

Tuam's roving All-Ireland champions hit the road

By TOM GILMORE

CELEBRATORY singing on a 70 mile bus journey plus lots of other fun and craic you tend to associate with teams returning after winning All-Irelands, but Tuam's D.H. Burke Cycling Club, All-Ireland champions, have these celebrations almost every Sunday of the year!

And this camaraderie, social atmosphere and team spirit permeates in to the often gruelling competition routes around the hills and many rocky roads of Ireland where the young cyclists from the Tuam area have proved to be as good as the best, especially over the last 12 months.

The club has increased in numbers from three under-age cyclists in 1989 to 33 at present and they won over half of all the prizes at the All-Ireland under-age championships in Kanturk last August.

This feat did not go unnoticed by the President of the FIC, Jack Watson from Co. Down, who said it was an amazing feat for a small club outside the main centres of population such as Dublin or Cork.

The Tuam club are the only ones in the country to have their own coach to take them to and from events.

"Sometimes we are like a travelling circus with the sing-songs on the journeys to and from competitions," said Stephen Burke, PRO for the D.H. Burke Cycling Club.

He continued, "We are lucky to have the bus as it can carry over 20 while we can hang 8 bikes on the back and put several more in the wells. We also have a number of tables so the lads can have their lunch while we are travelling too."

Stephen said they were very lucky to have got major sponsorship from Joe Burke for the club plus money from other local firms who have taken advertising space on the bus as well.

Their bus was purchased in 1990 and at the time Logstrup were the major sponsors of the club. The following year they were without a major sponsor until D.H. Burke Supermarkets came along and gave them the necessary funds last year.

But he added that it's a costly business running a club and they spend between £8,000 and £10,000 per year to keep the club in operation.

The Tuam club created history earlier this month when they were presented with the All-Ireland "Club Of The Year"

award by the All-Ireland cycling organisation the FIC.

This is the first time ever that the award has been won by a club outside Leinster and it was presented to the Tuam club at their annual social by Maurice Murphy who is a commissaire with the FIC based in Galway.

What is a commissaire? In layman's language he's a cycling referee who observes the races from an open top car and implements the rules which are surprisingly strict.

But then the whole training schedule of those involved with the D.H. Burke Cycling Club is strict and leading up to major races those involved often train up to three days per week.

"Since 1989 the skills training has become a much more important part of our activities: this involves bike control between bollards, jumping over obstacles and avoiding other props used in training as an example for some of the hazards they might face in road races," said Stephen Burke.

The idea that young cyclists should be able to jump over small obstacles with their bikes is in order to train them on how



Stephen Burke, PRO, Maurice Murphy of the FIC (Federation of Irish Cyclists), Joe Diskin, club chairman and Joe Burke, D.H. Burke Supermarkets, sponsor.

to escape hitting pot holes while taking part in races on country roads.

"From March to September is the really busy time for us and as we have our own bus, distance is no obstacle for us. We go to competitions in places as far apart as Kildare, Cork, Kerry, Limerick, Offaly, Sligo etc," said Seamus Quinn, who is

the under-age coach with the club.

He added that Cork expected to take the major share of the prizes in this year's All-Ireland under-age competition but Tuam were the surprise packet, taking four team awards and 15 medals.

John Burke, Galway Road, won the silver medal in the All-

Ireland under-16 class and on the following day Stephen Burke won a silver medal in the All-Ireland Community Games at Mosney.

"Hosting the All-Ireland under-age championships in Tuam last year was also another huge success for the club, and the reaction from all those visiting clubs was very positive," said Seamus Quinn.

Ambitions for the future

Now that the D.H. Burke Cycling Club has made such strides at under-age level their hope for the future is to have similar success at adult level.

"Taking over 25 per cent of the medals in the under-age All-Ireland at Kanturk this year has given the D.H. Burke Cycling Club a very high profile and among clubs all over Ireland the Tuam lads are now marked men. They are the ones that others aspire to beat," said Stephen Burke.

Their future ambitions include having an adult team taking part in the Milk Ras and becoming a National Road Race club.

The D.H. Burke Cycling Club have made such sensational strides in the past five years and if they keep up the momentum the sky's the limit for them in the next half decade.



YOUNG WHEELERS: (back) Kevin McLoughlin, Tomás Joyce, David Kelly, Stephen Burke, Gareth Diskin, John Burke; (middle) Bobby Quinn, Brian Doyle, Adam Howard, Mary Doyle, Seamie Quinn, Eoin O'Neill; (front) Tomás O'Reilly, Fiachra O'Neill, Stuart Quinn, Dara O'Neill, James O'Rourke, Michael Gormley, David Burke.