

Rathdowney Rumble (160km) Ride Report

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The Warm-up:

I'd like to open my first - but hopefully not my last - ride report with a big thank you to Roger and his family for hosting another superb event. Rathdowney is by no means the hardest or the most challenging ride on the Audax calendar up here in SEQ, in fact it's probably the easiest by my reckoning. However as an outsider looking in, I would consider it certainly one of the most important.

Rathdowney represents the chance for people like myself, Paul and I'd assume Roger, to reach out to our cycling friends who've never really pushed themselves beyond the ~100km mark, or those who won't get off the river loop, to come and do some **real** riding, on some **real** roads. Those two elements are what make Rathdowney special to me. Last year (2015), it was my first 150km+ ride, and really my first ride where I had to drive out of town to partake. The support provided by Roger and his family meant that not only did I feel a large burden lifted, I felt that I could invite my friends who hadn't considered pushing their limits in such a way. We arrived, we rode hard and we enjoyed. It wasn't that difficult, but it was seamless and that meant this year, we really pushed the envelope on our wider cycling social sphere to come and partake. And, partake they did.

This year the biketeam contingent was strong. We had about 8 guys from our core group and roughly another 5 or so other affiliates. Plenty of questions hit me the week leading in mostly guys concerned about their condition coming in, or who they'd have to be stuck riding with, basically just the stuff that forms the basis for an excuse to get out of doing something that takes a bit of effort! (In reality, 3AM wake-ups can be difficult in the heart of winter!). Despite the apprehension, most of the guys we wanted there - were there.

The Ride:

We left Rathdowney, and we didn't think it was cold. 10 minutes later, riding into the fog, with icicles forming on the facial hair, and on the socks, we learnt that it was cold, and Rathdowney Rumble will always be cold.



I don't know if it's the "done thing" at Audax rides, but we rolled turns. Or as the boys like to say, "chopped off". That helped get out off the front and stay a bit warmer. The group was large, Paul, or someone, invited some pretty strong guys this year round, which was cool and they seemed to relish the big biketeam bunch that was lead by Jack (centre, above) and Michael 'Rushy' Rush(right, above) who are **very** strong cyclists. Jack, is looking to ride Peaks in reverse (300km) and then wake up the next day and ride the actual event (230km+) to try and hit the 10,000m climbing over 36hours (or something) this weekend – So keep an eye out for that. Michael, has lots of potential to be an epic adventurer, but he's caught up in the crit racing scene... hopefully that changes soon as he's a big diesel and can sit on the front for a **very** long time and tow the boys over all sorts of terrain. In addition, Rushy is a natural leader, and has a huge cycling social group *cough* fanbase *cough*. This bodes well for the future of the biketeam (and possibly Audax) groups.



Anyway, we briefly stopped at W'Bong, rode swiftly to and up Mt Toolum, regrouped at the top and rode the worst descent you can imagine together; before rolling in to the lunch stop.

At lunch, my mate Iain Hurn (who's previous biggest ride would have been a fairly flat 110km) was looking pretty buckled to say the least. I tried to force him and the other boys who were looking worse for wear to smash some of the black doctor (Coca Cola) in and consider the last 60km "an extended river loop" to make the finish easier... at least mentally. However, I definitely forgot how much of a brute the climb from the 'Bong back over the border is. The big biketeam bunch split on this climb. Craig, who was as sick as a dog, finally hit the wall. And Iain, who was pushing his limits, really needed to pace himself up the steeper sections of the climb. The other lads, all raced off into the distance, surely dreaming of Mount Barney and a Coke at the finish. I stayed with Craig; who I had essentially forced to come on the ride despite being seriously ill with a flu. Pat, who would have been better placed in the leading group, decided to stay and pace his good mate Iain up the climb, just ahead of Craig and I.

I think plenty of bike riders wouldn't have enjoyed this sort of moment. There go your mates, flying up the 6% grade, smashing the rollers and the descent. And there you are, with your buckled mates who you dragged into stinking NSW with its horrible road surfaces, riding well below your preferred tempo. However this is what I love about riding bikes. It's the camaraderie, the mateship and the collective suffering. It wasn't some 600km Epic, no. But it was a solid little challenge for these guys on a Sunday in winter. This is what Rathdowney represents, a great chance to see what you're made of, knowing there's support there; for food, for mechanicals, and for illness. It's an incredible deal that you don't get often if you're not one for racing your bicycle.

Iain got back into QLD, waited for Craig, and by the time we were at the 130km mark Iain was smashing the pinch up Mt Barney View road and cruised home to the finish with a second set of legs. I know he felt an awesome sense of achievement, and I enjoyed being with him for that. Craig finished sometime after, being sick, but being high on the sense of accomplishment. Sick as a dog, no riding for a fortnight prior, a new bike set-up, his biggest ride by 50km. What a champion.



In the end, Rathdowney delivered again. All the guys I reached out to and pestered to come along finished with a bit left in the tank, no mechanicals, no flats. Just a good slog out in the Australian bush, tackling varying climbs, climates and road surfaces. Just **real** riding, on **real** roads. - making **real** memories.

Cheers to all.

Special mention to Paul Witz. for getting us involved with this ride last year and for asking me to write this report.