

# Susan Nicholson

Rheumatoid arthritis severely limits Susan's ability to get around, especially out into green spaces – unless she's on her **Surly Pugsley**



**Above:** With its ultra low-pressure tyres, the Pugsley offers very low-impact exercise  
**Bottom:** The track from above

**T**he standing joke was that I was the person who worked for a bike company and didn't ride a bike," Susan says. She works for Socialtrack, a Cycling UK-affiliated community enterprise that runs the Wishawhill Wood Pump Track in North Lanarkshire, and for Club 365, which provides free 'school' meals to children in the holidays at the same venue. "Come and have fun with us on the bikes and we'll give you a square meal," is how Susan describes the partnership.

"Socialtrack was founded when they asked the kids in Craigneuk, one of the most deprived areas in Scotland, what they wanted," she says. "They said 'a bike track'. The council spent £300,000 building what's now one of the best, most-used pump tracks in the UK."

It's been open since April last year. "The kids absolutely love it," Susan says. "Cycling was not open to them before this. Cathkin Braes [the trail centre near Glasgow] is amazing but you need a car to get there. Whereas we're 100 yards from a council estate."

At the Wishawhill track kids can, as

## Tech Spec SECONDHAND SURLY PUGSLEY

- **Cost:** £700 (new from £2,200). "I thought: 'I can sell that for what I paid for it, if it doesn't work out.'"
- **Adaptations:** Brake levers moved. "Everybody who gets on it says the brakes are in the wrong place. But they're not; they've been adjusted for my hands." Tyres set up tubeless. "And they had to take 1/4 inch off the seatpost because I need it a bit lower."

Susan puts it, "grab a helmet, borrow a bike, and have a go." Some are getting competitive and want to set up a BMX racing team. On 17th August, Wishawhill Wood hosts a round of the pump track world championships.

## Back on a bike

Yet Socialtrack is about much more than sport. "Antisocial behaviour in the area dropped last summer," Susan says. "There were no nuisance fires. In terms of what it's saved the police and the fire service, the track had paid for itself by September."

Susan was already volunteering with Club 365 when Socialtrack opened next door. They needed someone to help with the admin. Susan stepped up. "I knew the kids," she says, "because I'd been in the neighbourhood."

For a long time, Susan was a passive observer to the cycling going on. "I have problems standing, so I used to sit on a bike at the track – Fred's Surly Instigator. I used to think 'When my joints get a bit better, I could just about have a go at this.'"

"I found the Surly Pugsley online. It's really stable and easy to ride. The boys have set it up tubeless, so it has even lower pressures in the tyres than you would normally have for a fat bike. It'll go up a kerb and it won't jolt your hands. Whereas a full-suspension bike, if it bottoms out, it's still going to cause a jerk. And any impacts are bad with rheumatoid arthritis."

"I had ridden a bike before but not since I was diagnosed four years ago. I'm now on it 20 minutes a day, and I'm down one dose of painkillers; the more you move with arthritis, the better you are."

"There's a muddy gravel path down the side of the pump track. I couldn't walk 60 yards along that because my ankles are so bad, but I can now ride a quarter of a mile down it. I can get to spaces that are green. I can have five minutes sitting under the trees in the peace and quiet."

Susan was the winner of the 'Exceptional Individual – Community Project' category at the 2019 Cycling UK Volunteer Awards. See [cyclinguk.org/susan-nicholson-social-track](http://cyclinguk.org/susan-nicholson-social-track). Find out more about Socialtrack at [socialtrack.co.uk](http://socialtrack.co.uk).

