

## **PBP 2015 (Paris-Brest-Paris; 16<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> August, 2015)**

I met Ken from Montana in [Summum Bike](#) on the Tuesday before PBP. I bought lights and cleats and had the rear derailleur adjusted in final preparation for the big ride.

I checked out of the [Best Western The Wish Hotel, Guyancourt](#), at midday on Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> August, leaving my luggage in the Meeting Room. I rode about 4km to the [Velodrome-National-Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines](#), where I spent the afternoon waiting for the start and seeing other groups start. Riders who nominated finishing within 80 hours started from about 4pm. The “special” bikes, with “F” Frame numbers, including [recumbents](#), [HPVs](#), [tandem bicycles](#), tandem tricycles, a [crank-operated wheelchair](#), and some [Elliptigos](#), started at 5pm. All other riders who nominated 90 hours continued to start in waves of about 300. Riders who nominated an 84 hour finish time were due to start about 5.30am on the Monday, which I think would be a better time to start.

I had Frame number M063 and the “M” group started at 6:45 on Sunday evening. At about 6pm, we had to ride around the outside of the velodrome precinct to check in for final registration and then proceed to the “M” area below the velodrome. On the way to the check-in tent, we went past an ambulance where the paramedics were treating a woman who appeared to have come off her bike on a roundabout and broken her collar bone. At about 6.30pm we rode to the official start area in front of the main entrance to the velodrome and listened to French announcers telling the crowd something about the ride, presumably! There were about 340 “M” riders and we were led out by police cars and motor cyclists for the first 12 kilometres. It felt like a really fast start and I stopped to fill up my water bottles at a school in [Tremblay-les-Villages](#), 68 km from the start. The first official stop was at [Mortagne-au-Perche](#) at 139km where the volunteers had a BBQ organised to feed the riders. They were overwhelmed by the numbers, so service was slow. The local butcher and baker delivered more supplies while I was waiting. I had a “jambon et fromage” roll.

By the early hours of Monday morning I needed more than water to drink, so about 1am, I stopped at a pub in a village, which was open all night to cater for riders. I walked in and met Chris Richardson and said “You should be hours ahead of me!” but he replied that his knee had blown up after a knee reconstruction a couple of years ago. I asked how he was going to ride back to the start, but he was waiting for Chris Ellis who arrived a couple of minutes later. Chris Richardson shouted me two Cokes. I wished the two Chris’ all the best and continued. Somehow, I was unaware that I had slowed down considerably during the last 50km of the first 221km!? I arrived at the first Control at [Villaines-la-Juhel](#) at 6am, averaging a disappointing 19.7km/hr.

After some breakfast, I set off for [Fougeres](#), which is the first town in Brittany. I met Iain “Hampshire” Cox and rode with him for quite a while. During the day on Monday, there were a number of professional photographers from [Maidru Photos](#) taking pictures of all riders, which could be purchased after the ride. I arrived at Fougeres (310km) just before midday and had lunch.

The next stage was only 54 km to the [Tinteniac](#) Control (364km), where I arrived about 3.30 in the afternoon.

I had a meal at [Quedillac](#) (389km), then put my head down and slept at the dining table for less than an hour. When I awoke, I continued on to the next Control at [Loudeac](#) (448km). I arrived just before 9pm on Monday and had a shower (“douche”) to freshen up – the two paper towels provided were inadequate! After the shower, I put on a new cycling jersey, knicks and socks that I had in my pannier bag.

Iain and I rode on to [Saint-Nicolas-du-Pelem](#) (493km) where I had another meal and again fell asleep with my head on the dining table for almost 1 ½ hours. Iain “Hampshire” Cox slept on the floor like many other riders.

We awoke at the same time and rode together to the [Carhaix-Plouguer](#) Control (526km) where we arrived at about 4.30am on Tuesday. It was quite cold on this stage, so I put on the yellow silk tube that George’s wife, Anita, had very kindly made for me as sun protection for my head and neck, but my head over-heated so I had to remove it. Iain decided to ride on to Brest, but I had to have an “official” sleep because I was so tired. It was now just over 48 hours since I awoke in my hotel on the start day. I was desperate for a sleep but didn’t know where to find a “bed”. I met Dave Minter & George Row who told me where to find them. I had to walk across a dark oval, down an embankment toward a building that looked as though it was in complete darkness. When I reached the other side of the large building, there was a room with a light on. It was an office where I paid 4 Euro to sleep on a stretcher for two hours. They filled in a form with my “wake up time” and I was shown to a stretcher and given a sheet. I was asleep almost as soon as my head touched the stretcher, and when I was awoken, which seemed like about two minutes later, I felt relatively refreshed for the stage to Brest.

There seemed to be a long climb after Carhaix and I was overtaking quite a few other riders. I arrived at the [Brest](#) Control (618km) just before midday, and met Iain who was about to leave. I met Iain Cox again at about 2-3 other Controls and even saw him at lunch after the finish. We should have had our photo taken together after riding together for so long. I didn’t even know his family name – just that he works for the Hampshire County Council in England, but found it on an [unofficial web site](#) that has PBP 2015 results and [statistics](#).

After lunch at Brest, I started the return journey to Paris. Like many others, I stopped in the historic village of [Sizun](#) (654km) for a break. On the return journey, I saw more and more riders asleep in the grass next to the road. From my personal experience and observation, sleep deprivation was the major problem for most riders. I arrived back at the Carhaix-Plouguer Control (703km) just before 6pm for another meal.

A “secret control” had been set up in a hall at [Mael-Carhaix](#) where I arrived at 7.45pm.

I continued on to the next control at Loudeac (782km) where I arrived just after midnight on Wednesday. I paid 4 Euro for another 2 hour sleep on a stretcher at Loudeac, where they had 446 stretchers set up in a gymnasium. I was shown to Stretcher #316 and supplied with a sheet, which was insufficient. When I was woken up, I was feeling very cold and not particularly refreshed.

I rode on to the next Control at Tinteniac (867km) where I arrived for breakfast just before 8am.

On the next stage to Fougères (921km), I had my first 10 min sleep beside the road because of fatigue. Another rider stopped at the same time and a Victorian couple had a food stop on the other side of road. I arrived at Fougères just after 11.30am, for lunch. After lunch, I paid for a shower and changed into my last fresh jersey, knicks and socks.

Despite the shower at Fougères, I soon had to stop because of fatigue. After almost falling asleep on a descent, I dropped my bike and lay on my back in the grass with my helmet and sunglasses on. I woke up thinking I had slept for 2 ½ hours, so panicked and took off behind two riders, one of whom I realized after a couple of kilometres was Assoc. Prof. Mark Riley from the School of Chemistry & Molecular Biosciences at UQ, and a colleague, Steve, who rode the Perth-Albany-Perth 1200km ride last October. Even though they were riding fast, I thought I had to ride even faster to reach the next Control at Villaines-la-Juhel (1009km) in time. On this stage, I saw two cars ahead with their hazard lights flashing and could hear the siren of an ambulance behind me. As I rode past, one rider was administering CPR to another rider. I heard later that a German rider had suffered a heart attack. Not being on social media, I did not hear any further details. When I stopped for a short break, I checked my route directions to discover I had plenty of time (I must have slept for less than 2 hours!). I arrived at Villaines-la-Juhel (1009km) just before 7pm for dinner. My average speed was gradually reducing and was down to 13.9km/hr. As I arrived at this control, I met Dave Minter & George Row leaving on their tandem bicycle.

Fatigue meant more short sleeps beside the road. On the next stage to Mortagne-au-Perche, I stopped to buy a coffee in a small pub but fell asleep and spilt it on my thigh. The owner was very sympathetic and replaced the coffee free of charge. She looked at me and said “fatigue!”. Later, I bought a Red Bull in a mini supermarket, which I kept for later. My neck extensor muscles started to fatigue so I found it difficult to keep my head up sufficiently to see far enough ahead. This is known as [Shermer's Neck](#). I had restricted forward vision, which was a concern but I couldn't do much about it. I arrived at the Mortagne-au-Perche Control (1090km) just before 2am on the last day (Thursday), where I had the best meal of the ride – omelette & creamy mashed potato (generous helpings!). After another short nap at the dining table, I set off on the second last stage. In response, Mark Riley wrote. “I arrived with Steve, & we took our meals to the table you were sleeping at. Ate next to you, having an extended conversation with you. You were quite unresponsive. I should have taken a picture. We laid down for a couple of hours & when I got up (I won't say woke as I don't think I slept at all) you were gone.”

On the next stage, I had to drink the Red Bull, then had a free coffee at a roadside tent set up by volunteers, then had 2-3 “goos”, which did not produce the desired effect! I still found it difficult to keep my eyes open and maintain concentration, even though it had started raining about 2am. This was refreshing, but not enough! The rain continued until the finish. I could not afford to take a break. I arrived at [Dreux](#) (1165km; last control before finish) with only 12 minutes to spare (as I calculated it), so registered and got back on my bike for the last stage.

Going down a hill, the rider in front of me slipped on some raised bitumen and slid along the road in front of me. I managed to avoid him and went back to see how he was. He was a UK rider, John Rosbottom, who used to be an IT academic at Plymouth University. His bike appeared to be OK and he only had a slight graze on his knee. I stayed with him until the finish in case there was a delayed mechanical or psychological reaction, but everything seemed fine. Only 15 km from the finish, approaching Jouars-Ponchatrain, I heard the siren of an ambulance, which went past to treat a rider who had come off on the slippery road at a roundabout. John and I came in together at the National Velodrome just before 11am, but he beat me by 15 minutes officially because he was an “N” rider. I officially finished in 88h11mins, John (N152) finished in 87h56mins, and Iain Cox (N156), who had got away from me before Brest, finished in 87h21mins. We parked our bikes next to the [BMX track](#) and had lunch inside the National Velodrome. John is a vegetarian, so the chicken pasta did not suit him, and there was no alternative. We asked an Italian rider to take our photos with my Olympus camera, inside the Velodrome, exchanged e-mail addresses, and John took off to find a restaurant for lunch.

I went to collect my bike and when I was leaving, I saw a rider who looked as though he was suffering more than I felt. I asked how he was, and he said he’d be OK, but “could I take his photo because he was alone”. We took each other’s photos – I took his with his iPhone and he took mine with my Olympus. Looking at the photo later, it was obvious that I had a sore neck. He was from Arizona.

### Observations/Highlights

- The ease of navigation was very helpful – the entire route out and back was signposted with every intersection marked with arrows, which were different colours for “Brest” & “Paris”.
- The French people on the side of road during the day and night clapping and cheering was very encouraging.
- I was amazed that, in addition to the official controls/food-sleep stops supported by volunteers, there were “gratuite” stops where coffee, water, food were provided free of charge (sometimes all day & all night).
- It was amazing – I had ridden 1230km and there was always at least one other rider in sight, often a snake of red lights at night, for a kilometre or more.

After lunch, I rode slowly back to the Hotel without sitting on the seat, and checked in early. I left my bike in the meeting room, which had been converted to a bicycle shed with the carpet covered by plastic sheeting, and went to my room. I showered and went straight to bed about 2pm. I woke after 6am the next morning, having missed the official post-PBP dinner! Except for a few brief bladder-emptying episodes, I had slept for more than 16 hours. I had to put my riding clothes back on when I woke, to go down to collect my clothes/bike bag from the meeting room.

I felt (and looked) terrible but had another shower and a good breakfast. I was generally very fatigued, and my neck was sore, my right ankle was very stiff, and my fingers had “pins & needles”, especially on the left hand. The forefinger and middle finger (digits 2 & 3) were the worst affected. My toes also had “pins & needles”, but less so.

After lunch on Friday, the Swedish and Danish groups left in their coaches.

The Hotel restaurant was not open on Friday night, which was probably good, because it meant that I had to walk the 1.6k to the grill restaurant, and then return.

After breakfast on Saturday, I disassembled my bike in the “bike shed” and put it in the bike bag. I then took the bike bag back to my room and finished my packing.

After checking out at midday, I waited a few hours before asking the hotel receptionist to call a taxi for the airport. It was a Citroen C5 which could not fit my bike bag without laying the back seats flat.

I arrived at [Charles de Gaulle Airport](#) about 6 hours before the flight was due to leave. I was glad that I did not leave 24 hours earlier – I felt much better than on Friday.

When I returned to Brisbane, some people asked if I felt like giving up at any stage and I thought “Not for one second did I consider the possibility of not making it. I had Plan A to complete the ride in under 90 hours and there was no Plan B!”

Almost a month after the ride Mark Riley told me about an unofficial site that had much better information than the official web site. It provided all [individual results](#) and [statistics](#) from PBP 2015:

Overall there were 5,820 riders who started (T), of whom 4570 finished (F). There were 173 riders who completed the course but were over their nominated time limit (OTL), and 1,077 riders abandoned (DNF). The success ratio (SR) was therefore 78.5%. Equivalent figures for my age group (60-64 years) were 711 (T), 554 (F), 19 (OTL) & 138 (DNF) for an SR of 77.9%. There were 81 Australian riders, with 63 (F), 3 (OTL) & 15 (DNF) for an SR of 77.8%. Of the 9 Queensland riders, 8 finished, with 1 DNF for an SR of 89%.

## Queensland Results

<b>Rider (Age)</b>	<b>Nominated Time</b>	<b>Finish Time</b>
Nick BOOTH (46)	80 hours	48h12
Ant RICHARDSON (45)	80 hours	61h07
Gerry EGAN (53)	80 hours	74h37
Paul CRIBB (56)	80 hours	79h25
Chris RICHARDSON (42)	80 hours	DNF*
Mark RILEY (55)	84 hours	79h28
Nick BURNETT (30)	84 hours	80h53
George ROW (70)	90 hours	87h38**
Vaughan KIPPERS (63)	90 hours	88h11

\* abandoned on Stage 1 (sore knee from previous injury)

\*\* rode stoker on tandem with Dave Minter (UK - 48) as captain. Dave successfully completed his 5<sup>th</sup> PBP in a row.