

Cheshire Cobbled Classic

CW
Difficulty
rating:
9/10

This
year's
event:
June 7



65
miles

1,800
metres
ascent

The UK's very own Cobbled Classic goes under the CW spotlight

Louise Mahé

Despite only being 65 miles in length, the Cheshire Cobbled Classic shows it's not just distance that makes for a tough event. With a dozen cobbled sections of varying length and gradient, this rugged course will challenge your skill level, endurance and strength. ▶

Where is it?

The ride uses local roads that wouldn't look too out of place in a Belgian kermesse. But in fact you're in the heart of Cheshire. The ride starts and finishes at the local leisure centre just off the A34. The route heads east towards the Peak District National Park, taking in Goyt Valley.

Why ride it?

Combining various types of cobbled sectors, this is a must for any Classics fan or those looking for a challenging course.

A celebratory glass of Leffe at the finish, together with a commemorative cobble, from the very roads the route goes over brings an added incentive!

History

2015 sees only the second running of this event, but this doesn't make it any less of a classic, as its name quite rightly suggests. The event takes its inspiration from the famous Monument Ronde Van Vlaanderen or the Tour of Flanders, as we know it.

How to enter

Enter online at britishcycling.org.uk or follow the link through the event website: cycleclassics.co.uk.

Getting there

Situated near the A34, Wilmslow Leisure Centre is 10 miles from junction 19 of the M6. Nearby Wilmslow train station offers direct trains to and from London Euston and other major cities.

Where to stay

There are plenty of excellent local options for a range of budgets. Wilmslow Premier Inn and the Kings Arms are around a mile from the start. For those looking for a little more luxury, Alderley Edge Hotel or the Merlin about three miles away are top options.

Where to eat

Wilmslow has a whole host of different restaurants nearby from local pubs and independent restaurants to larger chains like Pizza Express. The Kings Arms has a Thai restaurant inside, which is a good option for fuelling up the evening before.

Local bike shop

Most local bike shops are shut on Sunday but the nearest to the start/finish, Royles (www.royles.biz), is open till six on Saturdays so it may be worth going there if you're heading up the day before and forget any vital bits.



It's worth taking time to savour the scenery

The first of these testing sectors comes after just three kilometres of riding. Thankfully it's flat, giving you a quick taste of the juddering surfaces you'll be battling over. The second sector of Woodbrook Road, 300m with a gradient of 20 per cent, around a kilometre later, is a true warning of what's to come: short and sharp with leg-burningly steep climbs.

As the route winds south to Alderley Edge and then out east towards Prestbury, there are a few longer flat cobbled sectors, including Hocker Lane which is just over one and a half kilometres. These lengthy, bone-rattling sectors are a rare treat in the UK and give a taste of what the pro riders experience in the Spring Classics.

The first feed station appears around the 15-mile mark, tempting you to crack on with the ride. However, with over 30 miles still to tackle before looping back to the feed again, a quick stop is well worth it — especially as soon after you'll be climbing more bergs before heading onto the exposed roads of the Peak District National Park.

Local knowledge

With 1,800 metres of climbing, the descents are a welcome relief. A careful approach is advised, as these twisting lanes lull you into a false sense of security. We often found ourselves at the bottom of another steep cobbled ascent in the wrong gear. Don't get caught out like we did; always be prepared for a quick shift up the block.

ORGANISER'S TARGET TIMES				
Route	Award	Distance	Ave speed	Time
Epic	Gold	65	>13 mph	<5hr
Epic	Silver	65	>12 mph	<5hr 30min
Epic	Bronze	65	>11 mph	>6hr

The amalgamation of different surfaces that make up the sectors will see you mimicking the techniques of the pros, such as hitting the gutter in search of a smoother surface.

Heading further east the uphill battles change to lengthy slogs along the grippy roads of the Peak District. It's hard to appreciate your surroundings, but if you're able to stop chewing the stem for a few minutes, the views across the wooded slopes of the Goyt Valley are rather spectacular.

You'll find yourself turning left and heading down a descent as riders are coming back up, some wishing you good luck. It's at this point you're about to hit the infamous cobbled Corkscrew climb. Be aware there may be a few riders stopped at the bottom for a second crack at getting to the top. Give yourself a few goes at getting up but don't waste too much time as you're still not past the halfway point. After climbing back up away from the Corkscrew you'll head deeper into the Peak District and some more longer climbs before you hit the long stony sector by the Fernilee reservoir. A glance over your shoulder at the top will reveal the stunning view across both Fernilee and Errwood reservoirs.

It's then time to begin winding your way back west, along many of the roads you've already ridden on the way out. If you're running low on energy make sure you don't miss the Robin Hood pub feed station as it's easy to overlook. On the way back it feels a lot faster with more slight downhills; however, with all the climbing already in your legs any uphill hurts. Saving a little bit for the final sector in Alderley Edge is a must: at half a kilometre long, Swiss Hill's 25 per cent gradient means you've got to put everything in just to get up. Then it's just nine miles back to Wilmslow for a well-deserved glass of Leffe.

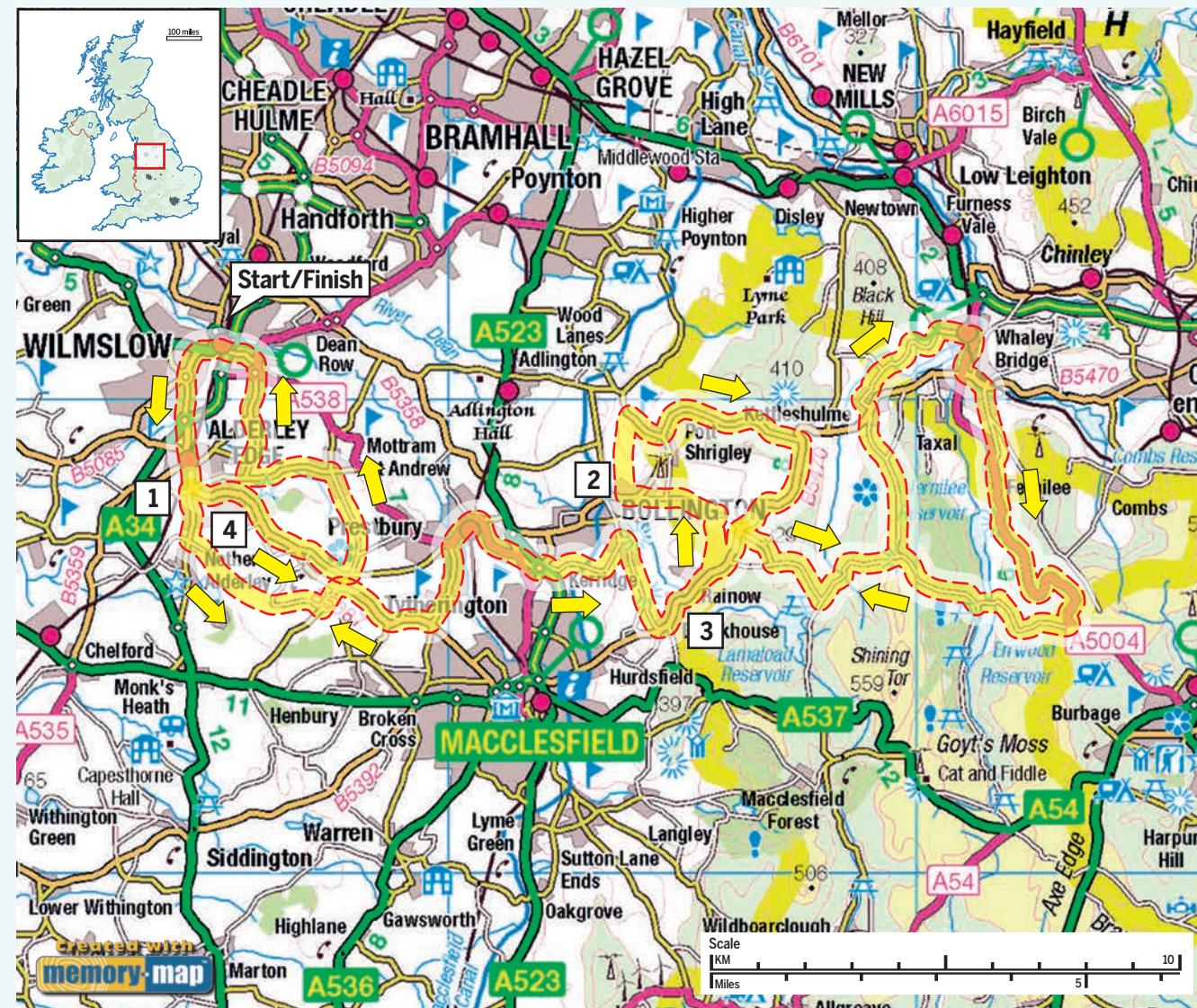
The challenges

- 1 Woodbrook Road** Not as steep or long as other cobbled climbs to come, Woodbrook Road is just 4km after the start. This means you're hitting the 20 per cent gradient relatively soon after setting off. It'll be quite a shock to the system.
- 2 Beeston Brow** This short, sharp kick up is only 300 metres long but leaves your legs and lungs burning as you just try to get over it. With a maximum gradient of 20 per cent over irregular cobbles, it's a tough call after just 29km.
- 3 Corkscrew** Only 200 metres long but arguably the steepest cobbled climb in Britain. Maxing out at 45 per cent, the Corkscrew is rideable, but not for many — even pro riders Owain Doull and Andy Tennant didn't make it up last year!



NAIL IT

- 4 Swiss Hill** Swiss Hill is the final steep cobbled climb that riders must tackle before heading back to Wilmslow. With a max gradient of 25 per cent, Swiss Hill is longer than most of the previous climbs at 500 metres. Geraint Thomas used this climb in 2011 during his training preparation for the Tour of Flanders, which shows just how similar the roads on this event are. Ensuring you've got enough energy left to tackle this punishing climb is important and while just getting up it requires going into the red, remember it's double the length of most of the earlier cobbled climbs.



Event website and GPX file: www.cycleclassics.co.uk