

At Synergy Farm Health, recent graduate **Emily Gascoigne** has not only been coping with sick cows, but acting as support team to a trio of determined fundraisers.

After cattle I had three mad cyclists to attend to

remember one recent morning distinctly for three reasons – it was a Sunday, it was the first glorious day of spring and it was a first.

This early call out was to a dairy heifer 'choking on a chain'. While some units may use chains as a form of environmental enrichment (as with pigs), they are rarely a 'choke' issue and, given my knowledge of the farm in question, something sounded very much amiss.

The inquisitive beast had managed to find the only piece of vintage equipment on the farm (an old cow chain), and had implanted a chunk of the linkage into her cheek muscles. When I got there, she was standing quite quietly in the crush and while no longer choking on the chain, she was clearly uncomfortable.

The chain felt like it had worked its way down under the tongue, and visions of heroic oral surgery flashed before me.

I was relieved that after washing the site and some gentle tension, I managed to rid the heifer of her burden, much to the surprise



Left to right: Cyclists Joshua Fincham, Lucy LeCocq and Peter Siviter with Elise Axon and Emily Gascoigne.

of the worried owner.

Although a substantial hole had been left in the muscle, I was confident the wound was clean and that some anti-inflammatories and antibiotics would protect her from any complications.

Mouths are incredibly quick healers and there was no obvious surgical repair that could be done.

A follow-up visit and a phone call later that week revealed she had made a full recovery.

While this Sunday morning was consumed with thoughts of chains, my spare time this spring has been full of thoughts of

other types of chains – bike chains.

Charity work is the remit of all Young Farmers Clubs and, whether for local or national charities, we like to throw the gauntlet down and do the job properly.

Convention

The National Young Farmers Convention (held this year in Blackpool) is a rite of passage for most young farmers, but my club decided the journey to Blackpool should be equally memorable.

As a Lancashire girl by breeding, I know only too well how long the journey to the Red Rose county

takes and, as many readers will know, my driving prowess goes before me.

When asked to be the support driver for two vet from work and my dairy farmer from Dorset as they attempted to cycle 320 miles to Blackpool, I expressed concern.

They then intensified the challenge by saying they wanted to achieve it in 30 cycling hours, so I decided they needed me.

They were clearly mad and would need someone to mop their brows as they missed their deadline on their doomed mission.

The chosen charity, the Amelia Grace Rainbow

Fund, is a Dorset-based charity raising funds for terminally ill children in the county and those with life limiting conditions.

It also supports the families of those affected and has ongoing projects including a beach hut in Sandbanks which provides respite for families and friends. Much fundraising ensued throughout spring, including producing posters at night while waiting for the on-call phone to ring, writing quiz questions for a quiz night after a day of routines, and researching 'carbohydrate loading' after an out-of-hours calving.

The team trained hard and at their peak were cycling 200 miles per week. Despite this, I did not underestimate the challenge that lay ahead, especially as they all have busy day jobs.

Lucy Le Cocq and Peter Siviter are my veterinary colleagues at Synergy Farm Health, and Joshua Fincham is a dairyman in Dorset. In between routines, sick cows and milking, they were out on their bikes.

Setting off

The day of the bike ride arrived and after a club send off at Swanage Pier, they were on the road. Our first mishap was 10 minutes into the task when we had, like my heifer, a chain problem on Pete's machine, but thankfully out of sight of spectators.

The first day saw the team cycle 140 miles through Shaftesbury, Westbury, Cirencester, through Gloucester and on to Ross-on-Wye to spend the night with some very hospitable Herefordshire Young Farmers.

One of the biggest revelations of the trip was that the farming community is the smallest and friendliest you will ever meet. It is like having an extended farming family – and our hosts were no exception.

Day two saw our team remount for the remaining 180 miles to Blackpool. My co-pilot Elise and I had flapjacks and sugary treats at the ready to boost flagging energy levels.

As a support driver, day two was a much more pleasurable experience, driving through Shrewsbury up the A49 to the dairy heartlands of the North West. Our elevated support vehicle meant Elise and I had a fantastic view of some of the largest herds in the country and saw some

brilliant grazing systems.

Warrington, however, marked the change from rural Cheshire to inner city and more aching legs. But with 50 miles to go, they were still smiling.

I directed the gang through Eccleston, the home of cycling idol Bradley Wiggins. A small crowd (my family) were waiting to wave on the crew as they faced the final 35 miles.

At 9:45pm they arrived, having achieved their goal in just 24 cycling hours, and raising £2000 for charity!

The new VMS™ Supra
The only automatic milking
system that delivers ...

- ✓ Accurate udder health control
- ✓ Precise quarter milk measurements
- ✓ Up to 3,000 litres of milk/day

SEE A
VMS SUPRA
IN ACTION
AT LIVESTOCK
EVENT
STAND MK262



If maximizing milk output and knowing with almost 100% certainty that your cows are healthy, sounds like a good idea to you, then you should take a look at the new VMS™ Supra package. It may change the way you farm, forever.

To find out more about the range of VMS™ systems contact your local dealer or check www.delaval.co.uk

DeLaval