

# Tandem Trekkers: Empowering the Visually Impaired Through Cycling and Community



If you are out and about in the Mirfield area and beyond on a Saturday morning, it's quite possible that you may have seen a number of tandems riding the local roads and cycle paths. No doubt you have thought to yourself, "I haven't seen one of those in years, and now I've seen 10 of them! I wonder who they are and what they're doing." Well, dear reader, allow me to enlighten you.

The group of tandems in question belongs to Tandem Trekkers, a Mirfield-based charity that provides cycling opportunities for blind and partially sighted rear riders (stokers). TT was

initially founded in 2013 by an enthusiastic group of visually impaired people who wanted to get out and enjoy the freedom of cycling on the open roads instead of having to rely on static indoor exercise bikes. They started life with just three donated second-hand tandems and gradually expanded to a present-day fleet of 20 predominantly new ones.

Having achieved charity status in 2016 and from just a handful of founder members, Trekkers now has a membership of close to 100, equally split between volunteer pilots and stokers. In addition to receiving grants and donations from the National

Lottery, British cycling, and local businesses, including Cummins, they also run some fundraising events. This year, TT will be running a 150mph Challenge where they will be completing a total of 600 laps (150 miles) of the Leeds Road athletics track in an hour on Saturday, 1st June, starting at 1030 am.

Based in Mirfield, they ride out every Saturday from March to November (weather permitting!). Some rides are straight from the Mirfield base, and others require the tandems to be transported by specially adapted trailers to routes as far afield as Hull in the east and Morecambe in

the west. All routes are ridden and risk-assessed by at least one of our volunteers prior to the group rides, and they can cater for up to 15 tandems on most rides. They carry out all of their own maintenance and repairs, thanks to a dedicated team of volunteers, as well as at least two full clean down and lubrication sessions of the entire fleet at least twice a year.

As with any self-respecting cycle club TT rides always include a café stop, an essential part of the day out and a really good opportunity for everybody involved to get together, catch up with the latest news and generally have a very nice time.

TT chairperson Steve Draycott stated "Although our primary function is to provide cycling opportunities for visually impaired riders we also provide a very strong social aspect for our members. We are a very open, welcoming and inclusive club, and we are very happy to accept new members. It's really important that everybody

attending our rides enjoys the experience, and we work hard to ensure that this is the case."

The first Saturday ride of every month is reserved for an induction/taster session which takes place on an off-road track. First time stokers and pilots attend one of these sessions in order to ensure that they are both comfortable and safe when riding a tandem. They are given a full induction and instruction by one of our team of experienced pilots.

The athletics track at Leeds Road sports centre has traditionally been used for induction sessions but this year they also include a number of alternative purpose built cycle tracks including the Wyke Sports Village and the BKCAT circuit in Wakefield. Although the majority of members live in the Kirklees area they do have members

from Leeds, York and South Yorkshire.

Anyone who would like to get involved with TT and have a go at riding a tandem should contact the club chairperson, Steve Draycott, by email at [steve@tandemtrekkers.org.uk](mailto:steve@tandemtrekkers.org.uk) or phone at 07951 799 736.

So if you are out and about and you see a group of tandems, now you know who they are and what they do. Make sure you give them a wave.

