

Sunday's Ballymena Road Club - Northstone – Reliability Trials were deemed to be a tremendous success with a total of 127 cyclists from all over Northern Ireland assembling at Rex Bonar House at the start.

The entrants were divided up into three groups with a choice of two distances of 53 miles and 75 miles.

The biggest group was the 53 miles “A” bunch which was led by Derek Dougan and had about 60 riders. This was to sub-divide into smaller groups as they headed out the Larne road, as there is a huge variation in individual fitness levels at this time of year.

Their route took them straight out to Larne and around the coast road to Ballygally, Glenarm and Carnlough before heading inland up Glencloy and back to Ballymena in through Aughafatten and Broughshane. A few more riders lost their place at the front on the long climb up Glencloy and they then faced a tough ride to the finish as it was a headwind on the homeward leg.

The first riders home in this group completed the distance in 2 hours 41 minutes for an average speed of 19.2 mph

The racing men's group had a 75 miles ride, at 20.6mph, which took in Antrim, Templepatrick, The Longshot to Ballyrobert, then Mossley, Greenisland, Woodburn, Kilroot, Glynn, Larne and the pit stop at Ballygally.

Then it was on around the coast road and home the same route as the 53 miles group.

The touring section's ride also included Ballyeaston and Kilwaughter before Ballygally. They managed to hold off the racing group until about four miles from Broughshane where some of the tourists even managed to join in with the fast men and “enjoy” a speedy final 7 miles gallop back to the finish. The tourists averaged 15.7 mph which was just short of their 16mph target speed.

The events were organised by Hugh McCullough, who is the new BRC race secretary. This was Hugh's first promotion in this post and he was very well pleased with how it all turned out. Hugh said “I am really pleased how everything worked out, I am delighted with the support from all the riders, it is probably the best RT we have had in recent years as the weather was very

kind too. We had great help on the day with Jim Burns doing support for the 53 miles ride and Donny Bremner was a great help on the 75 miles ride. I also wish to thank our two first-aiders Joan and Linda for making themselves available, thankfully they weren't needed. Also many thanks to the ladies committee for the catering after the event was over." Added Hugh.

This weekend it is the turn of East Antrim and also Island Wheelers of Coalisland to host their annual trials as the build up to the 2011 racing season continues.

Clothing

Samples of clothing from two manufacturers, Endura and Bio-racer are now available for viewing and "trying on" at the BRC clubrooms. The club's cyclists will decide soon which supplier to use for this season's order of racing jerseys. The samples are only available for one week so please come and view them at this Monday night's, 7th February, monthly meeting. The 2011 order will be kept to a minimum as the club intends to change the design and colours of the club kit for the 2012 season. Please let Richard Wilson know your requirements on Monday night.

P&O Tour will again visit Ballymena.

Entry Forms are now available for this year's P&O Irish Sea Tour of the North, which takes place over the Easter weekend. Details and an entry forms are available from the race web-site www.tourofthenorth.com

The event will follow a similar format to the 2010 edition, with the now traditional start at Stormont on Good Friday evening. There will however be some twists and changes in the event to make the competition for the Yellow Jersey more interesting.

I spoke to race organiser Anthony Mitchell about how the preparations for this year's event are progressing.

"We are well underway with preparations for this years race, which is quite late this year 22nd – 25th April. We pretty much have the route in place, but I am still working on the final details for one of the stages.

As you know the information on the event is usually released gradually as

we finalise it during the run up to the race and, at this point, we are still approx eleven weeks out from Good Friday, so I don't have too much to say just yet."

"I can, however, confirm that entries are now open for this years event which is Northern Ireland's premier stage race held over four days and we have had much interest from teams outside Ireland. We have also increased the team size to 6-riders."

"I can also confirm that Ballymena will again host to the race, as it has done for many years, although we can't quite say which day it will be in town. Ballymena has a great tradition with the tour of the north and has provided the most winners since the race started in 1955 Ryan Connor has won three times, Billy Kerr won twice and Andrew Moss was also a winner."

The 2010 event won by Ulster teenager Philip Lavery who went on to win a Bronze medal for Northern Ireland in the Delhi Commonwealth Games. Lavery is now with the An Post Sean Kelly team, and it is not yet known if he will be back to defend his title." Concluded Anthony.