



**ben** Here for the automotive industry

Support for life

# 4 Pillars Challenge 2017

## How it all began!

by Dave Garrett

In November 2016, a set of "PRIDE" values were launched for all colleagues working at Ben to underpin Ben's mission of making a positive difference to people's lives. I was quite new to the organisation at the time and wanted to do my bit to help launch the PRIDE values (Passionate, Respectful, Inclusive, Driven, Empowered) so I decided that a personal challenge would best reflect these values whilst at the same time, raise awareness and money for Ben. I had a couple of concepts in mind, all with various levels of commitment and effort.

After speaking to an old military friend of mine, affectionately known as "Mad Dog" or MD for short, who's a bit of a dab hand at fundraising and raising awareness, I decided that a challenge of endurance would be worthy of paying attention to, hopefully attract donations as well as offering up a good personal test! I came up with what I considered a straight forward concept which reflected the 4 Pillars, our organisational approach to providing support.



*Complete 4000 miles during 2017 - 1000 miles for each pillar. All miles would have to be travelled and self-propelled (so can be tracked by a GPS receiver) and there would be a symbolic theme for each Pillar.*

### How I applied the 4 Pillar Themes

**Financial** – Apply a 160-mile deficit (taking the total distance to 4160 miles), symbolic to being in debt due to financial hardship.

**Social** – Inspire Ben colleagues to get involved in a team event. This took the form of a team of colleagues swimming the distance of the channel in a relay format as part of the Industry Leader Challenge.

**Physical** – Undertake as many arduous races as possible – involving an Ultra Marathon as well as several tough Swim-Run events.

**Mental** – Just taking on the task was a big enough mental challenge, but during the challenge, I discovered I'd have to complete the remaining miles in the cold, the dark and the wet of the winter as I'd built up a deficit due to time ratio over distance. Basically, I covered a lot more miles in an hour of cycling than an hour of swimming or running – I am after all 6' 2" and weigh about 110kg's!



### Devizes to Westminster Kayak Race

The challenge started well, the first event being Farnborough winter half-marathon. This was followed by the Devizes to Westminster (DW) Canoe Race which is a big event, held annually over the Easter weekend. The preparation involved kayak race training, as well as progressively increasing my kayak distances. I successfully completed the DW with a PB and this coincided with the end of the first Pillar.





# Race Reports

## Farnborough Winter Half Marathon: 21km

I was offered a chance to do the half marathon by my colleagues at Ben and jumped at it! The event provided an opportunity to get my miles up early in the year in preparation



for the 2017 Swim-run season. The conditions on the day were perfect for a winter half marathon, freezing cold and a white, frosty landscape. I managed to finish in a faster time than I had predicted and achieved my aim of progressing my running distance.

## Waterside Race Series: Varying distances

The Waterside Series is a set of progressively longer kayak races that are traditionally used to build up to the Devizes to Westminster (DW) Canoe Race. I was fortunate enough to join the Royal Engineer crews and paddle in Watersides B and C in a 2-man kayak which really helped make this stage of the challenge much more exciting and a little less lonely. I then went on to complete Waterside D to get my predicted race timings for the DW.

The distances are:

- **Waterside A (13 miles):** Great Bedwyn to Newbury
- **Waterside B (18 miles):** Newbury - Aldermaston - Newbury



- **Waterside C (23 miles):** Pewsey Wharf – Newbury
- **Waterside D (35 miles):** Devizes – Newbury

## Devizes to Westminster (DW) Canoe Race: 201km

The DW is a 125-mile canoe marathon which starts in Devizes and finishes in Westminster. The K1 category is completed in 4 stages;

- Day 1 (34.5 miles) Devizes – Newbury
- Day 2 (36 miles) Newbury – Marlow
- Day 3 (37.5 miles) Marlow – Teddington
- Day 4 (17 miles) Teddington – Westminster (Tidal)

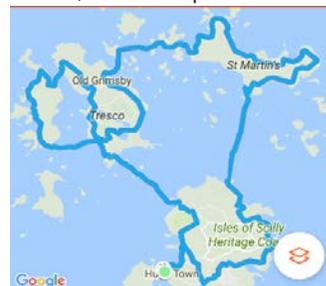
The DW is a very tough event with days 1 – 3 taking longer than 6 hours each. A support crew is necessary to replenish nutrition and fluid and you get to see them every hour or so. I was lucky enough to have my Dad supporting throughout and my best mate Paul Percival helping on the first day. At the end of each stage the key is to optimise recovery and prepare your nutrition and kit ready the next day. The accumulated fatigue over 4 days is substantial and finishing the course is a great achievement.

## Ötillö Scilly Isles Swim-Run: 29km Run + 8km Swim



At the beginning of 2016, my very good friend Kev Stokes drew my attention to an emerging sport event called Swim-run. The event we both looked at was the Ötillö Scilly Isles. At the time, we both considered the event a little outside of our ability. 18 months of training and 4 swim-runs later, we were ready for the challenge.

The organisers behind Ötillö (island to island in Swedish) were the pioneers of Swim-Run and held the first event in Sweden in 2006. A Swim-run is a



race involving multiple swim and run legs. Generally, you swim to an island, run across it, then swim to the next island, then run across that, and so on, for a given distance. Traditionally a Swim-run race is held in a remote location bringing environmental factors into the challenge. The Scilly Isles are a small archipelago off the coast of Cornwall and one of the most amazing places to visit in the world, they also provide a suitably testing environment.

## Swim-Run Llanberis 2017: 12.5km run + 3.5km swim

Swim-run Llanberis is a shorter "sprint" distance event which takes place in and around Llyn Padarn and Mount Snowdon (North Wales). Having completed this race in 2016 I was keen to improve on my time. There was a slight course adjustment to the previous year but we had great conditions and I enjoyed an exciting, fast paced event. I beat my time from 2016 by over 30mins and finished in the top 20.



## Mendip Marauder Ultra Marathon: 45km

The Mendip Marauder is an Ultra marathon which takes place along the Mendip way. Organised by Albion

runners, they have 30 and 50 mile distances running concurrently. I participated in the 30-mile event which had over 4000ft of climbing across the route, passing over Cheddar Gorge and finishing in Weston Super Mare. I haven't travelled this distance on foot for at least a decade so found this event mega challenging!

**Breca Gower Swim Run: 37km Run + 5km Swim**

The Gower Peninsula is a small peninsula of land south of Swansea and was host to the inaugural Breca Gower Swim-run. The conditions for the event



were epic! There was a 3 – 5 ft. swell throughout the day which made swimming very challenging and extremely committing (the safety kayaks could not be seen due to the waves and were themselves in survival mode at points). The coastal path had a plethora of varied terrains ranging from sandy beaches to rocky shores with many steep inclines and technical trails!

**Inch by Inch Loch Lomond: 25km run + 8km swim**

Inch by Inch takes place in Loch Lomond, Scotland, the largest land locked water mass in the UK, and it's absolutely beautiful!

The race is aptly named after the islands in the Loch, which all begin with "Inch". Inch-by-Inch was the first Swim-run I completed in a couple of years ago and I was keen to improve on my previous performance.

Once again, there were adverse conditions with a westerly wind



generating a slight swell against the competitors. The course was also slightly further than last year!

Despite these factors I beat my previous time and finished strongly. Loch Lomond is an awesome place and the event is a true island to island!

**Hokey Cokey Swim Run St Austell: 20km Run + 5km Swim**

The last race of my Swim-run season this year was another sprint distance; the Hokey Cokey, St Austell, Cornwall.

Organised by Mad Hatter Events, the Hokey Cokey has a high number of sea swims over the relatively short course (hence the name). The Cornish coastline is a great setting and made this race a



good one to finish on.

Unfortunately, during the last mile I twisted my ankle in a pot hole and injured the ligaments. This injury hampered my progress, limiting me from completing cycling and running miles during September.



## Thank You one and all!

To date I have raised almost £800 and reached 100's of people with posts about my progress but more importantly, raised awareness of Ben!

I would like to say a huge THANKYOU for everyone who has donated, liked and shared my posts on the 4 Pillars Facebook Page, and supported me along the way!

Thanks to all Ben colleagues for joining in with the swim challenge where we managed to work together as a team to smash the distance of the British Channel!

My Just Giving page is still open, it's really easy to donate, just follow the link below

<https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/dave-garrett4000>

To learn more about Ben and how they support our colleagues in the Automotive Industry go to:

<http://ben.org.uk/>