

# Peddalling for the Great British pub

This month, former Housemartins and Beautiful South front man Paul Heaton will set off on a 1,000-mile round trip around England by bicycle, to play in local pubs. The aim is to celebrate and promote two Great British pastimes – cycling and, of course, supping ale. **Rick Pearson reports**

Cycling through Cheshire and Macclesfield, near to where he lives, Paul Heaton, former frontman of the Housemartins and the Beautiful South, noticed that more and more pubs were closing down. “So,” he says, “I thought I might do a little pub tour to encourage people to start using pubs again.”

Heaton’s solution is the Pedals and Beer Pumps tour – a 1,000-mile trip that will see him play 16 British pubs in 18 days. In doing so, he is looking to promote two of his favourite pastimes: cycling and supping ale.

Starting at the Flying Horse in Rochdale, Lancashire, on 5 May, the tour will take in such legendary rock ‘n’ roll haunts as the Horseshoe Inn in Ratlinghope, Shropshire, and the Original Oak in Headingley, West Yorkshire, before calling last orders at the Southern in Chorlton, Greater Manchester, on 23 May. The 47-year-

old has also expressed an interest in visiting the fictional locals in *Coronation Street*, *EastEnders* and *Heartbeat* en route.

He will be joined by a band, which will cycle the first leg with him before jumping in a van, and is encouraging fans to travel to the gigs by bicycle. Heaton will be airing songs from his forthcoming solo album, which is due out in the summer.

The musician, who’s sold millions of records and played all over the world, gauged interest in the tour by making an appeal through various trade publications, including the Campaign for Real Ale newsletter, and Facebook, asking if anybody wanted him to play. The response was overwhelming. More than 900 pubs put themselves forward, with many others offering to provide him with a drink and lunch on his way through. He whittled it down to 16 pubs based partly on geography (“I

needed to create a bit of a route”), but mainly on the venue’s capacity to put on a gig of this size.

“The main thing was having a function room that we could play in,” says Heaton. “Some people have been a bit more entrepreneurial and put up marquees and things like that. One place even talked about knocking a wall through to make it happen.”

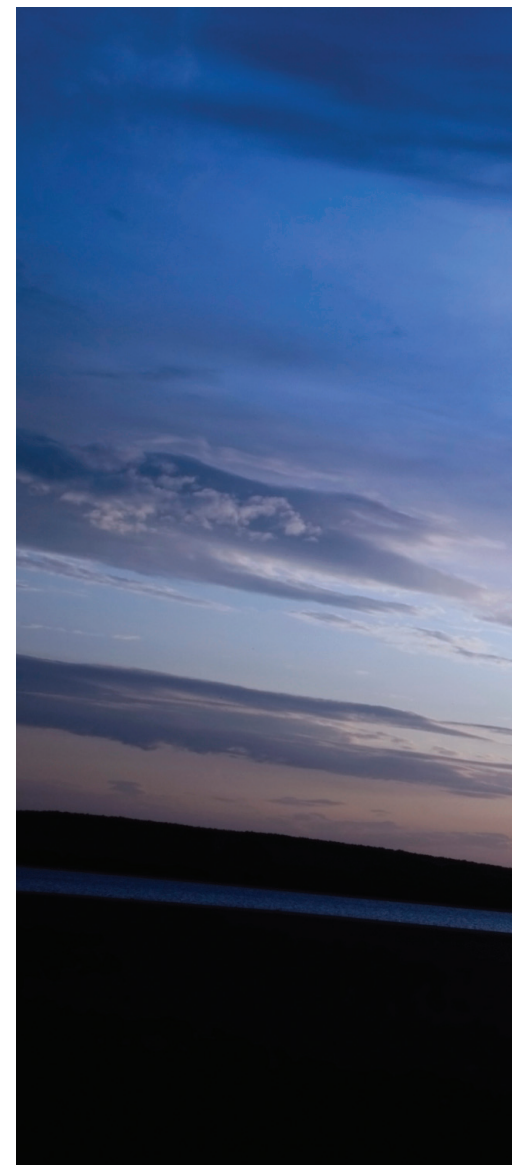
Another pub Heaton is playing, the Plough Inn in Coldharbour, Surrey, is planning a special Paul Heaton ale in his honour – appropriately called the Beautiful South. In order to get a feel for the pubs – and possibly grab a bit of food in the morning – Heaton and his band will be staying over at the places that they’re playing.

Satisfyingly for Heaton, the pubs on the tour have started to enjoy an increase in custom. “Some of the licensees have contacted me to say that more people have been going in their pubs since the announcement of the tour, which is great,” he says. “Certainly in the villages where we’re playing, there’s been a real buzz around the pub.”

Heaton’s love of pubs has often filtered down into his music. As frontman in the Housemartins, where he



Paul Heaton: his love of pubs has often filtered down into his music





played alongside Norman “Fatboy Slim” Cook, he reached the top 10 in 1986 with a song called Happy Hour. His 2008 solo album, *The Cross-Eyed Rambler*, featured a track called *The Pub* and there are more drinking songs planned for the next album.

What is it, I wonder, that he loves so much about the Great British boozier? “I’m not known for being a great patriot,” says Heaton, who’s a strong advocate of removing the British monarchy. “But pubs are one of the things that make me feel quite proud to be British. I have a group of German friends who come over here every second summer. Every pub they pass, they say [mock German accent]: ‘Look, English traditional pub. We must stop!’ They get really enthusiastic about cheese & onion crisps, about real ale and cricket. That reminds me of how pretty England is, and how special all this is to England. They remind me how good it is to have a local – and to use it.”

Heaton’s locals – he has two – are the Old House at Home and the Orion, both in Withington, south Manchester. If he’s feeling a bit more energetic, he’ll get on the bike and cycle up to the Cat & Fiddle (Macclesfield, Cheshire), which is the second-highest pub in England (Tan Hill Inn in Swaledale, North Yorkshire, being the highest).

“**I like visiting pubs. I think that they’re really good places to sit and talk to people you don’t know**”

“It’s at the top of a six or seven-mile hill. That’s a nice drink once you’re up there; you feel you’ve earned it. I’ll normally order a bitter, I don’t really have a favourite, but nothing too strong. I avoid the shorts these days, too, and try to avoid wine.”

**F**or Heaton, however, pubs represent more than just a place to quench your thirst. “I don’t drink as much as I used to, but I still like visiting pubs,” he says. “I think that they’re really good places to sit and talk to people you don’t know. I love going to pubs that I’ve never been to before.”

“A lot of my longest-running friendships have been formed in pubs, so I’d never criticise them. What are the ingredients of a good pub? I’d say live

music or a jukebox, a convivial host, good beer and good conversation. I also like pubs that are a bit rough and ready.”

Heaton’s a little less enthusiastic about bars: he’s wary of a place that might change its name overnight if not enough people are drinking in there. Pubs, on the other hand, have a sense of permanence: “If you walk into a place that’s had the same name for 200 years, there’s something special about that.”

But Heaton knows that many pubs are now under threat: “I’ve been cycling all my life and the British pub has provided some of my favourite stop-off points. It saddens me to hear about so many pubs closing on a weekly basis, so I want to do all I can to get people back to their local.”

For Heaton, much of the blame lies at the doors of the supermarkets, which are selling alcohol so cheaply. “I think the whole country is suffering under what you might call ‘supermarketisation,’” he says. “There are loads of people getting mad about things such as immigration or whatever. And I think this country’s real natural resource and asset – the countryside – is being stolen from underneath our noses. And it’s not being stolen by anyone from a different country or faith – it’s being stolen by Tesco and Sainsbury’s.”

## Tour dates

- 5 May**  
**the Flying Horse,**  
Rochdale, Lancs
- 6 May**  
**the Red Lion,**  
Winsford, Cheshire
- 7 May**  
**the Horseshoe Inn,**  
Ratlinghope, Shrops
- 8 May**  
**the Durham Ox,**  
Shrewley, Warwicks
- 10 May**  
**the Three Horseshoes,**  
Radnage, Bucks
- 11 May**  
**the Star Inn,**  
Alton, Hants
- 12 May**  
**the Plough,**  
Coldharbour, Surrey
- 13 May**  
**the Monarch,**  
Camden, London
- 15 May**  
**the Bulls Head,**  
St Neots, Cambs
- 16 May**  
**the White Hart,**  
Ufford, Lincs
- 17 May**  
**the Unicorn,**  
Gunthorpe, Notts
- 18 May**  
**the Rockingham Arms,**  
Rotherham, South Yorks
- 20 May**  
**the White Horse,**  
Hutton Cranswick, East Yorks
- 21 May**  
**the Original Oak,**  
Headingley, West Yorks
- 22 May**  
**the Royal Hotel,**  
Great Harwood, Lancs
- 23 May**  
**The Southern,**  
Chorlton, Greater Manchester

“As we go into this election, all the three parties are friends of big business, friends of supermarkets. Cameron says he’s a friend of small business, but he isn’t. So there’s no choice there that will save the countryside.”

So, will it ever be happy hour again for the pub, I wonder. “It’s a bit depressing, but I’m a firm optimist,” says Heaton. “I think the pub will survive because the idea of the pub is too special.”