

BY  
**PADDY  
HEANEY**



**F**ORMER Antrim captain Anto Finnegan has hailed the efforts of the charity cyclists who have restored his faith in humanity.

Since being diagnosed with motor neurone disease in August 2012, the 40-year-old has set up a Trust (DeterMND), which aims to raise awareness of the condition.

The latest event, organised by DeterMND, took place on Sunday when 125 cyclists rode from Casement Park to Croke Park.

"People were there and cycling wasn't there first, second or even third sport. But they were prepared to put themselves out there. They had the courage to put that effort in and see it through," said Finnegan.

"To see people doing that was very humbling, both for me and my wife, Alison.

"You can argue about all the things which go on in the world, but it does restore your faith in humanity when you see things like that happening.

"It makes you realise that there are more good people in this world than bad."

Finnegan was keen to pay tribute to the organisers of the event.

"A bike ride of this scale doesn't happen by accident. Paul Stevenson and the organising team did a fantastic job.

"To make the event a successful day and safe day took a lot of hard work. We had 125 cyclists of varying degrees of ability. That's not easy because I have done something similar myself.

"I can't begin to thank the organising group for the work they put in. That work and support has not been missed by me and my wife, Alison."

It proved to be a long day for the father-of-two. At 7.30am, he provided the countdown outside Casement Park. The St Paul's clubman was then waiting in Croke Park when the first riders arrived shortly after 2pm.

Due to entries from novice cyclists, Finnegan was still in Croke Park when people were arriving nine



■ **ON YER BIKE:** 130 cyclists gathered at Casement Park on Sunday morning to take part in the Casement to Croke Park challenge in aid of DeterMND Trust

Picture: **Seamus Loughran**

# PEDAL POWER

*Finnegan 'humbled' by effort of charity cyclists*

hours after they had set off from Belfast.

After reaching GAA headquarters, participants moved to Na Fianna's clubrooms where they were able to shower, change and eat. Transport then ferried cyclists and bikes back to St Paul's clubrooms.

"After Na Fianna, we drove back to Belfast and we were able to meet the people coming off the bus," said Finnegan.

Despite their efforts in the saddle, a party quickly got underway at St Paul's.

"I was out of there for about 10, but I think people were there a lot later," said Finnegan.

Relieved that everyone got home safely, Finnegan said the event was a

great success.

"From a Trust point of view, we are absolutely delighted. The objective of the day was to raise awareness. We got good publicity in the build-up to the event.

"Then on the day itself, there was the whole social media element to it went very well."

With approximately 120 people in Northern Ireland suffering from motor neurone disease, Finnegan hopes his Trust will also lead to a higher level of government support.

"It is a secret disease," he said.

"Outside of people who have experienced it first or second hand, there is very little known about it.

"There is very little awareness of it. It's not talked about. From a

government funding point of view, the funding for research and patient care is non-existent. People have to rely on sponsorship or donations from the MND Association."

Apart from raising awareness, Finnegan's charity is also raising funds for the MND Association, a charity that supports people who have been diagnosed with the condition.

"We have ear-marked a couple of event which are specific for the MND Association. We've already made a few donations to the Association. We have about 70 people taking part in the Belfast Marathon and they money they raise will make up the next donation," he said.

■ **Against the Breeze P63**