

He became Scottish champion at time trialling and road racing. Tall and rangy, it was on the climbs that he excelled. He began to race on the continent, riding Paris-Lens, then in 1951 earning a place in the Viking team for the Tour of Britain. This was a 1,400-mile, two-week race that started in London, went up to Glasgow, then returned to London. Steel dominated, winning three stages, including the one to his home city, and beating Alec Taylor by almost seven minutes to win overall.

Over the winter an invitation arrived for a British team to ride the Peace Race and Steel was selected with five others, including another Scot, Ian Greenfield. Steel knew nothing about the race but set about getting fit, searching out the west of Scotland's worst roads to prepare for the poor surfaces of eastern Europe. His Peace Race victory helped land Steel a professional contract with the Viking team, based in Wolverhampton. It was here that he met Peggy, the sister-in-law of his mechanic at the Peace Race, Bob Thom, who would become his wife of 62 years.

Steel was 26 when he began the Tour de France in the first British team to be invited, but it wasn't a happy experience. He fell victim to team politics and didn't finish. His cycling career ended the following year but another life beckoned and, in tandem with Peggy, they travelled and lived for many years in boats – sailing became his new passion – and motorhomes: France, Spain, Majorca and America, the US and Canada. Eventually they settled back in Scotland, in Largs.

Steel didn't entirely lose touch with the cycling world. In May he was guest of honour at the Scottish road race championships in Ayr. He turned up with Peggy and was an enthusiastic spectator and a boyish, charming raconteur, only too happy to recall his Peace Race win, his experiences as a teammate of the great Swiss, Hugo Koblet, and the day the three-time Tour winner, Louison Bobet, told him to raise his saddle. He seemed easily able to tap into the enthusiasm and excitement he felt as a teenager for the exotic world – and the illicit, guilty pleasures – of professional cycling.

And he had no regrets, he said. "Oh no. I moved on from cycling, but when I raced I had tunnel vision. All I wanted to do was to be a good bike rider, which I proved."

Steel is survived by his wife, Peggy, two children, Nicola and Roddy, and two grandchildren. In accordance with his wishes, shared with Peggy two days before he died, he will be buried in the full kit of his first club, Glasgow United – shirt, shorts and musette – alongside a small bottle of his favourite whisky, Lagavulin, and a peace pipe presented to him by the Pickwick Bicycle Club.