



# NICKI AITKEN TO BECOME THE FIRST FEMALE CYCLIST TO RIDE LE TOUR – ONE DAY AHEAD

- Nicki Aitken will be joining former England footballer Geoff Thomas on Le Tour – One Day Ahead, raising funds for Cure Leukaemia
- She will complete all 21-stages of the 2015 Tour de France one day ahead of the professional peloton

London, 11 February: Nicki Aitken, 36 from Reading, has been announced as the first female cyclist joining former England international footballer and blood cancer survivor, Geoff Thomas, on his Le Tour – One Day Ahead challenge.

Aitken has committed to participating in the once-in-a-lifetime 3,300+ kilometre, 21-stage ride in July 2015, aiming to complete the Tour de France 2015 route under full rolling road closures, just one day ahead of the professional peloton.

Unlike the professional women riders, who were only allowed to race one stage in 2014, as part of La Course by Le Tour de France, Aitken will complete all 21-stages demonstrating that women riders are both physically and mentally capable of participating in the endurance event viewed as the world's largest annual sporting event.

The women's equivalent of Le Tour de France, The Grande Boucle Feminine Internationale, was last hosted in 2009, but reduced to just four stages. Team GB Olympic medallist Emma Pooley was the final winner, with former Olympic Champion Nicole Cooke having taken the title in 2006 and 2007.

Pooley, along with four-times Ironman World Champion Chrissie Wellington and former World Champion Marianne Vos have been lobbying for women to be given equal opportunities in cycling and Aitken's efforts will provide additional evidence that there is no reason why women shouldn't have the same opportunities to race as the men.

## Inspired to ride

Aitken has been inspired by Geoff's 2005 conquering of Le Tour and can't wait to embrace the challenge ahead. Having seen her father and grandmother die from blood cancer, Aitken is determined to go the extra mile and is looking forward to the unique opportunity to experience life as close to that of a pro-cyclist as it's possible for a non-professional to achieve, whilst making a significant difference to helping to find a cure for the disease.

Alliance Manager for Ultima, Nicki Aitken has been inspired by Geoff's previous cycling exploits and as a European bronze medallist in age-group duathlon couldn't resist the opportunity to complete the full Tour de France route in a style as close to a professional rider as possible.

Upon committing to Le Tour – One Day Ahead, Aitken said: "I've always been active, whether competing in athletics, triathlon or duathlon so I'm used to pushing myself hard physically and mentally in training and competition. I regularly train and compete

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alongside men so I'm thrilled to be the first woman to sign-up to Le Tour and hope that I can inspire more women to sign-up for endurance challenge events."

"When I heard about Geoff's challenge I knew this was a once in a lifetime opportunity that I had to be part of, especially as it would help drive a cure for an illness that had affected my family directly. I know it will be a tough challenge and I am looking forward to being part of Geoff's team of fundraisers. I'm less daunted by the physical aspect than the financial challenge of raising £50,000. I've received great support from family, friends, colleagues and my community so far and can't stress how much every pound donated will make a huge impact to finding a cure for blood cancer. Please do support me, if you can.

## Motivated to make a difference

The 2015 Tour de France marks the tenth anniversary of former England and Crystal Palace footballer Geoff Thomas first completing the Tour de France route in 2005, which he achieved despite only having gone into remission from blood cancer six months previously. This time around Geoff, and a team of up to 20 other cyclists, will again take to the same roads as the professionals, this time just one day ahead, in a bid to raise £1 million for Cure Leukaemia.

Acknowledging Aitken's participation, Geoff said: "I'm delighted that Nicki has committed to cycling Le Tour - One Day Ahead with me. It's going to be a tough challenge for all of the riders and I'm thrilled that we have a female cyclist on the team. Given Nicki's fitness and competitive spirit I suspect she will be showing the guys how it's done. Having seen her father and grandmother die from blood cancer I know that she will be a dedicated and confident rider who will help all of us achieve our goal - not just to complete the ride but to raise £1 million for Cure Leukaemia."

## Boost for life-saving work

In 2003 Geoff was diagnosed with chronic myeloid leukaemia and was given less than three months to live. Following treatment from Cure Leukaemia Co-founder Professor Charlie Craddock, including a bone marrow transplant from his sister, Geoff has been in remission since January 2005.

Geoff and the team's fundraising efforts will go towards boosting the life-saving work carried out at the Centre for Clinical Haematology (CCH) at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham (QEHB), where Professor Craddock treated Geoff. The £1 million Geoff aims to raise through Le Tour - One Day Ahead will increase the Centre's ability to deliver pioneering treatments for blood cancer patients at this international centre of excellence in Birmingham consistent with the Government's Life Sciences vision.

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The money will pay for:

- More research nurses
- Ability to deliver more state Of the art therapies clinical trials and blood cancer treatments
- The potential to deliver stem cell transplants as an outpatient procedure
- A dramatically improved patient experience
- The chance of developing cures for a range of blood cancers within the next 30 years
- Consolidate the Queen Elizabeth Hospital's position as a world-leading centre for the development of new drugs for the treatment of blood cancer

Aitken is looking for sponsors to help her raise £50,000 as part of the £1 million target for Cure Leukaemia which the group aims to raise. To help support Aitken, Geoff Thomas and the team please donate at [www.justgiving.com/Nicki-Aitken1](http://www.justgiving.com/Nicki-Aitken1)

Geoff is still inviting riders to apply to be part of his peloton of up to twenty riders who will join him for the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience life as a pro-cyclist, with full rolling road closures and support crew and vehicles, one day ahead of the actual Tour de France. To find out more, visit: [www.beforethetour.com](http://www.beforethetour.com)

The video link below features an interview with Nicki discussing her challenge:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=mfewti0061w](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mfewti0061w)

===ENDS===

For more information about Cure Leukaemia please visit the website

[www.cureleukaemia.co.uk](http://www.cureleukaemia.co.uk)

For more information about the event organiser EDGE please visit the website

[www.findyouredge.co.uk](http://www.findyouredge.co.uk)

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## Notes

- Geoff Thomas's Playing Career – 1982 – 2002. Clubs represented: Rochdale, Crewe, Crystal Palace, Wolves, Nottingham Forest, Barnsley and Notts County.
- Geoff was capped three times by England between 1990 and 1992.
- In 2005 Geoff won the BBC Sports Personality of the Year Helen Rollason Award after he raised £150,000 by cycling all 21 stages of the Tour De France, 2,200 miles in total.
- In 2008 Geoff published a biography, 'Riding Through The Storm.'

## About Nicki Aitken

Nicki Aitken, 36 from Reading, is the Alliance Manager for Microsoft, HP and Dell at Ultima Business Solutions. With a degree in Sports Science from Loughborough University and sharing a birthday with Lizzie Armitstead (albeit being ten years older), Aitken was destined to be an athlete.

She has run eight marathons, with a personal best of 2 hours 54 minutes in London, and was part of the Reading Road Runners team that won UKA gold medals in the marathon. More recently Aitken switched to multi-sport events and qualified for the ITU World Long Course Triathlon Championships in 2012, following a 2nd place at the Marlow Half Ironman and 3rd place at Challenge Henley.

In 2014, Aitken won the Bronze medal in the long distance ETU European Duathlon Championships, pre-qualifying her for the 2015 European Champions. She has also qualified for the Iron distance Fire Fighter World Champs in Roth in July but will probably not compete in either now, having signed up for Le Tour One Day Ahead.

Aitken currently races for SwimForTri and is a member of a number of sports clubs, including: Henley Harriers, Athlete Service and Thames Valley Triathletes.

## About Cure Leukaemia

Founded in 2003 by patients and clinicians, Cure Leukaemia helps to bring pioneering drug and transplant treatments to blood cancer patients throughout the Midlands. The charity helps finance the world class Centre for Clinical Haematology at Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham, to fund life-saving clinical trials to treat patients with blood cancer who have exhausted standard treatment options. To date, Cure Leukaemia has helped to treat over 4000 patients by leveraging over £23m worth of revolutionary drugs and funding crucial research nurses to administer these trials.

Without the expert research nurses to ensure patients are constantly monitored and cared for; these trials would not run and patients would miss the opportunity to access

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potentially life-saving therapies. The aim of Cure Leukaemia is to raise money to fund more research nurses at centres across the Midlands and provide world-class treatment for its patients. Only by funding more nurses in more hospitals, can more leukaemia patients benefit from access to potentially life-saving treatment.

Currently, Cure Leukaemia has nurses at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham, Sandwell and Dudley, Stoke, Worcester, Coventry, Warwickshire and Birmingham Children's Hospital.

Cure Leukaemia celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2013 by launching the Cure Leukaemia for Kids appeal, raised in excess of £125,000 from runners in BUPA Great Birmingham Run and established new corporate partnerships with Deloitte, The Binding Site, OGL Computer and Hotel Indigo.

## 10 facts about Cure Leukaemia

1. Founded in 2003 to allow patients with blood cancer the chance to trial new potentially life saving drugs not yet available on the NHS.
2. Cure Leukaemia part funds the Centre for Clinical Haematology at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham, a world-class centre of excellence in the treatment of blood cancer.
3. The centre has developed the second largest adult stem cell transplant programme in the UK, hailed by Prime Minister David Cameron as an international centre of excellence in haematology.
4. The charity fund a network of specialist research nurses across the West Midlands, to offer potentially life saving new drugs and treatments to blood cancer patients who have come to the end of their treatment on the NHS.
5. The Cure Leukaemia for Kids campaign was launched in 2013 to celebrate Cure Leukaemia's 10th Anniversary Year, with the charity committing to funding specialist nurses at the Birmingham Children's Hospital.
6. Leukaemia is the most common form of childhood cancer, with most children diagnosed under the age of 5. Drugs trials will help increase survival rates of children with leukaemia.
7. A specialist research nurse costs £40,000 per year to fund.
8. For every £1000 donated, Cure Leukaemia can leverage £10,000 worth of free drugs, meaning any funds donated work 10 times as hard.
9. Over the past decade Professor Charlie Craddock and his teams have treated over 4,000 across the region.
10. Each year over 30,000 people are diagnosed with blood cancer in the U.K.

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