



'LE TOUR - ONE DAY AHEAD' RIDERS HEAD FOR CONTINENT AFTER MEETING PATIENTS

Geoff Thomas and his team of ten amateur cyclists will arrive on the continent tomorrow (Thursday) to take on 'Le Tour - One Day Ahead' (LTODA) - with the cause they are attempting to pedal more than 3,300km for fresh in the memory.

Ex-England international footballer Geoff and his LTODA peloton will ride the entire 2015 Tour de France route - tackling each of the 21 stages a day before the professional race - to raise £1million for Cure Leukaemia, the blood cancer charity he is Patron of and owes his life to. The LTODA cyclists and support crew will travel in convoy from London to Amsterdam tomorrow, via road and Eurotunnel, before taking on Stage One in Utrecht on Friday. They are due to finish in Paris on Saturday, July 25. The team were given added motivation to complete their superhuman challenge when they visited the Centre for Clinical Haematology, Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham. Cure Leukaemia Co-Founder, Professor Charlie Craddock, who saved Geoff's life with the help of a stem cell transplant from the ex-Crystal Palace midfielder's sister, Kay, gave the riders a tour of the facility their fundraising efforts will enhance and introduced them to blood cancer patients who will benefit. Geoff is already over halfway to reaching his £1million target, which will help to fund more specialist research nurses and allow more leukaemia patients to receive potentially lifesaving treatment. Stage Two of LTODA on Saturday, which will see the riders



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cycle 166km from Utrecht to Zeeland, will be exactly 12 years since Geoff was diagnosed with chronic myeloid leukaemia and given just three months to live. “When I first took on the Tour de France route ten years ago, it was my fellow patients – some of whom weren’t as lucky as me – that were my inspiration,” said Geoff. “Giving the riders a glimpse of what leukaemia patients have to go through, and the wonderful work of Professor Craddock, has given them a good insight into where the money they’re raising is going.” The riders – Helen Russell, 39, from Bromsgrove, Doug McKinnon, 55, of Brighton, Birmingham-based duo Melissa Brand, 35, and Stephen Jones, 52, James Maltin, 39, from Wiltshire, Hayden Groves, 40, of Hertfordshire, Guildford-based Ciaran Doran, 49, Trevor Clarke, 49, from Rugby, Simon Gueller, 50, from Yorkshire, and Dom Goggins, 30, of Manchester – are aiming to raise £50,000 each. Helen, an amateur triathlete, added: “Meeting the patients has put everything into perspective. This is so much more than a bike ride, it’s about saving lives, and we can all play a small part in that. Walking through the cancer unit brought back some personal memories, as that is where my mother was treated. I just felt she was looking down saying ‘this is the right thing to do’, to try and give back to the people that supported her.” Dom, communications and public affairs manager for British Cycling, said: “I lost a very close friend to leukaemia about 12 years ago and he’ll very much be in my thoughts. Visiting the hospital underlined why this challenge is so important. The difference between the hope and optimism on those wards, compared to what my



friend faced, when treatment wasn’t as far advanced, is extraordinary. The work Geoff’s helped to fund over the past ten years, that we’re trying to support and take forward, is what LTODA is all about.”

Incredibly, Simon, who runs Michelin-starred The Box Tree restaurant in Ilkley, is still taking on LTODA despite suffering a collapsed lung and broken ribs in a cycling accident three weeks ago. “If my team-mates can help get me through the first three days, I’ll return the

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favour later on in the ride,” he said. “It’s called One Day Ahead and that’s how I’m looking at it. I’ll be taking it one day at a time. I’m sure I’ll get stronger as the ride progresses.” The LTODA riders will cycle an average of 159km and burn around 6,000 calories per day. They face seven mountain stages, including five summit finishes, and the total amount of climbing along a Tour de France route usually equates to scaling Mount Everest three times. James, investment director for Rathbones, said: “It’s going to be the toughest physical challenge any of us will ever take on, which makes it exciting in itself. There’ll be tough times, when we’ll have to grit our teeth and get through it, but I’m sure the feeling of elation at the end will mean it’s all worth it.” Stephen, senior regional director for Brewin Dolphin, added: “It’s been very difficult fitting the training around my job. We are ‘very’ amateur cyclists and I don’t think you can ever train enough for an event like this. It’s the most arduous endurance event possible, but we’ve done as much as we can to prepare. We are a team and it’s about all 11 of us getting to Paris.” Geoff echoed the need to work as a team to complete the challenge. “I’ve organised this event to celebrate the tenth anniversary of entering remission and taking on the Tour for the first time, which was the start of what I call my new life,” he said. “Since then, it’s been about raising money to help more blood cancer patients survive this horrific disease and ultimately find a cure. I want these riders to experience going through the challenge everyday, and the euphoria of reaching Paris. There will be moments during the three weeks when you’ll need your team-mates to get you through.”

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