Crews were often young—some in their teens—and frequently Dutch seamen brought vital salvage expertise. Life on board meant weeks at sea in cramped quarters, constant danger from mines, U-boats, and aircraft, and the ever-present fury of the sea

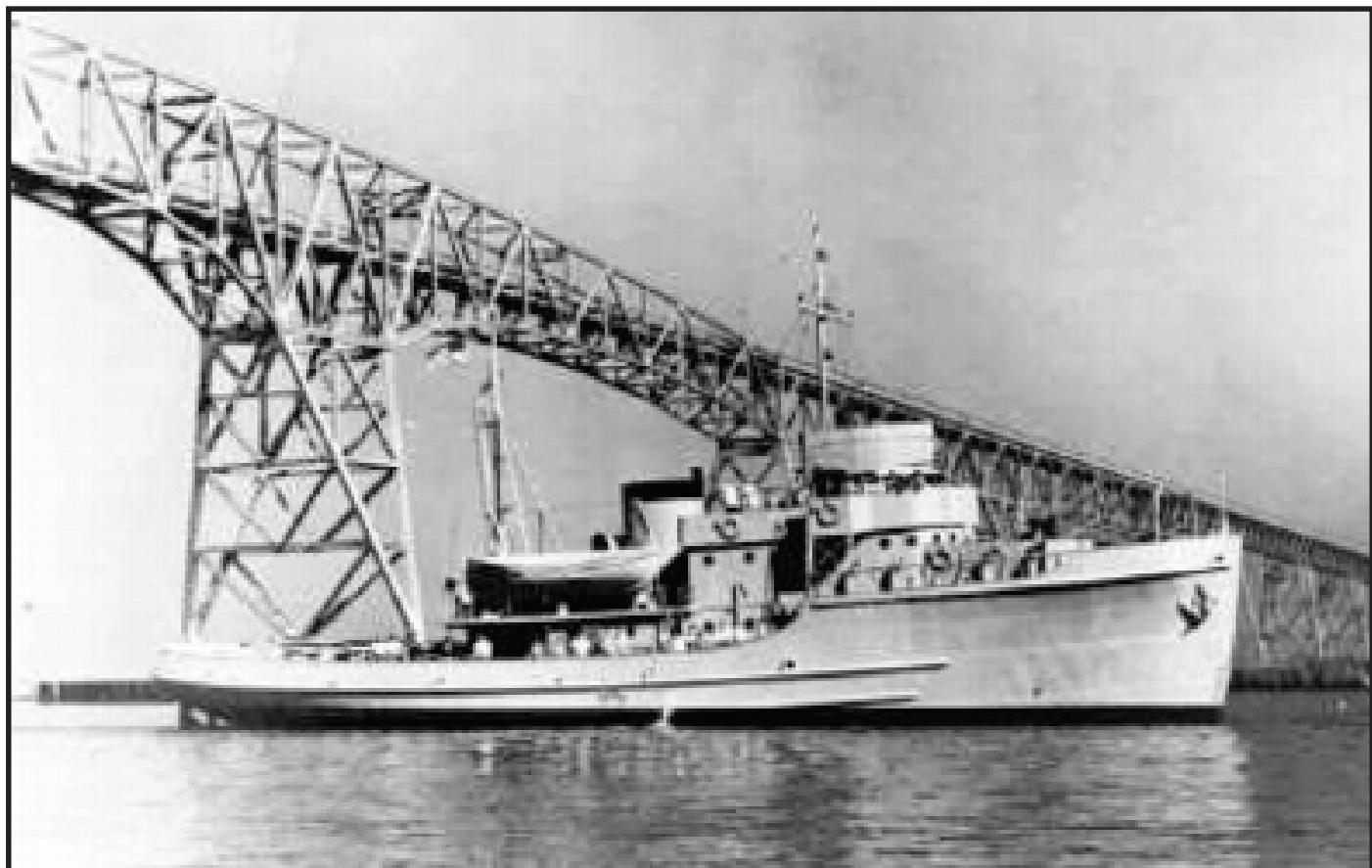


itself. Yet despite losses of some 20–40 vessels, the service saved over 250 warships and an estimated three million tons of merchant shipping. Their work, little recorded in wartime publicity, was nothing short of heroic.

After 1945 the Rescue Tug Service was wound down, though veterans kept its memory alive. Reunions were held in Campbeltown, and a Rescue Tug Veterans Association was founded in 1991. Books, articles, and even films such as 'The Key' helped to tell their story. The legacy remains one

of skill, endurance, and quiet heroism: the 'forgotten navy' without whom victory at sea would have been far costlier.

In short, Britain's Rescue Tugs were the Good Samaritans of the oceans. They restored an industry, saved lives, salvaged fortunes, and ensured that vital supplies reached their destinations. Their contribution, long overlooked, is now recognised as an essential part of the Allied victory.



HMRT *Masterful*

