

2016 Midnight Century Ride Report – A Newbie’s Perspective Dave Edwards

Date: 22 November 2016

Recipient: JamesD

Message: Gawd. I've gone and done it. I've registered to ride.

How do you pronounce Audax anyway? Is it a Latin word? You know, does it rhyme with Bordeaux? Audeaux? I do not know.

People say, “Audax” as in or-daxe (as in axe), so or-daxe it is.

So someone in our recumbent riding group says, “Hey, this Midnight Century sounds good. Are you interested?”

Me: What? Are you crazy? Ride through the night. 160 km? So I look up the route. I don't know why I did this.

My rides tend to be 80 km, a couple of 100 km ones and one 126 km, but that was done over many hours with many stops. And my rides are nice and comfy morning rides along smooth shared paths to a café for an hour-long breakfast and a comfortable ride home. No stress, no fixed schedule, no problem. I am not one for planning and committing. You know, just a “go with the flow” kind of guy.

Well, Terry said he might do it. He said Melvyn's keen. I'm not surprised Melvyn's keen. He probably needs a break from study and is hankering for a long blast. I do not know how much riding he's been doing but I haven't seen him on Strava lately, other than the odd commute to uni.

Terry has done a 200 km Audax ride before, so he knows what to expect somewhat. Melvyn's done a few including a Perth-Albany-Perth ride ... 1200 kms in 4 days. (→ Nutter). Me? I'm a complete virgin in the long distance riding world. I have no idea what to expect, but I do know that it'll be dark and the scenery would be beautiful ... if I could see it.

Me to Terry: Geez the route looks good. I have seen most of it with Google Streetview. It looks like Mango territory. Smooth for the most part, good shoulders, I reckon the roads would be pretty quiet at that time. Hmmmm ... I'm not committing. I'll think about it.

Terry: Yep. Confirmed by Mark. Velomobiles are ok to ride.

“OK” me thinks. I'll test the waters with Mrs Edwards and see how she responds to the idea.

Me: "How do you feel about me going on this ride? It's out West. Starts at midnight, breakfast at 8am they say. Melvyn and Terry are thinking about it.

"What would you want to do that for?"

Me: I don't know. Sounds like fun. Might be the only chance I get to do something like this. It'd be with Melvyn and Terry.

"How many others?"

Me: Don't know. Not sure. There's 13 signed up so far. Perhaps 40 or so. I really don't know.

"What about the traffic? Would there be any hoons around at that time?"

Me: "I wouldn't think so. There's nothing out there, not at that time, and anyway if there were they probably be on the main roads."

The blurb says, "If you only going to do one ride, make sure it's this one."

Her: "Uh huh. How much is it?"

So I tells her the details and she gives me the green light. Hmmm ... that was surprisingly easy.

Ride registration cut off time and date: midnight on 23rd November.

So I talks myself into it ...

- Your'e only young once.
- You don't want to regret not doing it.
- Just this one and see how you go.
- Got to give it a try at least.
- You love the Nike slogan: "Just do it."
- When in doubt, go for it.

So I prepare the online registration form and hesitate pressing "submit" and yet again discuss it with Mrs Edwards.

I am surprised this site doesn't time out like every other. Mrs Edwards seems busy with her work (remotely working from home) and doesn't seem overly concerned or even very interested in my indecision.

"Just do it" the voice inside my head says ... and I click "submit." Done.

An email to Terry and James confirms my commitment to ride ... And so the preparations begin and a flurry of emails to Terry discussing what to bring, potential breakdown preparations, are we taking 2 vehicles or one with trailer?, does Terry put on the new rear tyre, do I put on the new chain now or leave it a bit longer, should we take walkie talkies to communicate with in the velomobiles?, how big are the hills ..., ... so many questions.

Of course the weather and potential storm activity is a hot topic.

Cut to 9.40 pm on the night of the ride and Terry turns up to my place with car and Mango strapped to the trailer. My Mango sits in the Tarago waiting patiently, laden with water, tools, Nutella sandwiches (told you I was a newbie), Chicos and some other lollies. I have experience "bonking" several times before and do not want to experience it again, thank you.

I am hoping my new (larger) battery will last the whole night as the original two do not keep their charge for very long anymore. I have on board 3 headlights and 3 tail lights ... just in case.

We head out in convoy (can 2 be a convoy?) chatting on the walkie talkies like excited school boys. (Terry's 58 soon and I am 46)

Neither of us has managed to get any sleep and I have been running around all day with last minute preparations. We get to the meeting point at 10.45 pm, the first ones there. Terry immediately sets about unloading his Mango and I look around thinking everyone else will turn up at 11.30 for a light check. Everyone else being experienced of course and au fait with the process.

The house that borders the car park is pumping out a monotonous beat. It must be party night for the householders. They probably have no idea that a group of riders is assembling outside. Riders turn up and come to eyeball and ask questions about these strange things with 3 wheels. This is nothing new. Wherever the Mango(s) stop, people come over to have a look and ask questions. 99.9% give positive comments and want to know what they are. Kids love them. Dogs don't know how to respond to them.

Introductions are made and I take comfort in knowing I am not the only newbie. It's the first time for some riders too. Or was it the first Midnight Century for them? I do not know. It doesn't matter. Let's just assume they are newbies too because it makes me feel better ☺

I'm meeting the other riders and looking at their legs. Hmm ... experienced legs there. Oooh, nice bike, I bet that's done a few kilometers. What's their set up? Where are their tools and bags of sandwiches? And 3 litres of water like I have? (OK not 3 litres, only 2.5 ☺). Fortunately (or unfortunately), the Mangos can fit a lot of things inside. It all adds weight to its 30kg, the benefit being it is all out of the wind so there is no extra drag except perhaps a little more friction at the tyre.

I chose the Mango on this ride, the main reason being it's the bike/trike I feel freshest with after long rides. Even though it's 30 kg, 3 times the weight of my other recumbents, for some reason the legs come out it better.

So Mark gave a run-down of the ride, then some photos are taken. I should have paid more attention to Mark, as I am pretty sure he said left at the first roundabout at the bottom of the hill. Of course I was following Terry and we missed this and went left up the wrong side of the road. A pretty damn embarrassing start if you ask me. I think we'll just hang at the back for a while. Like the hole ride ...

I've always been a poor navigator. I studied the route fairly well days before the ride and so had a general idea regarding the roads to take and direction of travel, but thankfully other riders knew where they were going. I haven't yet forked out the cash for a gps/Garmin thingy that has mapping ability. My Garmin Edge 200 has very basic functionality. Mapping is not one of them. If anything, I will be better prepared should there be another Audax ride for me in the future (not committing, just sayin').

I think with all the nervous tension with the preparation and newness of it all, I felt quite drained before the ride and at the start of the ride. I hoped it would pass and it did ... eventually.

The first 30 odd kilometres went quite quickly, nothing much to report on there. I was very focused on just watching the road and taking note of the shoulders as outside the field of light the headlight gives, I knew not what was there. Was it gravel? Was it a small drop-off? Was it a cliff? I could not tell, so felt a little like I was riding in a tunnel. That is until I relaxed a little and started to look around.

Then the gradual incline of Grandchester started. Again, not having a device to tell me where I was on the map, I didn't even know at the beginning of the climb that this was "Grandchester." As my Garmin turned itself off at about the 6 km mark (I think), I couldn't even check it against the cue sheet, as the distances would be wrong. I can only

guess I forgot to press “start” at the start and it timed out and switched off. Lesson learnt there. I think many lessons are being learnt this night.

With any new bike, it may take a while to get the saddle position just right. I’ve had the Mango for just over a year and spent a fair while getting the seat set up for maximum comfort. There a quite a few things that can be adjusted and most likely the last thing to adjust is the chain length. Rear drive recumbents have long chains and the previous owner was taller than me, so I had excess chain, but I wasn’t about to alter it’s length until I was happy with the seating position. Early on I fine-tuned the seating, but never removed the excess links in the chain, so I never had use of the granny gear. I never really needed it. None of the hills near me required the granny gear, so I never got around to removing the links.

Looking at the hills on the route I thought it best I know get the chain sorted as the last thing I want is to be stuck in the middle of nowhere, in the middle of the night, pushing a 3-wheeled, 30+ kilogram brick up a 10 km incline.

I am so glad I did. It was first gear all the way for me. It felt like it was never going to end. I seriously doubted my reasons for agreeing to come on this ride. Which wouldn’t be the only time considered this.

If I can brag a bit I tend to power up hills. Get a nice cadence and try and maintain that power/speed/whatever you call it. It works for me and being a (rear wheel driven) recumbent, you cannot stand on the pedals. It’s all up to the legs. There are no handlebars to lever against. It’s just you pushing against the seat, pushing against the pedals ... and praying you have enough energy see the top of the hill.

So this is what I did, occasionally slowing my cadence to keep Terry’s light in my rearview mirrors to be sure he’s still behind me and hasn’t had any mishap.

I stopped at the top for a quick swig of water and Terry cruised passed and sped off down the other side. When I say sped off, he really did go fast. He has more courage than I do in these velomobiles. Off he went and he became an intermittent red light in the distance. No you see me, now you don’t kind of thing. I refrained from chasing too hard as self-preservation was stronger than my need for speed. Roll a fiberglass, pod-shaped vehicle like this at speed and it’s not going to be pretty.

So looking at Strava, my top speed down the other side was between 52 and 55 kph. Safe. I bet Terry’s was 60-65 kph.

So from the base of Grandchester it was about 10 km to the first checkpoint. We skirted Laidley then passed through Forest Hill. Somewhere in those first kilometers we passed a very large hall or country house, some sort of venue that was pumping with loud music and people. Everything was quiet, but then it seemed this place must have had all the people in the surrounding districts all at the one place. I would have loved to have gone in to see what was going on, only because I am a busy-body, but I had to be content with making up my own stories as to what it was about. A local dance perhaps? An end-of-year graduation party? A weekly country piss-up? I had no idea, but didn't stop me pondering.

Mark and Vaughan were very welcoming and the table was full of food. Not knowing what to expect, I just approached cautiously, but as soon as I saw the chocolate milk, I was into it. Flavoured milk is a luxury in my family. Sad huh? Nah ... I like it that way.

Nuts and slat and vinegar chips, chocolate fudgey-slicey thing and fruit cake (did it have chocolate in it as well? ... lovely), bananas, other trays of slices, was there meatloaf? I couldn't tell what it was because the streetlight made it look unfamiliar but it tasted like meatloaf hehe. There were soft drinks as well and I took advantage of a can of coke ... another luxury.

Terry advised to eat something salty, which I did. Soon Melvyn said we should consider moving on as "we don't want to cool down too much" so we said thanks and see you at the next stop. It was comforting to know some riders had already left, but some were still on the way. I had no idea whereabouts in the group we were. I guess with experience, one would become more aware of events instead of just focusing on the self, which is where I was at pretty much.

We headed off in a bunch over the railway tracks, heading North-East towards Lake Wivenhoe, 34 km or so away. Melvyn said, "Your Mangoes will love this section" and he was right. It felt a fast ride averaging about 30 kph. It actually felt like we were going faster and in all honesty, I was disappointed to see 28-29-30 kph on my speedo. It felt like at least 35 kph. I had read that the winds should be Northerly 10-20 kph so I justified we were riding into a headwind. Oh, and the streets were as dry as a bone. Skies were clear and Terry was swerving all over the joint looking up at the skies, which made me look up and, well, not swerve all over the joint.

I was appreciating the Mango's suspension along here too, as at time the road was a little corrugated, but it was always comfortable in the seat. I'd occasionally pull out my little pillow from Daiso (spoilt huh?)

and rest my head. I noted the turnoff to Atkinson's Dam and wondered what it looks like.

Onto the Brisbane Valley Highway and immediately the traffic had picked up. When I say picked up it had gone from nothing to a truck or car every 10 minutes. Between here at approx 90 km mark and the 106 km mark (where the second checkpoint was) were some great, smooth downhills. Some 50 kph, some 60 kph. I was in a bit of a rhythm so crept ahead of Melvyn and Terry, but was always watching for their lights in my mirrors. At one point I slowed to wait and Terry whizzed past, the sight and sound very satisfying. I couldn't see his face but I am sure he had a smile from ear to ear.

The sky was beginning to lighten, I think it was just after 4 am and I had heard a couple of people mention the dam wall is the place to be at sunrise. Alas, I crossed the section of wall near Cormorant Bay before sunrise, trying to get a peak over the railings to see the water.

The second stop was a chance to adjust to the new light, decide whether to eat more or just have a chat. It's a bit odd eating at this time of the morning and perhaps I ate too much at the first stop, because I wasn't very hungry. I carried a banana around for a bit, put it back and had a few nuts and a can of coke. I think I had some of that lovely fruitcake with chocolate in it as well.

I answered some more questions on the Mango, then we set off again in the morning light up a lovely rolling country road. My motivation at this point was to just get back to the starting/end point ... quickly. I didn't know how much longer I could ride for. A twinge in the right knee had been bothering me since about half way and wasn't getting any better (nor worse).

I used the downhills to gather speed and propel me up the other side. This was quite effective and I slipped away from Melvyn and Terry, eventually getting into synch with 4 other riders. Well as much synch as a velomobile can get with normal riders on normal bikes on rolling hills. I needed to stay with them as I did not know the way and they were going at a good pace for me. I think it was Col who encouraged me up Tallegalla Hill on the Rosewood Marburg Road. I wasn't sure this was "the" hill, but he said it was only short and the ride down the other side would be wonderful for me. I could only think of the crest of the hill. It was another first gear all the way moment.

He was right. It wasn't that much of a hill to get up, and being a bit tired and weary by this stage I kept the speed down the other side by dragging the brake most of the way. Yes it was a buzz but as before,

but I also wanted to get back in one piece and to stay with the group of 4 riders I was with.

I don't remember much of the rest of the ride, except it was a lovely road, there were quite a few morning riders coming from the other direction, I assume on their Sunday ride, and there was a little more traffic.

At one point I saw Terry in my mirrors. He just missed our green traffic light, so had to wait and then not too much long after, Melvyn goes flying past the bunch whooping it up (an Americanism ... sorry), gets the green traffic light and proceeds to decrease in size as he gets further away. I thought, "Terry mustn't be far behind. I wonder where they got their energy from?"

Anyway, we do the block(s) to make up the distance and I was so grateful to get back to the car park at about 7.15 am. A (Bicycle) beer each was on offer and I gave in and followed the crowd, knowing it'd be over an hour before driving anyway. I was really looking forward to a shower to freshen up and attempt to feel normal again. At that point I felt like I had stepped off a long-distance flight.

We loaded the bikes (trikes) grabbed our change of clothes and found the showers. Everyone else (who rode ahead) was already awaiting breakfast, so we sort of poured ourselves onto the furniture to peruse the menu. "The Brother's Big Breakfast" it was with orange juice and a flat white in a mug please.

The buzzer eventually told us our food was ready and we ate and talked about the ride, sneaking a look at the other riders who all seemed very comfortable, many of them old hands at long rides I am sure. The orange juice went down a treat and I wished I ordered a jug of it.

Terry had offered Melvyn a lift home, so I made my way back solo, stopping in at Redbank Plains to drop in on family. The drive home was a bit dodgy, and sleep came easily at 11 am once home.

So ... What are the learnings you ask?

- Know the start of the route! (and maybe the whole route). Don't fly through roundabouts and end up on the wrong side of the road.
- Lighten the load. 3 Nutella sandwiches might be too much. I also carried a 1.25 litre bottle of water 160 km unnecessarily.
- Leave the walkie talkies in the car. They were great to communicate whilst driving, but didn't work for us in the Mangoes.

Terry thought the earpiece was too hot to wear and I thought it was too hard to hear once the wind noise increased.

- Make sure the gear is 100% working. I used a new battery for this ride. The electrical connection was a little loose. A bumpy rail crossing dislodged it, requiring me to switch batteries (flip a switch), which ran low very quickly. The next stop I sorted out the connection, but either way, I was worrying a little about the lighting, which took away some of the enjoyment of the ride.
- Oh yeah ... and start the Garmin at the start of the ride 😊

All-in-all a great ride and one that I won't be forgetting quickly. Thanks to Mark and Vaughan, and all the riders for their support and understanding for this newbie.

I didn't take any photos, but I am sure there are enough from other riders. Thanks Terry and Melvyn!