

This was the biggest ride of the year for the 11 Queensland randonneurs who made their way to Perth. On the Saturday evening, most of the Queensland contingent got together for dinner, with Chris R cooking up a sensational roast. We are a close knit group, with five of us bunking together pre- and post-ride. The experienced campaigners of Brian H, Errol R and Gerry E gave the “virgins” a host of last minute survival strategies. The largest-ever Queensland contingent lined up on Monday 6 October for the 5th PAP. The riders who had conquered 1200 km before – Brian H (El Presidente), Gerry E (the Crazy Irishman), Errol R and Duncan M – were joined by a bunch of newbies – Anthony R (Ant), Chris R (Little Chris), Chris E (Big Chris), Alex M, Melvyn Y, Kym R and Mark R. All were full of equal parts excitement and trepidation. There were almost 110 starters from Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, USA, NZ and the UK. We started at 5 am on the banks of the Swan River near the centre of Perth in near perfect, albeit coolish, conditions. We were led out by two local pacemakers who were to limit the speed along the first 30 km of the bike path to 25 km/hr, but even they were a little over-excited by the occasion and we moved along nicely in a pellaton at 30 km/hr. Once the pace makers left, the speed increased even further and the field started to spread. The bike path out of Perth is very flat, in excellent condition, and there was not a single traffic light. It struck us that Brisbane could learn a thing or two about providing such facilities for riders. A highlight of the ride out of Perth was seeing two emus (emi?) beside the path. The first 280 km was flat – impossible to do in SEQ. A group of us were riding together – Alex M, Gerry E, Anthony R and Chris R. Due to the flattish nature of the course, a few of us achieved our fastest ever times for 200 km and 300 km, despite Gerry puncturing twice. We were hoping, though, we had not spent our lunch money too early..., as Gerry kept reminding us. We had a lucky break about 100 km in along a picturesque lake – an earth mover pulled in front of us going 35 km/hr and we drafted for a few easy km’s – unfortunately the advantage was probably offset by exhaust asphyxiation! Here we met up with a local Perth rider – Ruth – who was to be a companion for much of the ride. We were amazed with her gutsiness – she had only done three Audax rides previously – 2 x 100 km and 1 x 200 km events – but she was a regular ultramarathon runner. We said she had big Kahunas, and she appreciated the sentiment. The route travelling south along the coast was spectacular – at times riding along a bike path winding its way over the coastal dunes with the waves of the Indian Ocean crashing the shore. The route took us along the coastal towns of Bunbury and Busselton before heading inland where it started to get hilly. Most of the field slept at Nannup (366 km) and a few Qld riders – Gerry E, Ant R and Chris R went on to the longer sleep stop at Pemberton (442 km). This was pretty tough going, as Ant and Chris had not ridden this far before in a day and it was lumpy. The ride was stunning though, even in the dark, as we could see the towering karri trees looming in the moonlight. We arrived at midnight.

Heading off at 5 am in the morning, it was a cool 4°C and Ant and Chris were rugged up like eskimos, but the mad Irishman had a short jersey and nicks, commenting it was similar to riding in Ireland in summer. Chris and Ant were struggling through the undulations in the karri forests and Ant had concerns about DNFing if things didn’t improve. We were hoping that the advice of El Presidente would come true – that you can ride into form on longer rides. Gerry

offered some even simpler advice from his years of riding experience – “suck it up princess!” Thankfully, after 50 km of feeling like we were riding through mud, we started to lift. This was a short day (250 km) and we rode along the coast from Walpole to Albany (690 km). The climb to the accommodation at a girls’ school (the girls were gone) was a 20% pinch. Going “long” on the first day had its reward - we arrived at 4:15 pm and ready to hit the Albany pubs. One of the super vollies, Allison, lent us her car and we drove to Kmart to buy clothes as we didn’t want to attract attention in the pub in our nicks. Chris E joined us and we had a great steak dinner washed down with a few beers, with the mad Irishman drinking the pub dry of Guinness!

Off at 4 am, it was time to tackle Mt Clarence – an iconic landmark with a military history, overlooking the Southern Ocean. The climb was reasonably long and hit 20% near the summit. After 2 days riding, some were saving energy by walking. We then headed off through the Stirling Ranges National Park, which was ringed by mountains and native vegetation. We had to be careful of the massive road trains – with prime mover and three trailers – that were careening past. By this time our bums were getting pretty sore, and no amount of cream or double nicks would help. Ruth joined us again and we were amazed she was still riding, but she could not sit down. It was a reasonably long day in the saddle – 330 km – and was tough because of a strength-sapping headwind all day. We hit the wheat belt with its rolling hills and swaying fields of wheat. The countryside was much greener than we had anticipated, as the winter rains had been good. As we went through a small WA town, Broomehill, with our morale low and legs weary from battling the headwind, we saw an inviting pub that we figured would lift our spirits. The barmaid was from Ireland and her and Gerry were talking - unintelligibly to everyone else – about life in Ireland and Australia. After feeling suitably refreshed, we resumed at an increased tempo. Again there were two stops – a short one at Wagin (955 km) and a longer one at Williams (1015 km) where most stopped. We were pretty pleased to have reached 1000 km, but the job was not yet finished. Ant – being the responsible one – had an early night, but the Mad Irishman and Little Chris again hit the pub for beer and pizza.

We departed in the morning at 2:15 am for the final 215 km push into Perth. We felt reasonably strong but it was a bit rainy – the only wet weather on the ride. The first 115 km was hilly, but the weather cleared. Gerry was a hard taskmaster, pushing us to go faster, but showed his softer side by stopping to feed a horse. The 300 m decent in elevation into the final control was awesome, reaching speeds in excess of 60 km/hr. The entry into the control at Pinjarra (1150 km) was unusual, crossing a river on a narrow, wooden suspension bridge. Most of the last 85 km was then on the bike path. Gerry led the way, building to 45 km/hr for stretches, and we were in formation regularly taking turns on the front. One of the riders we passed at some speed jumped on our tail, but it quickly became apparent he was not keen to do a stint on the front. Gerry, in his friendly Irish way had a gentle word with our “friend” that if he didn’t do a stint on the front then he could b*gger right off! With the “wheel-sucker” now off the back, we pushed onto Perth. On the bikepath we were a bit fearful, as Gerry repeatedly did his characteristic “Toot! Toot!” as he was motioning like a locomotive driver blowing his whistle, signifying a mad dash at 45+ km/hr. We

made it to the finish at the South Perth Bowls Club (1235 km) at 10:50 am. Gerry was proud of his two “young” riders who had just completed their first 1200 in a touch under 78 hrs. We thoroughly enjoyed, during the course of the afternoon, welcoming Alex, Brian H, Mark R, Melvyn and Kym. Chapeau! For some who didn’t complete the event, they did the 215 km ride on the last day, and from all reports, thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

After the ride, Gerry phoned his wife Deborah and said we had “flown into Perth”. Deborah believed he had DNF’d for the first time, until he clarified we had ridden very fast in to Perth and not literally flown! We had a celebratory BBQ afterwards for the Qld contingent, where we could all discuss our ride. There were many lessons learnt and our conversation turned to the ultimate Audax Challenge – Paris-Brest-Paris (PBP) in 2015.

The route was scenic, the countryside varied, the weather ideal, and the ride was fantastically well organized. We would like to thank the vollies who would overnight in tents at controls, cook for us at the sleep stops, were surviving on less sleep than the riders, and were always helpful and cheerful. What a ride, what an experience, what a blast!!! Well done Audax Australia & in particular Audax WA for putting on such a fantastic ride. PBP here we come!!!

Ant R, Chris R, Gerry E