

Hippy Highway 2017 - Nick Burnett.

I'm not even sure what interested me about doing the Hippy Highway. Maybe it was because I haven't been doing a lot of Audax recently, maybe because I've been itching to go ride around those parts for the last 3 years, maybe to test if I could do 317km with almost 5000m climbing or maybe it was something else.

Within hours of registering I had a call from Paul asking me if I was sure man and machine were up to the task and with that I decided that this was going to be the first ride that I was going to drive out and check out what looked like the riskiest part of the route myself. Travelling more kms in one day than my car has seen in 6 months, things got dirty.



And so I decided to make plans to rebuild my beloved Tiffany, still in pieces after returning from our tour. After some minor nip and tucks (borrowed rear wheel to replace the one damaged in transit, swapped out triple crank set to a road set, removing racks, dropping a lot of stem height, slick tyres, new dyno light, ...new cables...) she was looking the part and ready for her first outing since returning back to Oz.



After forgoing my original plans to camp thanks to an offer of friends apartment on the Tweed I arrived at Currumbin feeling pretty fresh and after a civilised 10km drive to meet Roger, Anthony and Mark for pre-ride formalities we began our adventure through the north coast NSW hinterland.

This route was everything it promised. A brief ride along the shore to the Tweed before heading over some rolling hills and flat cane fields to Tyalgum before the first stretch of unsealed fun.

Soon that new rear gear cable was giving me a little grief and I was cursing the french mechanic that insisted on using a pair of pliers on the barrel adjuster. The fix came from a little unorthodox handling the cable until I got reasonable shifting but resulted in the loss of my bottom gear. Ahh well, a 34t is prob excessive anyway, right?

Tiffany felt right at home over the washed out, rutted and loose unsealed sections of climbs and descents before taking me through to Nimbin for a quick bottle top up and on to Doonan for a feed and a lecture from the shop owner about not leaning the bike on the fresh paint. Apparently the local kids made a mess of his paint with their scooters and bikes and have learned to leave them against the hedge on the other side of the road.

I made some four legged friends and continued on through the country side towards Mullumbimby for the final check point. It seems like only in Audax that you ever catch yourself saying things like "only 110km" and "Tomewin is no big deal" but there was still a lot of riding to get done before Tomewin and it was starting to get dark.

The next little while was spent just pedalling along waiting for the turn to Byrill Ck Rd and riding past the confused looks of people hang out outside country pubs. The Cadell Rd intersection almost felt like the home straight!

By Murwillumbah it was damp and by Tomewin it was wet and missing that 34t. Putting on my dry base layer half way down the descent was like putting on a warm hug and it was only a matter of following familiar roads home from then on.

The Hippy Highway is certainly not a chilled, relaxed route. It was most definitely challenging. It traverses some stunning Australian scenery along roads and distances most people would shy away from doing on a weekend trip in a car let alone do in one day on a bike. The distances between check points and relative remoteness means you have to be confident that you can be self sufficient on the road and, although on the more challenging side of Audax rides, for me it was every reason I do Audax.

