

# At the heart of your sport

**WHEN YOUNG, FIT** cyclists die suddenly, it can cause alarm. But should you worry about sudden arrhythmic death syndrome?

**T**HERE are plenty of health benefits to be enjoyed from regular cycling: it improves your cardiovascular system and keeps you trim and happy, simultaneously reducing the risk of heart disease, strokes, obesity and diabetes. However, repeated and strenuous exercise also puts a greater strain on the ticker, and herein lies a very small risk.

In recent years, two talented cyclists, John Ibbotson and Adrian Hawkins, have been among several top-level athletes to pass away in sudden and tragic circumstances. They were victims of the rare sudden arrhythmic death syndrome (SADS), a blanket term for the various and wide-ranging causes of cardiac arrest. As is more often the case for under 35s, their deaths were due to unseen, inherited conditions.

Dr John Rawlins, a registrar of cardiology at King's College, confirms that while SADS does not occur often — affecting between 0.5 and one in 100,000 athletes a year — there are ways of detecting it and therefore preventing some of these deaths.

"For peace of mind, if one would want to get tested, the tests are available and are effective at picking up the majority, but not all, causes of death," he says. He does advise that anyone who has ever experienced chest pain, felt their heart racing or fainted during sport should go for a test.

Every time someone dies in a marathon a sensationalist story is headlined 'Jogging kills', but although exercise is a proven trigger of SADS, almost tripling the risk, Dr Rawlins stresses that there is no need for hysteria

**SADS stats**  
SADS will affect between 0.5 and one in 100,000 athletes a year, but for peace of mind you can have an ECG scan for just £35

"There are ways of detecting SADS and preventing some of the deaths"

## OUR ECG EXPERIENCE

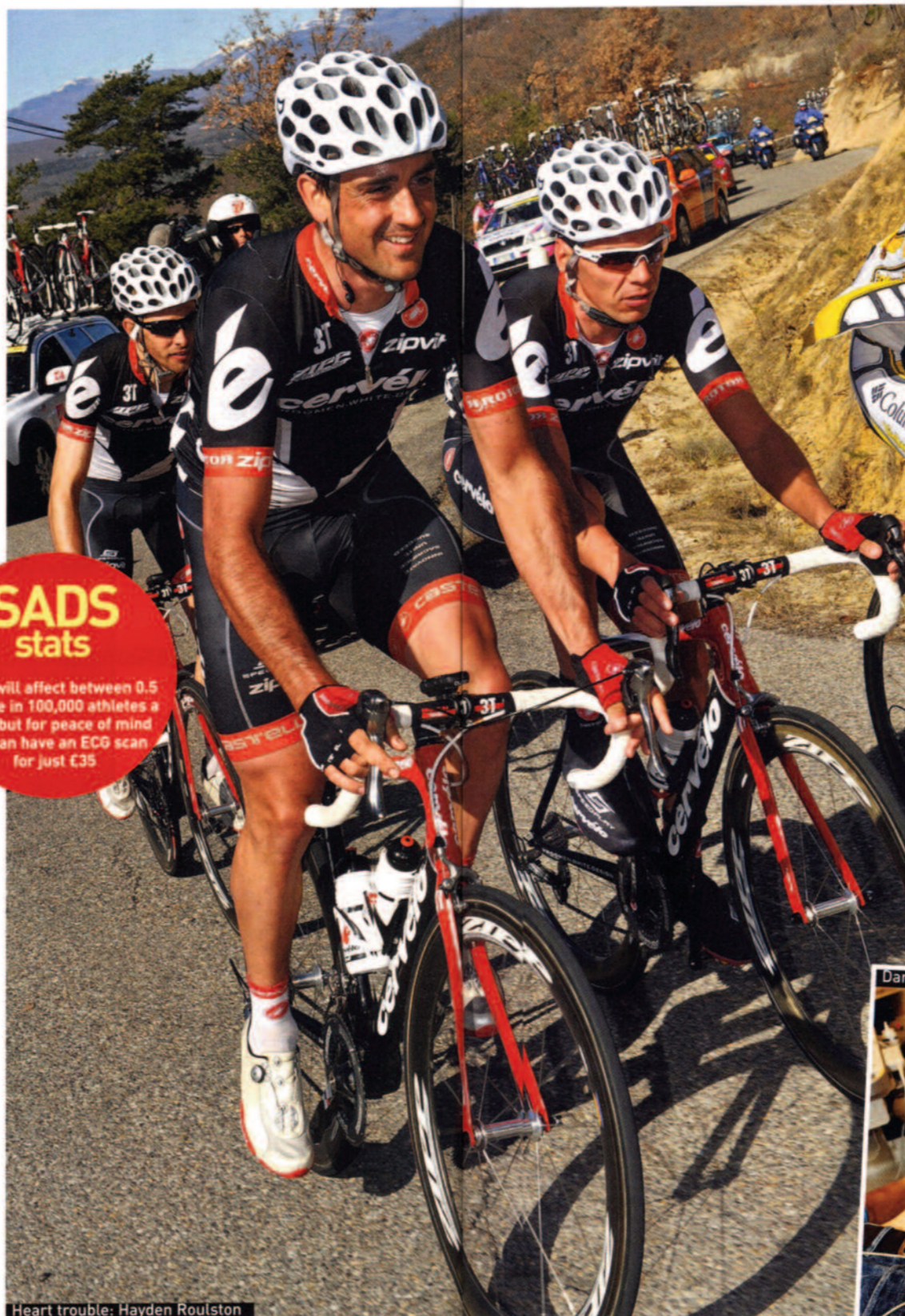
### CW gets screened

CW visited Cardio Direct on Harley Street for a sports screen. Having tested everyone from top Premiership football and rugby players to Olympic athletes, we were in safe hands here. After filling out a brief questionnaire and having a blood pressure measurement taken, electrodes were placed on the chest for the ECG — the most common way of discovering abnormalities.

The echocardiogram (ECHO) — an ultrasound — was carried

out to provide some idea of the structure of the heart, such as muscle thickness and chamber size. All in all, the screen was done quickly and easily within an hour.

Young, fit and healthy, with no personal or family history of heart problems, CW wasn't expecting the test to detect anything. A week later, the detailed results arrived at my house and obliged — nothing to worry about. Now, that's peace of mind in a relative heartbeat.



Heart trouble: Hayden Roulston

## RAISING SADS AWARENESS

### The John Ibbotson Fund

JOHN Ibbotson was a much-liked professional, who notably rode for Men's Health and Belgian squad RDM before founding his own cycle coaching business. He passed away suddenly in September 2005 at the age of 27, having suffered from the congenital condition arrhythmogenic right ventricular cardiomyopathy (ARVC). A fund has been set up in his name to help support young British racers on the continent and to raise awareness about sudden cardiac death in the young. As part of the scheme, supported riders this year Daniel Patten and Tom Copeland were each given a thorough heart screening before going abroad. For more details, visit [www.johnibbotsonfund.com](http://www.johnibbotsonfund.com).

or to stop taking part in sport.

"Have we ever excluded anyone from playing sport? Two out of thousands," he emphasises. "In terms of an entire population of 60 million, the benefits of exercise in terms of reduction of cardiac diseases and diabetes, and everything else, outweigh the relatively small risk of dying while doing it."

Cardiac testing is able to flag up hidden or congenital heart problems, so that they can be acted upon. The

basic test involves taking an electrocardiogram (ECG) to detect the electrical activity and profile of the heart.

Currently, screening is only a staple of the top-tier professional sportsman's medical, as British guidelines for amateur sportsmen lag behind the continent. Many seasoned sportivistes will know that a valid doctor's certificate is a prerequisite for entry into many foreign events. In Italy, an amateur cyclist must have an ECG before obtaining his racing licence.

It seems effective too. Research suggests that this has reduced incidents of sudden death by 89 per cent. Considering this, pre-participation screening is an issue that British Cycling has comparatively failed to address.

### Should amateurs get tested?

Dr Rawlins works closely with Cardiac Risk in the Young (CRY), a charity pushing to raise awareness of SADS, which annually screens thousands of people between the ages of 14 and 35. Their research suggests that one in 600 people will have a serious life-threatening condition. For instance, Cervélo Test Team rider Hayden Roulston and Sean Yates have both had enforced lay-offs due to heart problems. CRY deputy chief executive Steve Cox further suggests that, "About one in 100 will have a condition that it's good for them to know about because it could cause them complications later on in life, if not immediately life-threatening." At a one-off payment of £35 for an ECG, it serves as cheap peace of mind, too.

### What is SADS?

SADS is an all-encompassing term for cases of non-traumatic and unexpected death. It usually involves an abnormal heart rhythm, resulting in no blood being pumped from the heart, leading to sudden loss of consciousness or death.

## Cardio Direct special offer

CYCLING Weekly readers can get 20 per cent off a cardiac sports screen. To make your appointment call 020 7935 9303 or email [appts@cardiodirect.co.uk](mailto:appts@cardiodirect.co.uk) and quote CW CD1. Visit [www.cardiodirect.co.uk](http://www.cardiodirect.co.uk) for further details.



Dan Lloyd undergoes ECG testing

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