

Franks Ride 17th June 2017 John McMullan

One disadvantage of overseas holidays is the extended travel time spent on planes or coaches. In Brian's case, the travel wasn't the issue, just a person with the flu which Brian caught after sitting in close proximity to the contagious one for many hours. The other is the lack of ride hours which takes a bit of recovering from too.

Brian's illness blossomed a couple of days before Franks ride and after driving the flood affected areas of the route he gave me a call and asked if I could kick off my RO experience by starting off Frank's ride on his behalf. I was quite happy to accept because I got the fun part (so I thought) of starting all the riders off and Brian got to validate the brevets before sending to the brevet secretary for processing. I was riding the 100 so Brian recommended that I ask Vaughan to collect the 200km brevets at the end.

Frank's ride is a memorial ride to celebrate an enthusiastic Audax rider who came to grief whilst riding several years ago on the route. Brian created the two rides so we could see the scenery whilst taking part in the memorial ride.

4am Saturday morning soon came round and I was awake, had a light breakfast then left home at 4:30 to get to Winders part at 6am to get the pre-ride checks under way.

I arrived to find two riders setting up and once I had my bike out of the car I went to work on the RO tasks. Talk about wrangling cats! I rapidly developed a newfound respect for the organizational skills of ROs who also ride on the day. 16 riders registered but one rider couldn't make it on the day. About a 50/50 mix for the distances with some familiar faces looking forward to the ride.

Note to self:

Get riders to come to you, do not leave Brevets unattended and get lighting checks underway early.

Once I had the correct brevets with the correct riders, lighting checks sorted for the 200 km riders (including lending a light to our Victorian visitor) and sneakily running the rider brief so that the remaining few minutes of night had slipped away the riders were off – except for me who still needed to get the pen in a zip lock bag under my windscreen wipers, get kitted up for the day, visit the gents and get rolling – 15 minutes after starting time.

I will say that I am not familiar with this part of the Gold Coast (except Bilambil) but I looked forward to the ride and started off warming up as I rode. The morning was mild, not too much wind and a very scenic coastal route which was enjoyable (well maybe not the first little uphill bit whilst cold.)

I was pleased with the route and was feeling pretty good and soon found a familiar bit of road in Tweed Heads West where I started the grind up into Bilambil heights. My last experience was on the motorcycle whilst visiting a friend in the area and soon found myself on the descent into Bilambil and round the corners to Hogans Road. The climb was tough as I expected, not having really ridden since Beach and Bush but my shiny new 28 tooth low gear helped physically and psychologically. I was caught by our first puncture recipient for the day who was a bit annoyed by the puncture so he took off to ‘punish some hills’ although for me it was the other way round.

Over the top of at Upper Duroby and gently on the descent due to damp roads and I was greeted by the awesome and serene rainforest at the bottom that made the next 5km exceptionally pleasant to ride. I had warmed up and got into a rhythm and good pace (for me) and continued round the course to Banora point where I made the bad mistake of ignoring the Wahoo’s complaint that I was off course. Note to everyone – most GPS units are like the aircraft avoidance warnings – always listen to the machine and do something about it. What I had missed was the change of direction heading up onto the bridge. What I did see

was NSW's finest unloading a car that had been pulled over and a blasted steep climb to get back on course. Second lesson – read the cue sheets for the nuggets and have a good look at the map for the things that warn you about such navigational idiosyncrasies.

Having lost some more time I cranked up the pace to the first control. Bit less impressed as the wind had picked up but my new riding position, adjusted cleats and frustration soon had me powering along as quick as I could.

Thanks to being last at the control the only pie left was chicken curry. Food and drink consumed I headed off after my shortest break at a control and continued making up time even when hitting the bump on Clothiers Creek Road. I am always impressed by the scenery we ride through and I appreciate that we get to see it better than most (at least til we have high speed descents) and the changing scenery from Clothiers Creek to Murwillumbah kept me guessing as to what would be next. I had been riding quite quickly not only to make up time, but I failed to take my own advice at Casuarina (never miss an opportunity to pee.) so I really did need to get to Murwillumbah.

I encountered my second rider on the Route at the Murwillumbah Bakery. Fortunately this time all the good food had not been taken by the riders and the lovely lady at the bakery loaned me the key to the gents toilet out the back rather than ride back down the road to the public amenities.

Lunch consisted of a couple of sweet pastries and a bottle of coke and I started my way on what I had thought would be a simple but hilly home stretch.

I passed Dave not far from the bottom of Tomewin Hill who was finding the hill a bit tough in places so I gave him some encouragement (it's only 22km to the end!). I recalled Brian telling me that Tomewin Hill was ok, you just grind your way up and I did for a couple of kilometers until I ran completely out of grind. Not wanting to stop, I walked for a bit until I sensed a lessening of the incline and hopped back on - this lasted about 100m until the cramps set in. I

continued to walk and both getting rid of the cramps, getting rained on and getting closer to the top. Once I found the next flatter bit I hopped back on and pedaled slowly to work out the last of the cramps.

The descent was a bit intense after the sprinkle of rain so I took my time and tried not to hold any cars up. At the lights for the landslip I had a chat to people in one of the cars to see how far back Dave was but they hadn't seen him because they had turned onto the road near the top. I continued working my way down the hill and finally came to Currumbin Creek Rd.

Turning right I discovered a few good things – the road was relatively flat, I was less than 10km from the end and I had an awesome tail breeze that helped me lift my average speed. I used my recently acquired posture guidelines to power my way back to the finish. I was impressed to see speeds over 30kmh for most of the return and very quickly I found myself waiting at the lights just before Winders Park. I got my Brevet signed by a couple walking back to their car. Bike away, clothes changed, brevets taken from under my wipers and checked then I waited patiently for Dave to get back being the last of the 110's.

I disappeared across the road for coffees only to find out that the takeaway was out of coffee but the restaurant supplied me with some and I rewarded Dave with a hot coffee to recover from his ride. With nothing better to do we had a good chin wag about this and some other rides we had done and before we knew it we saw the first of the 200km riders return. I quickly noted the time, signed the brevet and put the pen, ziplock bag and first of the 200km brevets under Vaughan's windscreen wiper. Dave had headed off and I had a bit of a chat with James before I got some chips from the takeaway then headed up the highway. I do recommend that if you like hot chips, the takeaway does an awesome job. I will be getting some from the re next time I am down that way.

How did I find my introduction to RO duties? I need to be better organized and prepared for the next one to make sure I have everything under control and I get away on time. Practice will help that (I am sure I will get a few requests...)

How did I find the climbing? I thought I would be ok with a 28 on the back for Tomewin hill. Perhaps not. I will be getting a 32 in the next week or so because I think I might have a crack at 6 bumps and one hill to make sure that I can conquer Tomewin hill properly.