



2026 CHARITY BIKE RIDE

10-Week Training Guide

Your complete companion to the ride.
Birmingham to London. From the sofa, the saddle,
or anywhere in between.

ENDURANCE RIDE

18–19 July 2026

1-DAY BREEZE

19 July 2026

FAST TRACK ELITE

5 September 2026

Welcome

You're holding the same training plan that's helped riders go from *"I haven't cycled in 10 years"* to crossing the finish line in Southall to a roar of bhangra drums and a crowd of strangers shouting their name.

Some of those riders are now on their 15th SACA ride.

The truth about training for a long charity ride is this: **it's 80% turning up and 20% knowing what to do when you turn up.** This guide is the 20%. The 80% is on you — and we'll be there with you the whole way.

THREE THINGS THIS GUIDE IS NOT

- It's not a generic plan ripped off the internet. It's built specifically for the Birmingham–London route, the British weather window, and the realities of training around a job and family.
- It's not just for elite riders. The whole point of SACA is that **everyone** finishes — we've had 65-year-olds, complete beginners, parents pulling kids on tagalongs, and elite club riders all crossing the same finish line.
- It's not just about the bike. Half the work happens off it — recovery, fuel, mindset, kit. We cover all of it.

Ten weeks. One ride. Tens of thousands of pounds raised for kids who really, really need it.

Let's go.

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Before you start: the 5-minute readiness check


Run through these before week 1. Each takes minutes. Skipping them costs weeks.

The health check

- If you haven't exercised regularly in the last 12 months, see your GP before starting. This is non-negotiable, especially if you have any heart or joint history.
- If you have any chronic condition (diabetes, asthma, blood pressure), get a green light from your doctor before week 3 long rides.
- Listen to your body during training. Pain that gets worse mid-ride is a stop signal. Ego is a terrible coach.

The bike check

- **Tyres:** correct pressure (check the sidewall — typically 80–110 psi for road tyres, 50–70 for hybrids). Replace if cracked or balding.
- **Brakes:** firm, pads not worn down to metal. Test on a slight downhill before any long ride.
- **Gears:** all working smoothly through the range.
- **Chain:** clean and lubed. A dry chain destroys your drivetrain and your legs.
- **Saddle height:** standing leg straight on the pedal at its lowest point with your foot flat = roughly correct. There should be a slight bend when riding with the ball of your foot on the pedal.

 **TIP Worth doing once:** Get a basic bike fit at any decent UK bike shop (Halfords, Evans, your local independent). Costs £30–£75. Will save you more knee and back pain than any amount of stretching.

The kit minimums

You don't need everything in the kit list (page 12) yet. To start training, you need:

- ✓ A working bike
- ✓ A helmet (non-negotiable)
- ✓ Padded cycling shorts (non-negotiable beyond 20 miles — trust us)
- ✓ A water bottle and bottle cage
- ✓ Lights, front and rear (even in daylight)
- ✓ A way to fix a puncture (spare tube, tyre levers, mini-pump or CO2)

The route logistics

- SACA will share the official route. Drive or look at the map for day 1 before the ride — knowing what's coming is calming.
- Tell someone you're training. Accountability triples completion rates.
- Block out your training days in the calendar **now**. The number one reason riders fall behind is Sunday morning slipping into Sunday lunchtime.

Pick your track

Be honest with yourself. Picking the wrong track is the most common training mistake.

Track A

Sofa to Saddle

Haven't ridden in 6+ months, new to cycling, or never ridden more than 10 miles in a day.

Goal: Finish tired but smiling.

Time: 4–5 hrs / week

Longest ride: 38 miles

Track B

Returning Rider

You cycle occasionally, can do 15–20 miles right now, but no long-distance event yet — or it's been years.

Goal: Finish strong both days.

Time: 6–7 hrs / week

Longest ride: 55 miles

Track C


Confident Cyclist

Regular rider, comfortable at 30+ miles, aiming to ride strongly across both days — or eyeing the September Fast Track.

Goal: Ride strong, finish with capacity.

Time: 8–10 hrs / week

Longest ride: 70 miles

 **TIP Not sure?** Start one track lower than you think. You can always step up in week 3. Stepping down mid-plan is harder mentally than starting cautiously.

How to read the plan

- **Easy ride** = chatting pace, breathing easy, no strain. Time on the bike is the point, not exhaustion.
- **Steady ride** = working but sustainable, you could speak in short sentences.
- **Long ride** = the cornerstone of every week. Always at easy-to-steady pace.
- **Cross-training** = anything that builds fitness off the bike (walking, swimming, gym, yoga, running). Helps avoid burnout and protects against bike-specific overuse injuries.
- **Rest** = actual rest. Not "an easy run." Rest.

Distance vs. time

Time on the bike matters more than miles, especially in early weeks. A hilly 15 miles in Birmingham is harder than a flat 20 in Cambridgeshire. Use both as guides, but if life forces a choice, go by time.

The 10-week training plan

Calendar-dated to your ride. From Monday 11 May to Sunday 19 July.

WEEK 1

Foundation

11–17 May

Just turn up. Build the habit before the volume.

DAY	TRACK A	TRACK B	TRACK C
Mon	Rest	Rest	Easy ride 30 min
Tue	Easy ride 30 min	Easy ride 45 min	Steady ride 60 min
Wed	Walk 30 min	Cross-train 45 min	Cross-train 45 min
Thu	Easy ride 30 min	Easy ride 45 min	Steady ride 60 min
Fri	Rest	Rest	Rest
Sat	Long ride 12 mi	Long ride 20 mi	Long ride 32 mi
Sun	Easy ride 30 min	Easy ride 45 min	Easy ride 60 min


WEEK 2

Build base

18–24 May

Add a little. Not a lot.

DAY	TRACK A	TRACK B	TRACK C
Mon	Rest	Rest	Easy ride 35 min
Tue	Easy ride 35 min	Easy ride 55 min	Steady ride 70 min
Wed	Walk 35 min	Cross-train 50 min	Cross-train 55 min
Thu	Easy ride 35 min	Easy ride 55 min	Steady ride 70 min
Fri	Rest	Rest	Rest
Sat	Long ride 16 mi	Long ride 25 mi	Long ride 38 mi
Sun	Easy ride 35 min	Easy ride 55 min	Easy ride 70 min

 **TIP The 10% rule:** never increase your weekly distance by more than ~10% week-on-week. This plan respects that. If you're tempted to push harder, ride longer at the same pace instead of going faster.

WEEK 3
Increase volume

25–31 May

First proper long ride of the plan.

DAY	TRACK A	TRACK B	TRACK C
Mon	Rest	Rest	Easy ride 40 min
Tue	Easy ride 40 min	Steady ride 65 min	Steady ride 80 min
Wed	Walk 40 min	Cross-train 60 min	Cross-train 60 min
Thu	Easy ride 40 min	Steady ride 65 min	Steady ride 80 min
Fri	Rest	Rest	Rest
Sat	Long ride 22 mi	Long ride 32 mi	Long ride 45 mi
Sun	Easy ride 40 min	Easy ride 65 min	Easy ride 80 min

WEEK 4
Recovery week

1–7 June

Pull back ~30%. Your body adapts during recovery, not during the work.

DAY	TRACK A	TRACK B	TRACK C
Mon	Rest	Rest	Rest
Tue	Easy ride 30 min	Easy ride 45 min	Easy ride 60 min
Wed	Walk 30 min	Cross-train 45 min	Cross-train 45 min
Thu	Easy ride 30 min	Easy ride 45 min	Easy ride 60 min
Fri	Rest	Rest	Rest
Sat	Long ride 16 mi	Long ride 24 mi	Long ride 35 mi
Sun	Easy ride 30 min	Easy ride 45 min	Easy ride 60 min

⚠ WATCH OUT Don't skip recovery weeks. This is the single most common mistake. Riders who skip them peak too early and arrive at the start line tired.

WEEK 5
Endurance build

8–14 June

Long ride is the priority. Everything else supports it.


DAY	TRACK A	TRACK B	TRACK C
Mon	Rest	Rest	Easy ride 50 min
Tue	Easy ride 45 min	Steady ride 75 min	Steady ride 95 min
Wed	Walk 50 min	Cross-train 60 min	Cross-train 60 min
Thu	Easy ride 45 min	Steady ride 75 min	Steady ride 95 min
Fri	Rest	Rest	Rest
Sat	Long ride 28 mi	Long ride 40 mi	Long ride 55 mi
Sun	Easy ride 45 min	Easy ride 75 min	Easy ride 95 min

WEEK 6
Peak prep · dress rehearsal

15–21 June

Practise everything you'll do on ride day — fuel, kit, hydration.

DAY	TRACK A	TRACK B	TRACK C
Mon	Rest	Rest	Easy ride 55 min
Tue	Easy ride 50 min	Steady ride 80 min	Steady ride 105 min
Wed	Walk 50 min	Cross-train 60 min	Cross-train 60 min
Thu	Easy ride 50 min	Steady ride 80 min	Steady ride 105 min
Fri	Rest	Rest	Rest
Sat	Long ride 35 mi	Long ride 50 mi	Long ride 65 mi
Sun	Easy ride 50 min	Easy ride 80 min	Easy ride 105 min

 **TIP** Use this week's long ride as a dress rehearsal. Wear the kit you'll wear on ride day. Eat what you plan to eat. Use the bottle and bar combinations you've been testing. Find what doesn't work *now*, not at mile 60 of the real ride.

WEEK 7
Big week · longest ride

22–28 June

Highest-volume week of the plan. You'll be tired. That's the point.


DAY	TRACK A	TRACK B	TRACK C
Mon	Rest	Rest	Easy ride 60 min
Tue	Easy ride 50 min	Steady ride 85 min	Steady ride 115 min
Wed	Walk 50 min	Cross-train 60 min	Cross-train 60 min
Thu	Easy ride 50 min	Steady ride 85 min	Steady ride 115 min
Fri	Rest	Rest	Easy ride 45 min
Sat	Long ride 38 mi	Long ride 55 mi	Long ride 70 mi
Sun	Easy ride 50 min	Easy ride 85 min	Easy ride 115 min

WEEK 8
Recovery + back-to-back weekend

29 June – 5 July

Reduce midweek volume. Introduce two long days in a row — because that's what the actual ride is.

DAY	TRACK A	TRACK B	TRACK C
Mon	Rest	Rest	Rest
Tue	Easy ride 30 min	Easy ride 50 min	Easy ride 60 min
Wed	Rest	Cross-train 45 min	Cross-train 45 min
Thu	Easy ride 30 min	Easy ride 50 min	Easy ride 60 min
Fri	Rest	Rest	Rest
Sat	Long ride 22 mi	Long ride 32 mi	Long ride 45 mi
Sun	Long ride 22 mi	Long ride 32 mi	Long ride 45 mi

 **TIP** The back-to-back is the most valuable training weekend you'll do. It teaches your legs and your head what day 2 actually feels like. Eat well between rides. Hydrate seriously. Sleep early on Saturday night.

WEEK 9
Taper begins

6–12 July

Cut volume by ~30%. Resist the urge to "squeeze in one more big ride."



DAY	TRACK A	TRACK B	TRACK C
Mon	Rest	Rest	Easy ride 40 min
Tue	Easy ride 40 min	Steady ride 55 min	Steady ride 75 min
Wed	Walk 30 min	Cross-train 45 min	Cross-train 45 min
Thu	Easy ride 40 min	Steady ride 55 min	Steady ride 75 min
Fri	Rest	Rest	Rest
Sat	Long ride 25 mi	Long ride 38 mi	Long ride 50 mi
Sun	Easy ride 40 min	Easy ride 60 min	Easy ride 80 min

⚠ WATCH OUT The taper trap: by now you're fit and used to riding lots. You'll feel restless. *That's the signal it's working.* Trust the plan. Pent-up energy on the start line is exactly what you want.

WEEK 10
Ride week

13–19 July

Sharpen, eat, rest, ride.

DAY	EVERYONE (ALL TRACKS)
Mon 13	Easy ride 30 min — light spin to keep the legs awake
Tue 14	Rest. Hydrate. Sleep early.
Wed 15	Easy ride 20–30 min — final bike check, gear lubed, tyres pumped
Thu 16	Rest. Pack. Register. Drink water all day.
Fri 17	Travel to Birmingham start. Pasta night. Bed by 10pm.
Sat 18	 RIDE DAY 1 — Birmingham → Luton
Sun 19	 RIDE DAY 2 — Luton → London (Southall finish festival)

💡 TIP Ride week truth: you cannot get fitter in the final 7 days, but you absolutely can sabotage yourself. Don't try a new bar, new shoes, new energy gel, new anything. Stick to what you know.

The long ride: what to actually do

Your weekly long ride is the heart of this plan. Here's how to make every one count.

Pacing

- **First third:** ride slower than feels right. You'll thank yourself in the third third.
- **Middle third:** settle into your steady rhythm. This is where you build the engine.
- **Final third:** test if you can still keep that rhythm when tired. If not, you went too hard early.

Group rides


- Riding with others is faster, safer, and a hundred times more fun. Find a SACA local crew (page 15).
- Etiquette: hold your line, signal hazards, never overlap wheels with the rider in front.
- If you've never ridden in a group, do at least one group ride before week 6. The riding skills are different from solo.

Where to ride near you

- **Birmingham / Midlands:** Stratford-upon-Avon canal route, National Cycle Network Route 5, Sutton Park loops.
- **London:** Regent's Canal towpath, Lee Valley, Richmond Park loops, Surrey Hills if you're feeling brave.
- **Anywhere:** Use Komoot, Strava heatmaps, or Cycle.travel to find quiet routes near you.

Long ride safety

- Tell someone your route and expected return time.
- Carry a phone, ID, and bank card (in a waterproof pouch).
- Know roughly the postcode of where you are every 30 minutes (in case of emergency).
- Don't ride in headphones. Music in one ear at most. Better: no music. Just listen.

 **TIP** **Train your gut, not just your legs.** Use long rides to test your pre-ride breakfast, your on-bike fuel, and your hydration mix. The ride is not the place to find out a gel doesn't agree with you.

Fuel, hydration & nutrition

The biggest cause of "hitting the wall" on a long ride isn't fitness. It's running out of fuel.

The simple rules

- **Eat early, eat often.** Start fuelling within the first 30 minutes of any ride over 90 minutes. Don't wait until you're hungry — by then you're behind.
- **30–60g of carbs per hour** for rides over 90 minutes. That's roughly 1 banana, or 1 energy bar, or 1 gel + half a bottle of sports drink, every hour.
- **500ml of fluid per hour minimum.** More if it's hot. Add electrolytes (SiS, High5, Tailwind, even a pinch of salt + squash) on rides over 90 minutes.

PRE-RIDE BREAKFAST (2 HOURS BEFORE)

- Porridge with banana and honey
- Wholegrain toast with peanut butter
- Or your traditional pre-event meal — many South Asian riders swear by parathas with yoghurt or a chapati with eggs. Stick with what you know works for *your* gut.

ON THE BIKE


- Bananas, jam sandwiches, malt loaf, flapjacks, energy bars, gels — all work.
- Test what you can stomach during training. Some people can't handle gels. Some hate energy bars after 3 hours. Find your toolkit.
- Solid food in the first 2 hours; gels and quick-carbs in the back end.

AFTER THE RIDE

- Within 30 minutes: 20g protein + carbs. A protein shake + banana works. So does a chicken sandwich. So does daal and rice.
- Within 2 hours: a proper meal.
- Hydrate steadily for the rest of the day.

WHAT NOT TO DO

- Try a new gel or food on ride day.
- Skip breakfast because you "don't feel hungry."
- Drink only when thirsty — by then you're already dehydrated.
- Drink alcohol the night before either ride day. Ruins sleep, dehydrates, and tomorrow's legs will tell you.

 **TIP** **Your fuel toolkit by week 6.** By dress-rehearsal week you should know exactly: what breakfast, what bottle mix, what mid-ride food, in what order, at what intervals. Write it down. Pin it to the fridge. Use the same plan on ride day.

Kit checklist

Don't skip this. The wrong kit at mile 60 is the difference between "tough day" and "ride-ending day."

Essential — you must have these

- ✓ Roadworthy bike
- ✓ Helmet (current British/EU standard)
- ✓ Padded cycling shorts (not optional past 20 miles)
- ✓ Cycling gloves
- ✓ Cycling jersey or technical t-shirt (no cotton)
- ✓ 2 water bottles + cages
- ✓ Front and rear lights (rechargeable, with spare)
- ✓ Saddle bag: 2 spare tubes, tyre levers, multi-tool, mini-pump or CO2 + cartridges
- ✓ Phone in waterproof case
- ✓ ID and emergency contact card
- ✓ Cash + bank card
- ✓ Sunglasses (clear or yellow lens for grey UK days)

Highly recommended

- ✓ Cycling shoes + clipless pedals (huge efficiency gain — train with them for 4+ weeks before ride day)
- ✓ Padded undershorts as backup for ride day 2
- ✓ Chamois cream — apply to padded shorts, not skin, before long rides
- ✓ Lightweight rainproof jacket (UK summer rule)
- ✓ Cycling cap under helmet (keeps sweat and rain out of eyes)
- ✓ Bar tape that's not falling apart
- ✓ Mudguards if rain is forecast
- ✓ Garmin / Wahoo / phone holder for navigation

Ride day extras

- ✓ Charging cable for phone + Garmin
- ✓ Spare jersey for day 2
- ✓ Toiletries + change of clothes for overnight stop
- ✓ Warm layer for early morning starts
- ✓ Plasters, painkillers, anti-chafe cream (Sudocrem or Body Glide)
- ✓ Earplugs (you're sleeping in shared accommodation Friday night)
- ✓ Small towel
- ✓ Reusable water bottle for hotel

What to leave at home

- ✓ Cotton t-shirts
- ✓ New shoes you've never worn
- ✓ Untested energy products
- ✓ A second bike "just in case" (adds stress, takes up van space)

Mental prep & mindset

The longest part of any long ride happens between miles 50 and 70 — and that fight is in your head, not your legs.

The five mental tools that get you there

1

Chunk it.

Don't think "I have 60 miles to go." Think "I have 5 miles until the next pit stop." Break the ride into pieces small enough that your brain can carry one at a time.

2

Have a "why" you can say in 5 seconds.

"I'm riding for kids at QE Hospital." "I'm riding for my niece." "Because I said I would." Write it on a piece of tape stuck to your top tube. Read it at mile 70.

3

Smile when you're suffering.

There's actual sports psychology research on this — smiling reduces perceived effort by ~3%. It also makes other riders smile back, and a kind word at mile 80 is worth a thousand calories.

4

Hard moments pass.

Every long-distance rider knows: the worst patch in any ride lasts 20–40 minutes. Eat, drink, ease the pace, talk to someone. It always passes. It always.

5

Remember why you signed up.

You weren't bored. You weren't pressured. Somewhere, at some point, you saw something — a story, a friend, a child — and you decided this mattered. That decision is still true at mile 80.

The pre-ride visualisation (do this Thursday before ride day)

Find ten minutes. Sit somewhere quiet. Close your eyes. Picture:

- The start line in Smethwick at sunrise.
- The first hour, your legs warming up.
- A hard moment, and you handling it.
- The roll into Luton at the end of day 1.
- Sunday morning, a bit stiff but still riding.
- Cresting into Southall — the crowds, the bhangra, the cheers.
- Crossing the line.

This isn't woo. Sport psychologists call it mental rehearsal. It works.

Ride week & ride day

Monday – Wednesday before

- Light spin midweek (30 mins).
- Full bike service or check-over.
- Shop for any last-minute kit.
- Sleep 8 hours each night minimum. Sleep is the single biggest performance lever in the final week.

Thursday

- No riding.
- Full hydration day — start drinking water from the moment you wake up.
- Pack everything. Twice. Use the kit checklist on page 12.
- Eat carb-rich, low-fibre dinner (pasta, rice, daal, chapatis — whatever's familiar).
- Bed by 10pm.

Friday — Day 1, Birmingham → Luton (~60 miles)

- **Wake up:** 90 mins before start time.
- **Eat:** big breakfast. Porridge / toast / paratha — whatever your pre-event meal is.
- **Drink:** 500ml water with electrolytes before you even start.
- **Arrive at start:** 30+ minutes early. Toilet. Photos. Hugs.
- **First 5 miles:** ride slower than your training pace. Adrenaline lies.
- **Pit stops:** eat at every one, even if not hungry. Top up bottles.
- **Through Coventry, Daventry, Milton Keynes:** you'll feel great in the first half. That's the time to fuel for the second half.
- **Luton arrival:** stretch, refuel within 30 mins, shower, eat a proper meal, into bed by 9:30pm.

Saturday — Day 2, Luton → London (~60 miles, Southall finish)

- **Wake up:** stiff. Everyone is stiff. It passes.
- **Breakfast:** same as yesterday. Hydrate.
- **First 30 minutes:** spin gently. Your legs will come back to you by the second hour.
- **Through St Albans, Radlett, Elstree, Harrow:** stay fuelled, stay hydrated.
- **The approach to Southall:** you'll start to hear it before you see it. Crowds. Music. Friends. Family.
- **The finish:** through the gates of Southall Park West. Drink it in. This is the moment.

What to do if it goes wrong

- **Mechanical:** SACA support vehicles are along the route. Don't try heroic roadside repairs unless you know what you're doing.
- **Physical pain getting worse:** stop. Talk to a marshal or medic. There's no medal for ignoring an injury.
- **Mental wall:** eat. Drink. Talk to someone. It will pass.

Recovery & the SACA community

Sunday + Monday after

- Walk, don't ride.
- Eat properly. Don't undo the training.
- Hydrate.
- Sleep as much as you can.

The week after

- One easy 30-min spin Wednesday or Thursday if your legs feel okay.
- A short easy ride at the weekend if you fancy it.
- Mostly: rest, recover, ride the high.

Don't disappear

The post-ride blues are real. After months of training and the emotional peak of ride day, the calendar suddenly empties. Counter it:

- Stay in the WhatsApp group.
- Keep using the Strava club.
- Sign up for the September Fast Track or pre-register for 2027.
- Become an ambassador.
- Tell your story so the next rider knows it's possible.

Join the SACA community

You don't have to do this alone.

[SACA Strava Club](#)[Riders WhatsApp](#)[Facebook Community Group](#)[Local training rides](#)

Find them all at charitybikeride.com. Or scan along — links are shared with every registered rider.

Ready to commit?

Ten weeks. One ride. A finish line that you'll never forget.

[Register for the 2026 ride →](#)

Already in? Forward this guide to one mate.
That's how this ride has grown for 40 years — one rider bringing one friend.

Standard fitness disclaimer: this guide is general training advice, not personal medical advice. If you have any pre-existing medical conditions, are returning to exercise after a long break, or experience pain or symptoms that concern you during training, please consult your GP. Train safely.