

FREEWHEEL

■ PONGPET MEKLOY



Charity ride raises almost 500,000 baht for cardiac kids



PHOTOS: ATAPOL WONGSATHIT AND PANUWAT EIRCHAMNON

Cycling is good for your health, no doubt about that. But who would have thought that one's riding could also benefit other people's hearts? Trust me, it's not beyond reality.

At least the 1,003 cyclists who took part in the "Nok Air Ride For Life" charity ride last Saturday, myself included, believe it's possible. In Nakhon Si Thammarat's beautiful coastal district of Khanom, we rode a 50km loop to raise funds for the Cardiac Children Foundation of Thailand, which provides medical assistance to needy children born with heart defects as well as those affected by heart disease.

A day before the event I flew to Nakhon Si Thammarat with Nok Air's own cycling team on a morning flight. My window seat on the right side of the plane offered a clear view of the southern province's coastline as the aircraft gradually shifted to lower altitudes. Flying past Khanom, I could re-examine the

topography of the area where the mass ride would take place. What I saw confirmed the good news I had found earlier on Google Earth — the designated route was relatively flat.

For serious roadies, 50km on such terrain is nothing. Some might be able to finish it within an hour. But for a spoiled mountain biker like me who enjoys shaded single tracks and relies more on gravity than pedalling power, doing such a long distance on a flat road was one of those things I wish I had a secret twin for, who could do it on my behalf. The fact that it was for a good cause motivated me to just go for it.

Prior to the ride, I imagined myself at a higher fitness level; I'm too lazy for a real workout. But there were other things I could do to survive the long ride under the Sun. Familiarising myself with the route was part of it.

Proper clothing also was important. The loose DH jersey and rough pants I normally wear would not be good for the task. I needed more aerodynamic cycling tights and a long-sleeved compression base layer. The provided bright yellow short-sleeved Nok Air jersey wasn't enough to protect me from the Sun's heat. Sunglasses also were a must.



wheels and the recently-serviced hubs would be of great help for me in the long ride. I couldn't find time to visit a bike shop before the trip, otherwise I would have replaced the 2.1 MTB tires with something friendlier to the tarmac.

Anyway, that was my preparation for my longest road ride in 15 or so years. The last time I did such a journey was when I biked 70km in Saraburi from Khao Sam Lan National Park to Chet Khot-Pong Kon Sao Nature Study Centre and back. I didn't find it enjoyable and ever since bid adieu to on-road riding. Somehow, I felt much better this time. I finished the



Apart from the Sun, another issue I would have to deal with was butt soreness. Unlike downhill mountain biking — my favourite discipline — in which riders stand on the pedals rather than seated on the saddle, in road cycling you are forced to sit most of the time.

The padding on the crotch area of the tights may help reduce the painful impact of prolonged contact between your behind and saddle. But even more important is the riding position. Instead of dumping all the body weight on the saddle, I must make sure to distribute much of it via the arms to the handlebar and via the legs to the pedals. Always using the right gear would allow me to conserve my limited power.

At the same time, I must make sure I wouldn't be going too slow because without sufficient and continual force on the pedals, the weight — and the pressure — would be focused on my fragile buttocks.

The next thing was getting the right bicycle. Not counting the foldies, the lightest rig in my "fleet" that was still in working condition was an enduro bike. Mid-travel, full-suspension bikes these days perform well both on- and off-road. Besides, its 27.5-inch

Nok Air Ride for Life's 50km route without struggling. I attribute that in large part to being properly prepared and the wonderful feeling in my heart that I was doing something for a worthy cause.

The mass ride, which coincided with Khanom Festival — an annual beachside concert also sponsored by the budget airline — raised 460,872 baht for the Cardiac Children Foundation.

Well, see you here again next Thursday. Until then, if you have questions, news or biking insights you wish to share, please feel free to send an email to pongpetm@bangkokpost.co.th or go to the **Freewheel Bangkok** community page on Facebook.

Pongpet Mekloy is the Bangkok Post's travel editor and a mountain bike freak.

