

It's all fun

Pat Lehane

What can I say, 2008 was not a good year for me. Hurt my knee, on the Oppy and it was starting to come good after five months when the mechanical gremlins hit. Eventually the mechanical problem was fixed when Specialized came to my rescue and replaced the frame under warranty, which was great considering that the damage was not a direct result of manufacture...thank you Specialized, thank you iRide, Toowoomba. However I received notification of the warranty replacement the day before the start of the GSR. Not a good year so I was looking forward to the Parkes 1000 km ride. What follows are my distorted memories of a ride with really great people: Martin Pearson, Warren Page, Doug Kennedy, Howard Dove, Rebecca Morton and Richard Pinkerton.

I arrived in Dapto about 2 pm the Friday before the ride. All of us had booked into the Elsinor Motel and the manager let us leave our cars there until we returned from the ride. What a top motel, say no more. Being from Queensland and the first time in Dapto, I went and had a look at the Macquarie Pass. Looked like fun. By the time I returned and had a power nap the others had started to arrive. A few of us went up the road for a Thai dinner and then off to sleep before 10 pm. By 4:45 am, we were up and on our way to the Dapto

train station for the 5am start. Henry, who organised the ride, went through the mandatory requirements of filling out of the ride forms, the safety check and mandatory group pictures. His final instructions were to interpret the map and notes the same as if driving a car (sic).

We were over the Pass and riding into Robertson before I knew what was happening. This may have been because of the fog. The fog cleared by the first checkpoint at the Sutton Forest servo.

Then it was out on to the mighty Hume and heading towards Goulburn, checkpoint two and lunch. Martin, Howard and Warren were the fast group with Bec, Richard, Doug and I in the sane group.

In the past, I have driven past Goulburn on the way to somewhere else but I won't do that again. Not now that I know about the Green Grocer bicycle shop/grocer shop/café. This may be a case of business diversification gone crazy or multi-tasking of business opportunity to the extreme but

Reflective vests? Check. Lining up for the start, Martin, Pat, Warren, Doug, Howard, Bec and Richard



Photo: Sandy Vigar

it sure is a neat place to stop and eat. The advantage is that while having dinner one could have one's bike attended to. And that is what happened. Bec dropped her bike in for some TLC to have the carrier fixed after one of the rear supports failed due to fatigue. How's that? Get your bicycle serviced and good food too.

After lunch we were back on the road and heading towards checkpoint three at Yass. Did I mention the head wind? No thought not...too bloody obvious. As was the heat. The thing that impressed me about now was the safety factor on this ride. I hadn't been looking forward to riding on the Hume with the heavy traffic but there was a wide shoulder and ample space for two bikes to ride two abreast. It was much better than I had anticipated. What I hadn't anticipated was the hills on this section of the Hume, basically from the Sutton Forest servo to Yass. These things are long, high and seem to take forever to get over. Not specifically steep gradients just one after another. Reach a curve and see the road continue to climb into yet another curve and when that curve was reached the scenario was repeated, climb to the curve, climb to the curve, climb to the curve.

Yeah!!! Yass. Food and a rest at the Cat Café. In Yass I felt a little off and decided to remain there for the night and catch up with the ride later. The others pushed on to Boorowa for a feed of pasta and finally into Cowra about 11 pm. The fast group was there a bit before that. Sunday's start was 4 am with the turn around point in Parkes coming up around noon. I rolled into Cowra mid-afternoon. The fast group was back in Cowra by 9:30 pm and all were back by 11 pm. I was told the ride back into Cowra from Parkes was notable due to the series of ridges ridden over before arriving back in town. When the last ridge was crested the town and its lights lay out below on the plain. There were more lights than expected and they covered an area greater than anticipated, a neat thing to see after 700 km in the saddle.

All had a shower and hot meal before heading for bed. Ever noticed how two days in the saddle are conducive to sleep and funny walks? The agreed time to head off was 5 am. For every positive there is a negative. The Second Law of Cycling meant that during the night the wind changed direction and the tail wind home was cancelled.

Out of bed and on the road by 5:30 am. It was a pleasant ride from Cowra to Yass. No steep or long climbs and good ride for the start of the third day. Noon found us back at the Cat Cafe in Yass for lunch. We were on the road by 1 pm and a bit over a couple of hundred to go. The town of Gunning is about halfway between Yass and Goulburn and well worth the stop on a hot day. The day was not so hot, in fact it was a bit overcast and much cooler than the previous two days but never let a chance go by. Then on to Goulburn.

There comes a time in the day when one gets tired of pedalling down hill—especially big hills where one expects to coast—just to make 20 km/h. The ride into Goulburn was one such day. But on

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the bright side if you are ever 35 km out of Goulburn on the western side and want to know if you have a good head wind check out the wind turbine. Don't know much about wind turbines but on this day there was wind but no turn in the turbine.

Back to Goulburn and all were travelling OK, but the Green Grocer Café was closed. Got to love Goulburn, it also has the Paragon Café and the Big Merino, but I didn't stop there. I had never heard of The Paragon Café and it was where we stopped for dinner. The café was right out of the fifties. There was a great big wooden bar that ran down the left hand side where one could order a milkshake or a meal and sit down to enjoy it. There were a number of round tables in the middle of the café and down the right hand wall were the booths. The decor was soo cool and the staff wore uniforms that went well with the fifties theme. The seating capacity must cater for about a hundred people. The place was awesome and I think the people of Goulburn know it. We were there at dinner time on a Monday night and it was more than half full. I was told the food tasted as good as the place looked. If you live in Goulburn or have been there this is not new to you but it sure was new to me. Well worth the trip just to visit the Paragon Cafe.

It was about fifty-seven kilometres to the next checkpoint and then seventy-seven kilometres to the train station and last checkpoint. But since we were all staying at the Elsinor it was decided to make that the final checkpoint. Another kilometre or so is not that important in one thousand. My navigation errors usually account for many more than that. I should mention about now that Henry did a great job of organising the ride and Sandy, Martin's partner, had been at every checkpoint with water and any extra gear we had asked her to move around for us. The final checkpoint was where we put on some cold weather gear for the run out to Roberson and the drop down the Macquarie Pass. Hence the need to mention Sandy, thanks Sandy. The fast group was still out in front and the sane group had a nice warm drink and some pasta before moving on to Robertson.

For me, the run down the Macquarie Pass was simply fun, as much as, but a different type of fun to visiting the Green Grocer or Paragon Café. I put my helmet spotlight on at the Sutton Forest servo checkpoint so all I had to do was look around the switchback or corner to see the road. This was not possible with a handlebar mounted light so I had light where the others had darkness but most of the fun was in going 8 km or so without having to pedal. Once we were back on the coastal plain it was a matter of simply getting back to the motel. Bec, Richard and I were the last to arrive in Dapto around 3 am.

One of the things that attracts about a long distance Audax ride is the time spent with interesting people. Some can sing albeit they may only know half the words to one song. Others talk about stuff that interests them or the things they have done and the occasional philosophical deep and meaningful about Audax riding. Maybe it's the camaraderie and the doing of something that's entirely normal, given the distances are not so average, but in a world of extreme sports and adrenaline junkies there is something satisfying about pushing the physical envelope just a little. Not so much to see what you can do but each ride is different, the people you ride with, your condition, the condition of the bike and the weather all play a part. All need to come together to successfully complete ride...maybe that's the challenge, good preparation and a bit of luck. Me, I'll take all the luck I can get.