

Excitement ran through my veins as the registration opened for TdT1200 (The tour of Tasmania) I had learnt that Giro 1000 had slipped into history a year or two earlier. I entered then and there, paid my \$500 with relief that I had secured a place, as this was an iconic Australian 1200 and places can fill quickly. Now I sat back and waited for the next 3month for the start date of 18 February 2016, and questions began rise, my sanity for one, among other things, am I fit enough ? Should I be riding a 1200, now that I have a daughter? I even sent an e-mail to Andrew Johnson.

I negotiated with my wife, and got the green light for a lazy 1200, I got supporting words of encouragement from Brian when I questioned my sanity, and Brian said he had entered. I rode the Alpine classic ultimate 320 with 6000m of elevation just to be sure.

There we were, the three QLD contenders, Mark Riley, Brian Hornsby and Andrew Bragg with 27 riders from Australia and abroad. International riders, we had 1 Kiwi, five Americans, 2 Japanese, 1 German, and 1 Norwegian rider. Two female riders braved Tassie's formable Terrain.

Lights blazing, all but mine as I had a less then bright Chinese light, that later fell apart (another story another day) Memories of 2009 (Giro) were flashing back and then we started from Salamanca Place in Hobart at 0500. One peddle down to what was going to be a truly amazing 1200.

I was really looking forward to this ride, as Tassie is such a beautiful island state and also the fact that my good mate Vinny from America was riding, back for another crack from 2014.

Brian had some issues with the derailleur hanger of his bike getting bent in transit to Hobart. A visit to McBain Cycles, the local Giant dealer, came to the party and straightened the hanger for free. Friendly service for the cycle tourist.

With 14500m of elevation gain waiting, and 1200km. How do you prepare for a 1200km ride? A few basics make sure you have new tyres and good quality tubes. Bike is serviced and working properly. Good quality lycra, (not Chinese, no matter how cheap it is) Food and Chamois cream, have consecutive day riding under the belt and lastly but not least 3 pairs of ear plugs.

Day 1. 354km, 3980m

We were lead out from Salamanca place by a few locals before we were on our own. My riding plan kicked in; find riders of a similar pace. Luck was on my side, pretty soon I was riding at the front with Adam Morely USA, and Jeremy Rye from NZ. All the hills were fun and there were plenty on day one.

Feeling good as one normally does on the first day of the ride, I was wearing my good \$12 lycra shorts from China, so confidence was up. Riders came and went from our Pelton of three, our first control at 79km Orford had past, a pretty little town on a Esplanade, we were now coming into St Helens, a sea side town at 255km I asked Andrew Johnson at the control who was in front and he replied that we were the first riders.

There was a long climb leading out from St Helens and water was waiting at a Pub that may be open depending on our travel time. Adam, passed me with some ease on the climb and waited for Jeremy and I at the top, a beautiful climb in day light I thought of the riders that would be navigating this at night. The pub was still open , and built by the looks in the early 1800s, radiating character and felt as though it was asking you to stay for a six pack or two, we downed our soft drinks and we were on the way again.

We rode into Scottsdale sleep control in daylight at 1957, Amund Lybeck from Norway had passed us after St Helens somewhere. I met Vinny early at the sleep control passing him in the corridor, he was buzzing, ever friendly and eager to ride, Vinny asked me if I wanted to ride and I said no, as I was planning on sleeping longer. Vinny left the control at 0218.

Day 2, 362km, 4030m

Turned out to be the day of reckoning for some of the riders. I considered pulling out on this day as well. The great lakes beckoned, I had not ridden that section of Tassie and I herd to the call. A week earlier there had been snow, so I new it was going to be interesting.

I had lost my riding buddies, Adam and Jeremy in Launceston leaving a food control. Westbury control was at 121km, now we were on our way heading towards Poatina Village into a relentless head wind Mark Riley and Steven Goble W.A (who had specifically entered TdT1200 as he was riding around Australia) and I took turns bracing a relentless head wind, a passing thought went to Brian Hornby who I passed earlier that day leaving Scottsdale, I wondered if Brian was going to be keeping this head wind to himself or sharing?

The Poatina Village control was at 183km, followed by a long and hot climb to the summit. Steve and I made it first with the temperature plummeting at the summit with the wind adding to the chill factor, Steve said, he was going to wait for Mark, I replied that he was going to freeze and should get out his space blanket. The head wind politely kept us company as Steve and I rode to the Great Lake hotel, where we regrouped with Mark. It had become very cold, full length gloves, booties and Jacket, barely managed to abate the relentless cold knife of the wind. The food warmth and atmosphere of the pub was yet again asking me to stay a while longer, I ignored the longing warmth and we re-entered dwindling light with the cold wind waiting ever so patiently at the door. (I learnt later that Brian had abandoned the ride due to mechanical issues with his bike, at the pub) in retrospect I thought how nice it would have been to sink a few cold ales. Brian, told me later that there was a fight as well, good country entertainment.

At 240km, the dirt started, 21 km which I was happy to ride, we skirted the great Lake, with holiday homes scatted along the way, such a beautiful place to visit. The lights of our bikes were now the only resemblance of the sun, only with no warmth shone a dim light forward (Chinese light). There were plenty of animals on the road, particularly at dusk and night, the roos like to hop on by. One little Walaroo, jumped right in front of Steve's front wheel and almost connected. Now I was really cold, we had a long steep windy descent at night which we could not ride fast due to the risk of hitting an animal. The wind had cut its way through what little protection I had, I

was very cold, and had begun to rationalise it is only a ride, I can pull out, I have a daughter now, no point in pushing myself. I had decided I was going to pull out once I got to Deloraine, it was too cold. I agreed with my rational at the time and was satisfied with my decision.

Deloraine Control: 306km. We arrived at 2210. I remembered that I had packed a Chinese space blanket, my last chance, I opened the pack and pulled out the blanket and stuck this down the front of my Jersey, instant warmth. Zipping my jersey up I dismissed my earlier thoughts and we were off again.

It was a slow slog to the sleep control t at Gowrie Park Wilderness village at 363km, at 0120, to my surprise we passed Vinny shortly before reaching the control, Vinny had taken a long break along the way he told me. The water from the taps at the village was a river brown, aligning with the wilderness theme I thought?

Day 3. 220km, 3270m

In my mind now, it was not difficult riding, with beautiful scenery and interesting country towns. I had decided to burn my Chinese lycra, 7 layers of skin, if I could count and look around, I don't think that there would have been too many layers left. Mental note must find better Chinese supplier.

The scenery and flora changes so much through this part of Tassie, massive tree ferns line the roads, rain forest and grey ghostly images of trees in the distance that turned out to be die back scattering the hills. We rode into Cradle Mtn lodge at 38km, a quick up and back, chatting to hikers there, it is certainly a place to revisit with hiking shoes instead of cleats. Passing through mining towns such as Rosebery and Zeehan who both spoke of past glory with their riches having long since left the earth. Steve and I rode up to a lookout along the way on a single rocky gravel track, wheels spun and had to get off half way, but quickly got back on, making it to the look out, chatting to an older couple already sight seeing, Steve rode up and went clunk, not unlocking his cleats in time when he stopped, I did not laugh!! We rode through valleys crossing stunning rivers. The sea side town of Strahan was fast approaching as I was riding again with Adam, hanging onto his back wheel we pulled up to a café at Strahan a pictures little sea side town on the west coast at 180km. Other riders joined us there.

Queenstown beckoned, 40km to go, a nice climb if you could call it that into Queenstown, rainforest turning to s stark moon like landscape as we approached. Queenstown has a bit of a wild west feel to it and spoke of the brutal reality of Tassie's mining past. Our control was at the West Coaster motel, where our fine support team had ordered Pizza.

Day 4. 263km, 3260m

90 bends climbing out from Queenstown, was a nice way to wake your legs up from a good nights rest. I waited at the top of the climb and then got dropped on the descent (Chinese lights) Riding to Derwent Bridge control at 85km, I passed Sarah Chaplin, who was happily grinding away. I later learnt that Sarah completed the ride with a total of 2.5 hours sleep which lends support to the theory that sleep is over rated for

Randos. All controls had been met now, time to relax. Vinny had just arrived shortly before I did at the control. Vinny and I rode the last leg together into a warm welcome at Salamanca place, our support crew cheering us into the finish of a challenging fun 1200. Total ride time 86:33m.

The TdT 1200 is held every 2 years. If you are wondering if this is the ride for you? Just train hard, ride lots of hills, be prepared and give it a go, and remember sleep is optional. Of the 31 riders, 22 completed. 100% success rate of the female entrants.