

THOUSANDS of cyclists pedalled over the finish line in Priory Park, Southend, yesterday after riding all the way from London.

There were refreshments, sports massage and music greeting the cyclists at the end of the 58-mile route, which started in Victoria Park, East London, and takes in much of Essex's countryside.

It was the ninth annual event, organised by the British Heart Foundation to help raise funds and awareness for the charity.

Thousands of cyclists, young and old, took part, either racing the route and beating their personal best, or taking it slow and enjoying the scenery.

Nick Le-Mon, 20, persuaded his friend Jamie Kennedy, 19, to take part with him just two months ago, leaving them little time to train.

They decided to do the ride dressed as the characters from the 118 directory inquiries advertisement.

Mr Kennedy, of Blythe Road, Shoebury, said: "He asked me if I wanted to do it and I said yeah.

Annual bike ride attracts plenty of riders to support British Heart Foundation

"Then, when I got back from holiday he told me it was 58 miles!

"The hills were a killer – although it was fun going back down them."

Mr Le-Mon, of Herbert Road, Shoebury, said: "We always go to parties in fancy dress as a double act and thought we'd do the race as the 118 men.

Members of Southend Wheelers bike group did the ride in bright yellow jerseys.

Our youngest rider is 13, while our oldest is in his 70s. It is a really good route and we had excellent weather

Graham Pearl said: "This is the third year we've taken part. It is a nice social event for us.

"Our riders got times between three and five hours. Our youngest rider is 13, while our oldest is in his 70s.

"It is a really good route and we had excellent weather. It was been a great day."

Tom Carroll, 31, from Dagenham, stood out from the crowd with his green mohican hairstyle.

Five years ago he was knocked off his motorbike on the A12 and doctors told him he would never walk again.

Defying their predictions, he now enters as many bike events and marathons as he can.

He said: "I've already done eight events this year, I did a marathon last week.

"I just really enjoy it – I'm a glutton for punishment."



■ Yellow jersey – Southend Wheelers had 22 entrants in the race