

Rob Campbell on Thursday

Read Rob's column every week in the Western Daily Press

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We're great when we all work together

If we are a nation divided – furiously pitched against each other in a spiral of national self-destruction – then clearly nobody has told the inhabitants of Chipping Sodbury.

It might, on the face of it, seem an unlikely place to stumble across all that is good about Britain, given that the town's name sounds so nearly comical that it was regularly used in 1950s radio shows as a shorthand for somewhere or something rude.

Other than that, Chipping Sodbury is also famous for JK Rowling having been born there; for the father of vaccination Edward Jenner, having worked there in the 1760s; and for vacuum cleaner bloke James Dyson living in a big house just outside.

Indeed, things seem to have happened to Chipping Sodbury just outside it, or a long time ago, or both. Such as when the Queen got her car stuck in the snow, back in 1981, and had to shelter (with dinner) in the Cross Hands pub in Old Sodbury, which is just outside. The pub's web-

site even gives its broad location as Bristol, perhaps in an effort to distance itself from Yate, which always threatens to gobble up Chipping Sodbury.

None of that matters. Because at the weekend, volunteers staged the annual cycle event known as the Sodbury Saddleback Sportive. These events can often be a combination of corporate, brutal and a bit daft, with the lycra crowd paying £40 a ticket to organisers who are prepared to indulge Tour de France fantasies by directing people up impossible hills against the clock.

Not in Chipping Sodbury, where there were hills aplenty but a different kind of mood. I was among the riders on Sunday at an event run entirely by volunteers who ensure that any money made is poured back into local good causes – and that's totalled more than £25,000 in previous years.

One of the keys to this is the All Chipping In charity initiative, which raises money to provide extra-curric-



ular opportunities for local children, plus for Macmillan Cancer Support and the charity See Change, to help those struggling with addiction and homelessness.

Even more than that, the event brings the community together on the day of the ride to help provide the marshals, music, breakdown support, 700 road signs out on the course, and the fruit cake (more of

which later).

Local companies help out, too, from Saddleback (the bike gear importer based nearby), to the Toll House Clinic with massages, local cadets with the parking, and St John Ambulance crews bandaging up anyone who ended up taking a corner on their elbows rather than their bikes.

It's in the top ten rides in the UK partly because of the sheer prettiness of the route – winding through Horton, Hawkesbury, Hillesley, around Tetbury, by Seagry both Upper and Lower, Grittleton, Littleton (Drew), Doddington and beyond. The reward is views of countryside that, from the Cotswold ridge after a summer shower, looks like heaven on earth.

The cake, though, is what really makes it. We found it halfway round at Charlton village hall and again at the finishing line at Chipping Sodbury Rugby Club, by which time we were woozy from losing 2,500 calories to the hills. It is the king of cakes, and the cake of kings, made to a reci-

pe sent out to volunteer bakers and celebrated in bike nerd forums and chatter around the country.

But it's the bigger recipe that really counts. One that sees local folk come together in a carnival atmosphere whether riding or helping, feeding off the buzz of fresh air, stunning countryside, and togetherness in a way that so easily eludes us in a country that might seem, to an outsider reading the headlines, one where the very idea of community has been usurped by conflict.

It's a reminder of just how good we can be, when we work together.

■ If you want a day out on your bike, there are still a few local rides this season in our region and you can find the details at the website of British Cycling. Most events have different length routes ranging from easy to tough, depending on fitness and experience, and some cater for families and beginners. All of them are friendly days out, and all provide cake, but none quite like Chipping Sodbury's.