

Audax Midnight Century Ride in a Velomobile 26th/ 27th November 2016 - Terry Burn



This was my second Audax ride and on paper it looked ideal terrain for a velomobile, why not give it a go? I convinced fellow velo rider David E and recumbent endurance/ Audax rider Melvyn Y to come along and share the fun....or pain.

Velomobiles are fast, sleek and fun to ride, they are also 30kg in weight, I am wrong end of 50s, fat and not all that fit- can you see the problems here!

We duly arrived at the start point on a cloudy, humid night and prepared the velos for the trip, we passed the lighting check, showed off our toys, met many new people and hoped I had the legs to make the distance.

On the dot of midnight we were off and straight into an uphill gradient straight away, cresting the top we sped downhill passing many riders but not realising the left turn was imminent, big braking effort, but we ended up on the wrong side of the road feeling very silly. Sedately we advanced against a couple of oncoming cars and finally changed to the correct side of the road- things were off to a great start.



Finally got into a nice rhythm, off the highway around the back of Amberley RAAF base headed for Rosewood. The cloud cover was clearing, it was very dark and the Milky Way was right overhead! In little groups of bright lights we made our way toward Grandchester and the climb up the Grandchester range.

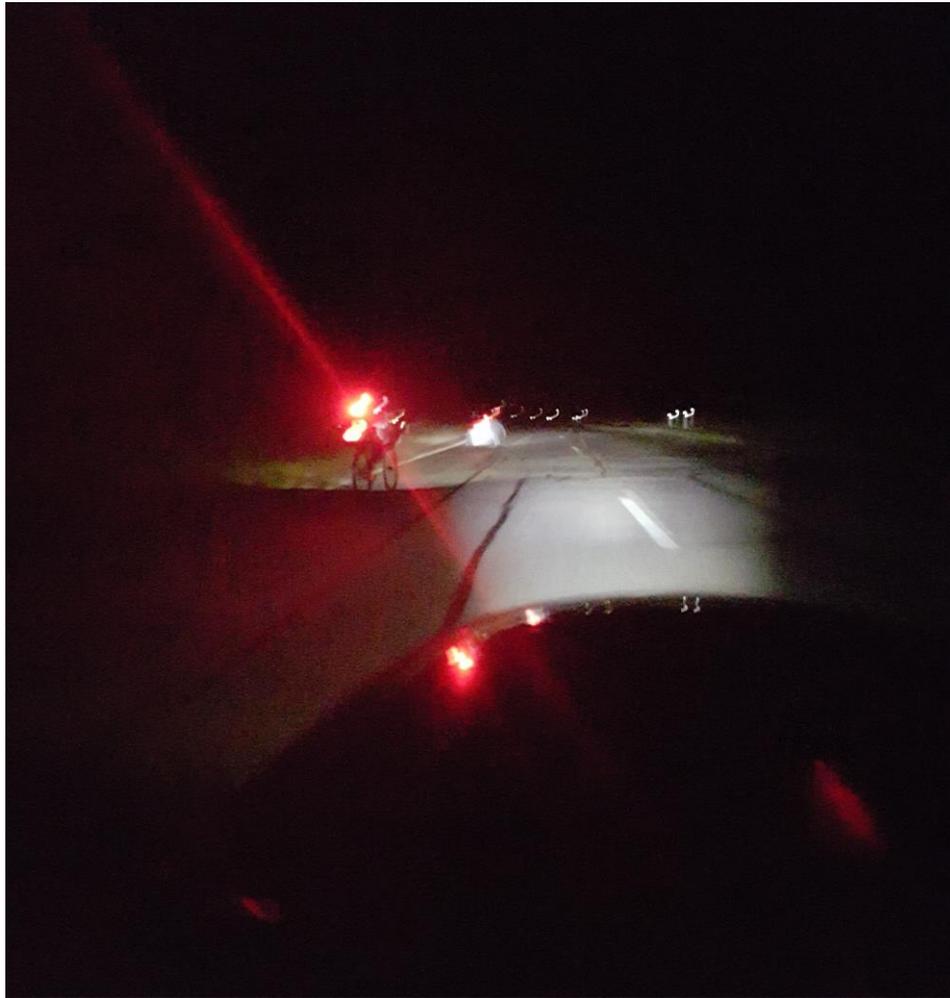
Velomobiles weigh 30kg and on rolling hills they are fine, the momentum gained on the flat or downhill can carry you up and over the next rise with minimal speed loss, however on long hills you gear down and slug it out!

And so it was up the Grandchester Range, I was pretty much in granny gear straight away. David E being much fitter and younger, drew ahead of me and Melvyn Y is just a machine! Any other rider who I had zoomed past now had their revenge as I toiled upwards between 5-8kph! Another positive attribute of recumbent bikes is that you can look up at the scenery. To distract myself from the pain, I spent a large part of the climb looking up at the stars, amazed at the clarity away from the lights of the city. I even saw a shooting star.

All good things come to an end and I finally crested the top and began the descent into Laidley, speed built up rapidly and I had to brake regularly to keep the speed at a point that wallaby or wildlife avoidance would be an option! Melvyn was waiting at the turn to Forest Hill and said he could hear the rumble of the velo coming a long way away- cool!!

There were some light fog banks from here and at one point the road dropped a bit and the bottom of the fog layer was sitting about 30cm above my head, this appealed to my aviation bent and it was just like descending out of cloud in my personal Spitfire.

Shortly after we arrived at the first Control at Forest Hill and refueled and rehydrated with a wonderful spread provided by Mark and Vaughan. The next leg to Fernvale was described by Melvyn as being "very recumbent friendly" and he was not wrong- it was a joy!



We set off with full stomachs and before long crossed the highway headed towards Lake Wivenhoe. Another aspect of Velomobiles is, although slow to accelerate, once at cruising speed, it is relatively easy to keep it going. In fact you can stop pedalling for 20-30 seconds and really not lose too much speed. David, Melvyn and myself rode as a group after breaking away from about 5 others, we were able to ride comfortably between 30-32kph most of the time. I was guilty of weaving on the road here and there, it was due to me conducting more astronomical observations overhead, a truly beautiful night.

In the last 15 or so kilometres to Fernvale, there were some rises in the road followed by the most magnificent downgrades, 1-2%, to the dam wall, the last being 2-3 km long, this was pure joy and this is velomobile terrain par excellence! We arrived at Fernvale to another excellent feed, 106 km complete.



I was feeling pretty weary by now and as we set off back to Ipswich, I was wondering if the legs would last. By now it was well and truly daylight and the views were lovely, overcast, so it wouldn't heat up too quickly. I had been told of one last decent hill to climb and secretly started planning on recovery schemes that involved David and my trailer.



My legs did feel toast, I found it hard to keep up a reasonable pace, any upgrade hurt and I coasted as much as I possibly could. Melvyn, ever the protector, stayed with me or nearby, it was appreciated and I worried I was holding him back. We arrived at the foot of an impressive climb, Melvyn said "I don't think this is the climb", my heart sank. Back into granny gear, wondering if i would ever make the top. Melvyn receded into the distance, having to maintain his minimum control speed, which is higher than 3 wheeled affairs!

Turns out this was the hill, Tallagalla Hill, and a strange thing happened about $\frac{2}{3}$ of the way to the top. I felt my energy returning, my legs were in a good rhythm and before long I crested the top, paused to take a photo of the beautiful vista back to the Wivenhoe Valley, then commenced the descent, which everyone had said was a goody!



Wow, a great descent it was, I glimpsed 81kph on the Garmin during the nanosecond I looked at it, all attention was on the road and controlling the velo. Melvyn was way ahead, but I saw him in the distance approaching a small rise, I caught and passed him like he was standing still, my momentum carried me over the top of the rise at over 60kph, no point losing this speed advantage so I kept on going opening the gap on Melvyn, through the village of Walloon and onward to Ipswich. This road was lovely to ride, nice shoulders, nice undulations- ideal velo territory!

Back into the suburbs of Ipswich, the legs are starting to get heavy again, especially with the number of hills thrown in the last few kilometres! Ever since Fernvale, David had ridden ahead with another group, he stayed with them to the end of the ride, waving the flag for the velomobiles! Melvyn caught and left me here and apparently due to a run of good green light changes, caught and beat David and his group to the finish as well.

And it was done, 160km, cards signed, 7.30am beer, shower and hearty breakfast....what's not to like about the Midnight Century Ride.

So how did the velomobile go? I was very happy with the ride, I was always going to be slow up the hills, that was a given, but the terrain was ideal. The flats were great and the downhill just

fantastic. Velos are so stable that it was like being on rails coming down hills. Better fitness would have helped, pushing around 30kg does accrue fatigue over time.

From a 'recumbent in general' point of view, after 160km I had tired legs, my neck, bum, wrists and shoulders were fine, no other body aches at all. I'd happily climb hills at 5kph for that!!

