

What about the trucks?!?

Peter McCallum

There are two types of people in the world. Those who have cycled along the Bruce Highway at night and those who worry about the trucks...



A couple of years ago, when Stuart Dowell suggested finding the perfect route for smashing the 770 km Oppy 24 hour record, I thought about western Queensland. It's dead flat once you get to the other side of the black stump, perfect terrain for such a memorable ride. But the wind is another thing. I had a look at the alignment of airport runways and saw they were almost random. Weather Bureau data confirmed it. The wind is unpredictable, especially a few weeks in advance.

Where else could we find a place to ride? Right under my nose of course. The coast between Rockhampton and Townsville is just as flat as out west and, as any cyclist could tell you, the wind blows from the south-east all day, every day. I told Stuart I had found the route. His immediate response was, "What about the trucks?"

That played on my mind quite a bit. I have ridden from Mackay to Airlie Beach along the Bruce and had no problems. But that was in the daytime. What would it be like at night? Fortunately I was holidaying in Cardwell last year. As we walked back to our accommodation I noticed that we had strolled along the entire length of the town at 9 pm and not a single vehicle had passed us. The Bruce at night wouldn't be a problem.

Well, as time went by and training plans were forgotten, the idea of a record breaking ride slipped off the agenda. But we still had this Oppy thing to do. I suggested Mackay to Townsville in a day and a few people came on board.

Then the weather started looking nasty. March is not the best month to run an endurance event in the North Queensland. It's likely that a cyclone could be smashing into the coast or one could have just passed through, destroying roads and other infrastructure. The heat and humidity is also unfavourable at that time of year.

Two weeks before the Oppy (or as we call it up here, the TrOppy) I drove to Townsville. The wet season has been mild this year and the road was in pretty good shape but the heat was another thing completely. I could feel the intensity of the UV rays in the few moments it took to walk across a road in Townsville. Then on the way home it started raining. I mean real rain. I had trouble keeping the car driving in a straight line, trucks were producing bow waves that flew metres above my head. I couldn't see more than 50 metres ahead. Not the sort of conditions you want for a 400 km ride.

Over the next two weeks things began to improve. We had no more rain. The

mornings became a little cooler. Then on the Sunday prior to the ride I listened to the ABC radio news and they reported that a tropical cyclone was likely to form in the Coral Sea sometime during the week. I began feeling a little depressed.

Over the next few days I checked the synoptic charts frequently (every five minutes according to my partner Jacki). It wasn't so bad. In fact it was tremendous. Over the Oppy weekend, the cyclone was predicted to be sitting due east of us, far enough away to reduce the chance of rain to zero but close enough to create 30-40 km/h southerly winds. My hear sang! I told many people we were planning to ride to Townsville next weekend and they had two responses, "What about the trucks?" and "What about the trucks!"

I drive a truck for a living and I know that 99 per cent of other truckies are not angry red necks wanting to run us off the road. It turned out better than expected. Our two teams of three riders left Mackay at 7 am on Saturday and were treated with respect all the way to Townsville, 24 hours later. Every time a truck passed, they went to the other side of the road if possible. I think the Audax rules about wearing reflective vests and having good lights helped our cause, we were respecting them and we gained their respect.

Well how did the ride go? It was probably the easiest 400 of all time. We spent about one to two hours at each of the six controls. Rode at speeds approaching 40 km/h with little effort, in the end we had to slow down deliberately. We had a strong tailwind all day followed by a cool still night. The roads are in almost perfect condition, especially the last 100 km of hot mix from Ayr to Townsville. If we had been chasing the record, this would have been the time to do it. Maybe sometime in the future things will be as perfect again but I doubt it.



*Inaugural TrOppy participants:
Peter McCallum, David Adams, Phil Burnham, Peter Robertson, Jenny Townley, and Troy Forbes*

Four Decades

Anne Latimer

The challenge for 'Four Decades' was to become the first all-female team in Queensland to complete the Fleche Opperman All Day Trial.

The team

Anne Latimer: (48 yrs) our captain, who kept us on track and made us think about the planning for our ride with many breakfast meetings.

Deb Aitcheson: (49 yrs), our organisational expert, who made sure our food was correct and compartmentalised.

Holli Linklater: (39 yrs), our non-navigator, who provided us with many delightful, light hearted moments.

Lynne James: (63 yrs), our mother figure, who made sure we got going on Sunday morning.

The bikes

Our road bikes, three Pinarellos and a Merida, were outstanding on the journey. Despite weeks of practising how to take off the rear wheel and change out a flat, our bikes could not have performed better on the day. We were well stocked with repair equipment, tubes, gas canisters—even a spare tyre, sacrificing our water carrying ability in case something went wrong. As luck would have it, our equipment went unused, despite some moments of dread riding through smashed glass and rough road surfaces.

The preparation

We began training at the beginning of February, with about six weeks to go.

Our road preparation was hampered by very wet weather, but we were able to do at least two long rides as well as adding a couple of extra river loops to our usual weekend rides. All of our training was done together and we were fortunate to have access to indoor CompuTraining at MB Cycles in Milton. We also trained three times at altitude at the Brisbane Altitude Centre.

With no break in the rain, we embarked on a six-hour CompuTrainer session together. Not much fun for the derriere, and certainly not as exciting as being out on the road. The pain and suffering was tempered to some degree by a gourmet picnic provided by Deb. The food, wrapped and packed in individually named picnic bags, was to be a trial run for the main event.

We had unwavering support from Marcel Bengston from MB Cycles, who spread the word about our goals and gave us confidence that we could do the ride. Marcel supplied us with a support vehicle which our support team used to cart supplies to our checkpoints. The van also carried our bikes and our tired bodies home from Ipswich after the Oppy was all over.

Boulderstone supplied our high visibility jackets, bags for our gear and caps. We may have set another 'first'

when the man sized high viz vests went into the seamstress for alterations!

The ride

Our course commenced at MB Cycles at Milton and run through the northern suburbs and, then through Scarborough, Redcliffe, Sandgate, across the Gateway Bridge through the bayside suburbs back through the city to the overnight stop at Holli's place. The next leg started with a river loop (well known to Brisbane cyclists), through the bikeways to Springfield and then to the finish at Brothers in Ipswich.

At 8 am on 16 March 2013 we were physically and mentally ready. We started the ride wearing our pink kits so that motorists could identify us as women. This was a good decision as we were treated with courtesy and respect.

We completed the first leg of our journey at a good pace, through heavy traffic out to Chermside and then onto the Samsonvale loop. Our arrival at the Narangba checkpoint was spot on time. Our support vehicle was manned by a roster of six wonderful men, all of whom welcomed us with encouragement and support. It was comforting to see them waiting for us at each of our check points.

The second leg, from Narangba to Sandgate was testing in the heat of