

On a damp day in December 2016, **Kajsa Tylen**, surrounded by cheering friends and family, cycled to a little bike shop in Breaston in the English East Midlands, to celebrate the completion of a remarkable achievement – cycling 52,000km in one year, a distance equal to more than one and a quarter times around the planet, and a feat which had never been achieved by a woman before. Here's her story...

Why 'lazy' Kajsa took on the

By her own admission, Kajsa Tylen is no Amazon – she's a slightly-built featherweight and tends towards inherent laziness, she claims. Yet, in her early-40s, having taken up cycling just four years earlier, Kajsa smashed a 78 year old world record for the furthest distance cycled by a woman in a year.

It required her cycling every single day – including Christmas Day – in all weathers, usually alone. The Swedish-born cyclist covered the miles in daily rides, very occasionally in France, Germany and Sweden, but mostly in her adoptive Nottinghamshire and nearby counties. "I know every pothole in the county," she says.

On a bike named Billie – named after Billie Fleming, the female world-beating cyclist of the 1930s whose world record of 1938 inspired her to the challenge – Kajsa learned a great deal about endurance riding, but she learned much more about herself.

"I'm embarrassed to say that I've just taken part in my first

Audax," she says. "A measly 100km. And it hurt. It's difficult to comprehend that I rode that distance and more every single day of 2016."

Her main support during the daily cycling regime in 2016 was her mum Tina, who followed with the family caravan, to carry out chores and dry the many tears that came with the punishing schedule. "It was often a year of fatigue, pain and frustration. My mum was my rock for the entire year. She looked after my dog, fed me, watered me, washed my clothes and generally did anything I asked of her. Sometimes I was not a nice person. I was a bit of a monster," Kajsa admits.

Born in Sweden, Kajsa moved to Nottinghamshire in 1992. She now speaks with a soft Midland accent and was perfectly at home being "British", until, half way through her world record attempt, while riding in Sweden in July 2016, she and her mum heard the news about Brexit.

"Mum and I woke up in the caravan and she turned to me and said: 'They voted leave'. It was a shock, regardless of which way you voted in the referendum, and it hit me hard," she says.

"I should have just shut social media out, it was like watching a car crash, and within a few days I felt like I didn't have a home to go back to anymore. There was, seemingly, so much hatred out there against immigrants, and that included me, despite how British I felt."

Kajsa admits that she was already low at this stage of the record attempt, mostly because she was having a dreadful time with her saddle, and had it not been for friends who brought some perspective to her feelings, she might have quit right there and then.

"My friend Jane reassured me that life was just going on as normal back home," she says. "Yes, people were having arguments at work about Brexit, but there were no riots

or crazy stuff kicking off."

It was a turning point for Kajsa. She had begun the epic ride, she admits, without really understanding the difficulties she would face – the fatigue, the saddle sores, the cold and the wet, the loneliness, the boredom. "I told myself that misery is only temporary," she says, with her characteristic good humour. But she often asked herself why she'd take up "this ridiculous challenge".

Kajsa says: "I always say that I like a challenge. But as the many hours, days and months of the ride went by I did a lot of soul-searching and self-analysis. What else is there to do on a bike? I realised that I was trying to prove something. Not to anyone else, but to myself.

"I am, by nature, lazy. In Sweden I would be called a time-optimist – always optimistic that time is on my side. I always leave everything to the last minute and if there's a chance I can take the easy way out, I'll generally take it. But I didn't want to be this way. I knew, deep down, that I wasn't fulfilling my potential.

"Physical exercise was not something that I did for many years – except horse riding. But I was a lazy horse rider. Then I really got into kickboxing and then started running. I managed to get round a marathon, despite being a lazy runner."

Then she did something which seemed to smash a mental barrier – a bungee jump. "I've always been afraid of heights. I can't say that my first experience of jumping off a bridge was anything less than terrifying, but it hammered home the message that it's mind over matter," she says. "I learned that I could do something I was absolutely terrified of doing. It was the start of a pattern of positive behaviour."

Kajsa also began to compete in triathlons, which involved getting a bike. And she never looked back.

"I started doing longer and longer distances on the bike,"



“Achieving a goal that is out of your reach just changes your life”

she says. "And then I read about Billie Fleming. I was intrigued, not just about her but about the record she set back in 1938. It was 82 miles a day, and she was just a regular person. I'm a regular person, I thought, and I convinced myself that 82 miles was not that far. Once the seed was planted, I knew I had to do it. Guinness informed me that they would verify the attempt and set a goal of 50,000km. My rules included using just one bike for the duration of the attempt and ride from the front without drafting, which is why I was mostly alone."

On New Year's Day, 2016, Kajsa set off from the Leisure Lakes Bike Shop in Breaston. She would spend the next 365 days attempting to set a new world record. "I was naive," she says. "That probably helped. If I'd had experience of this type of ride, it probably would have scared me out of doing it. I was a rookie at this. In fact there are only a handful of people alive who are not rookies at riding all day, every day for the period of time I was planning. And, as it

turned out, I didn't get fitter.

"The weather was absolutely dreadful and I was often in tears. I was so cold. After one ride I thought about what had gone wrong that day. Yes, my legs were starting to complain, but that was to be expected. What else? My clothes. I had worn the wrong clothes. I wasn't wearing enough of them, so I was cold, and secondly they were not waterproof enough – except for the marigold gloves, but I also learned to tuck them inside my jacket. Nobody likes a glove full of freezing cold water."

Why didn't she train for this? Kajsa says: "I thought I had. I went out in all weathers as part of my training, but the issue was that while doing so I was pacing differently and simply didn't get as cold because my heart rate was higher."

BACKGROUND BILLIE FLEMING

Billie Fleming, the woman who inspired Kajsa's world record attempt, was born in London in 1914. Although she had no background in racing, she began her bid on January 1, 1938. Her mileage was authenticated through a cyclometer on the bicycle, and through check cards signed by witnesses.

At the time, her cycling challenge attracted massive national press attention. She completed her ride in December that year, having covered 29,603.7 miles.

Before she died, aged 100, in 2014, she was still receiving letters from people who said Billie's achievement had inspired them to take up cycling.

Her subsequent plans to cycle across the USA were cancelled, thanks to the outbreak of World War Two.

Lessons learned, she continued the challenge with renewed vigour. The arrival of spring weather helped. Then she, her mum and the caravan went on a European adventure, riding through the midnight sun on an odyssey to the north of Sweden.

Once back in the UK, things began to improve for Kajsa. The saddle soreness which had plagued the first nine months of the challenge were cured, thanks to a new saddle. "The Infinity Bike Seat is a revolutionary saddle," she says. "I was sceptical, but at this point I was in so much discomfort that I was willing to try anything. As soon as I sat on it I knew this was the one. The soreness began to disappear and life was good. So good, in fact, that for September, October and November I averaged 100 miles a day."

Kajsa hit her first target on 24 November – 29,604 miles, the distance Billie Fleming had ridden to set the record.

"I had until the end of the year to push the record further," says Kajsa, "and I did ride every day for the rest of the year, but I wasn't as motivated as I had been, so it was more about having fun and taking in what I had achieved."

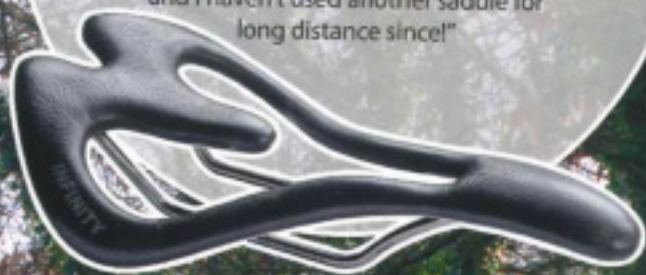
Her year ended where it started – at Leisure Lakes Bikes in Breaston. "I wanted to finish there because they had been such a huge support for me during my year, having firstly supplied my bike, which they said I could keep if I managed to break the record. And they also helped me with the servicing during the year."

So what's next for this intrepid cyclist? She says: "Well, I kind of feel like I've peaked with this challenge, but I'm sure that sooner or later I'll get bored and take on something else that pushes my limits. I just need to find my motivation again. If someone knows where I've put it, do get in touch. Until then, I'll just enjoy 'normal' life again."

SPOTLIGHT ON INFINITY SADDLES

The Infinity Bike Seat pretty much saved my ass.

Nine months of riding 89 miles a day on a "regular" bike seat (the best one out of the half dozen I'd tested long-distance on) and I'd had enough. I'd read about the Infinity when it was on Kickstarter but had dismissed it as a marketing ploy. The idea was to remove the pressure from the sit bones and distribute it elsewhere. I asked them to send me a saddle that I would promote if I liked it. They must have had confidence in their product because they obliged. It was love at first sit, and I haven't used another saddle for long distance since!"



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