

## Frank's Ride report or Puncture lesson for an Audax virgin\*?

Whenever I do a long ride I take a spare tyre, 3 spare tubes and a puncture kit. OK probably a bit excessive and maybe I'm a bit old school since I've been riding since the 80s when the tyres didn't seem to be as puncture proof as they are today and we didn't have plastic \$5 notes that make good inner sleeves for cut tyres. But I think my philosophy of paying homage to the Puncture God in this way works really well as I rarely do get a flat on an Audax ride and I haven't needed the spare tyre. Sure as hell, I know I'll need it the day I don't carry it all.

Frank's Ride showed one Audax virgin the importance of being self sufficient and having enough correct spares to get home on the bike instead of having to make a phone call to a spouse who'll probably be a bit annoyed by the time they find you 2 hours later on some god forsaken back road in the middle of no-where that even GPS doesn't know exists.

Rule number 1. Don't tempt the Puncture God.

Never talk about punctures during a ride and say you haven't had a puncture for 6 months because your tyres are really good.

So Peter, Sean (Audax virgin & MTBer who is new to road cycling and loving it.) and myself are on Frank's Ride at a Pottsville cafe refuelling when virgin Sean commits the above sin. I comment on it's never a good idea to say such things because it'll cause a puncture.

Sure enough, 20 or so km later Peter and I are waiting at the top of Smiths Creek Road, Stokers Siding on a cold wet n dry ride and looking forward to the 70-80kmh descent on the western side before we get cold again. Virgin Sean finally comes up blaming his slow ascent on a slow leaking flattish tyre.

Rule number 2. Have the right gear.

So the bike goes upside down on the verge (the land along the edge of the road between the pavement & the property fence) and the tube comes out. Experienced Peter checks for the source of the leak while virgin\* Sean sits on the verge and pulls out his spare tube. Virgin Sean has very deep rims but the spare only has a short stem. "That's OK" he says, "I have a valve extension." Well it turns out it is only a cheap plastic extension and the thread pulls off it as

they pump it up and a bit of plastic seal gets lost. After a bit of mucking around the tyre is inflated a reasonable amount but there is a flat spot where the bead hasn't properly seated. Even though he's Canadian, vergin Sean has adopted an Australian attitude, gives up and says "she'll be right, I'll take it easy". Meanwhile Peter has found the leak in a seam next to the valve. So just for a laugh the Puncture God had left the tyre still as good as Sean stated in the cafe conversation and failed the tube instead.

Rule number 3. Fix it properly.

So back on the road down the short and sweet 70-80kmh descent with the fastest bit at the bottom. Luckily it is short because Sean gets the death wobbles that gets worse when he tries to brake. It almost results with him hitting one of the few cars to use the road that day. Luckily he stays upright and misses the car so we continue on to the final checkpoint at Murwillumbah.

Did I mention the headwind?

We had been cursing the seemingly ever changing wind & light rain squalls that had been headwind and reasonably strong most of the way no matter which way we rode. Finally the wind stayed the way it was meant to and we flew downwind with a slight downhill grade following the Tweed River trying to get to the cafe before the next dark cloud we can see coming. The Rain Squall God saw our feeble attempt and spat on us again as we were almost there.

Rule number 4. If it aint broke don't let an engineer fix it.

We found a cafe to wait for the roads to dry a bit and reattempt fixing Sean's dodgy tyre. The valve has moved within the rim and was difficult to get the extension onto so I deflate the tube to pull it out and see if we can get the extension back on better. Not working. After losing a bit of plastic, the seal is not good and I can't get air into the tyre. So we make 2 attempts to patch the punctured tube that has a long stem. But the hole was too close to the valve and the glue just wouldn't stick to the tube well enough. It's starting to look like Sean is going to have to call his wife & I'm thinking "Typical engineer (me). Thinks it should be perfect but should have left it alone. Well it aint broke don't fix it next time." I'm also thinking about Rule No. 2 - deep V rims that need long stems are not good to use for Audax rides especially if the rider doesn't carry enough long stem spare tubes.

The rest of the ride.

Luckily Peter has the right touch and gets enough air into the tube to ride on although there's still one spot where the tyre still isn't seated properly. But it is better so reluctantly we head out for our destiny with the relentless 10% 5km grind up Tomewin that Vaughan calls a hill. This is the "hill" where every year I make the same mistake of thinking I bought a 28 tooth cluster since last time only to check later and realise I still have a 25 tooth cluster. Still it's better than one hot year when I had a 23 tooth cluster and I had to stop, cool down and eat lollies to make it.

Mountain Goat Peter can smell the finish line and mutters something about it being his slowest 200km ever as he disappears towards the mountain mist we admire to take our minds off the grade as we grind the pedals. We thought he'd be long gone by the time we vibrated over the cattle grid back to the cycling rules safe haven of Queensland. But gentleman Peter was waiting at the top to make sure I got Sean over the hill.

From there is a nice long mostly downhill cruise to the finish ride with some exciting grades and bends in places to get the adrenalin going. But it's wet and Sean's tyre isn't ideal so we take it easy and I watch out for turkeys. Unfortunately a local rider was hit by a turkey on a fast section near the bottom of this very road and crashed into a rock cutting near the junction with Currumbin Creek Road. It happened only a week ago and he is in critical condition in a coma with many broken bones and spinal injuries. My thoughts go to his wife and children. Peter does have a bird scare but luckily it misses and there's no harm done. And there is our final lesson for all of us as we honour Frank with this ride, we should all remember to watch for wildlife and be careful on the downhills.

\*A bicycle rider sitting on the road verge instead of riding their bike?