Grinding her pedals on an epic journey

“Keep your head down. Stare at the tarmac. Keep pedaling.”

Those words, plus a charity she cared deeply about, kept Kate Robertson going for seven grueling days through the greatest physical challenge of her life.

It started over dinner with friends in North Yorkshire, England. One of those friends had survived leukemia while another mentioned her brother had died from the disease.

Each year, Kate and her husband, Doug, sit down with their five children to choose a charity they want to achieve something for as a family that year.

After dinner that night she suggested to Doug that that look at what they could do for the blood cancer charity Cure Leukaemia this year. When he agreed, Kate leapt into action.

“I immediately went on the Internet and saw Cure Leukaemia has a big fundraising event each year, which is to cycle all 21 stages of the Tour de France,” she says, “so I signed my husband up. It should be an awesome experience, but it’s also 21 days of riding on your bike.”

Kate, feeling she also needed to do her bit for the charity, then committed to her own fundraising bike ride – an epic 1,000-kilometer journey from the southernmost tip of England to the most northern point of Scotland.

“At the beginning of the year, my training was going well,” says Kate, who’s part of Microsoft’s Customer Transformation team in the UK. “Then, about five weeks before the event I got COVID, which impacted my ability to train, followed by a slipped disc that caused a lot of lower-back pain.”

Kate decided to plug on anyway, packing lots of ibuprofen and heat patches for the ride of her life.

“The farthest I’d ridden in a day to that point was 100 kilometers,” she says. “Now I was going to be riding more than twice that, between 220 and 240 kilometers, every day.”
Her husband decided to ride along, figuring it was good training for the huge challenge he'd face a few months later. Kate's parents joined, too, as their support crew, following along in a little VW campervan.

"It was wonderful having their support and the support of people at home who looked after our kids."

Kate says, "The first day was quite lovely. It was great being on the bike. But then, about 100ks into the race, the rain began and pretty much didn’t stop for the next seven days."

She admits there were times she wanted to quit.

"It was toughest in the morning. With the four of us in the little van at night we didn’t get much sleep. Making yourself get back on the bike each day to do it all again led to some really dark moments. I just wanted everything to stop hurting."

Needless to say, Kate and Doug made it, raising more than 10,000 pounds for Cure Leukaemia. But a lot happened between the pain and the celebration. To hear the full inspirational story – including the surprising role Top Gun played in Kate's life – tune in to the latest Powered By The People podcast hosted by Zach Xu.