

Esk by Night 2018 – Peter Jenkins



Having ridden the 100KM version in last year's 38 degree heat I had made up my mind to ride the 200 this year to appreciate the second 100 KM's in the relative cool of the evening.

Things rarely turn out the way one plans, and thus it was this time.

After weeks of hot weather, it rained steadily the day prior to the ride but it was relatively dry on the Saturday morning and only started raining as I was reversing out of my driveway to drive to Esk.

As the rain increased, I began thinking that perhaps, if enough people withdrew prior to the start, I could pull out without losing too much credibility. This would have been grossly unfair on Kym as it was a supported event and he would have been left with a mountain of food, so I disabused myself of that notion and continued driving.

As it happened, I'm not aware of anyone withdrawing because of the rain and 20 or more intrepid souls set off at the appointed hour... into the rain.

The first 100 KM loop goes to The Spit, near Somerset Dam Village via Biarra, Toogooloowah and Mt. Beppo. There are some hills on this section but the road surface is generally good and the traffic light, so is good Audax country. The wind was picking up as we approached Mt. Beppo but our little peloton of Brian Hornby, Andrew Preston, David Foster, Pat Lehane and Greg and Sarah Clarke was making steady progress until Pat punctured at about the 30KM point. The only mitigating factor was that it was the front wheel, which made removal easier. Apart from that, most things that can complicate a puncture repair in unfavourable conditions came to bear; a pump that won't pump, a tube that fails after installation and inflation and more.

By the time Pat had his pump pumping and the first replacement tube had failed (valve stem problem) Brian was shivering uncontrollably and had no option but to keep moving with the remainder of the group. As I was wearing a rain jacket I stayed with Pat to see what could go wrong next.

There is no facial expression quite like a cyclist's as he watches a CO2 cartridge expel its contents into thin air as it's attached to the inflator....

Fortunately, another cartridge was to hand, saving considerable time with a mini pump and David Booth arrived and waited with us, then towed us to the first checkpoint at The Spit. While this was happening, I couldn't help remembering that a number of riders were resting by the roadside along this stretch last year because of the heat.

We were passed by a small band of 300KM riders heading back to Esk well before we reached the checkpoint.

Kym and John were catering admirably with the influx of riders but were puzzled by the non-appearance of a few who are faster than the likes of me. We decided that they were either off course (unlikely) or had stopped for refreshments in a local hostelry (very likely). They turned up as David, Pat and I were leaving, so all was well. I have since learned that the unlikely option was actually the case.

The rain continued steadily all the way back to Esk but the wind abated and the edge of the cloud cover was visible on the horizon, raising hope that the second half of the ride might be drier. It was nearly dark when we passed the Esk Start/Finish and checkpoint to ride to the turnaround point on the Esk-Hampton Road. Pat was riding the 300KM brevet and had to go further before turning so we parted company and I headed back to the 100KM checkpoint, where Kym and John were once again feeding the masses.

Fortunately, I had taken the precaution of packing a spare pair of knicks and long sleeved base layer in the car and was able to change into these, making a world of difference to my comfort level but it was still very tempting to call it a day at 100KM and head home.

I hadn't voiced this to anyone but Brian said that he would wait for me to get ready before leaving even though he must have been at the checkpoint for quite a while before I arrived. I'm not sure if my face was giving anything away....

Eventually, a group of 200KM and 300KM riders left together, by which time the rain had stopped, although the road was still wet, and we set off up the Brisbane Valley Highway towards Fernvale. There was still full cloud cover but it began to thin out as we approached Wivenhoe Dam and, as we crossed the dam wall, the light of the moon was becoming evident in contrast to the sunrise at this point when riding the Midnight Century.

The group had split up somewhat by the time we reached the final checkpoint at Lowood but Brian, Andrew, Greg and I regrouped once the 300KM people cleared out and left us to our own devices.

By now it was 11:00PM and decidedly cool at 13 degrees according to my Garmin; certainly not cool enough to cause hypothermia but almost cold after weeks of higher than average night time temperatures. I should mention though, that Andrew, who is visiting from the U.K., was showing absolutely no sign of discomfort.

The cloud had dissipated and the almost full moon was overhead, making for pleasant nocturnal riding conditions. The route from Lowood took us along the Coominya Connection Road, Atkinsons Dam Road and the Gatton Esk Rd.

I had never ridden Atkinsons Dam Road in its entirety before and it seemed to go forever. Just as I was beginning to think I'd found a tear in the space-time continuum the T junction appeared in the distance and sanity was restored.

Turning right onto the Gatton Esk Road I found myself alone on a long descent in bright moonlight. I was enjoying the experience until I spotted a wallaby beside the road. He hopped the right way but it was a salutary experience and I kept a finger on the brake levers on the ensuing downhills, of which there were quite a few. It goes without saying that for every downhill there is an opposite and more than equal uphill, a fact known to all cyclists.

The final downhill, however, leads straight into Esk and the final checkpoint where, as I had expected, the usual suspects had completed the 300 and were waiting for others to arrive.

All in all, a satisfying brevet that ended in more pleasant conditions than those in which it started.

Thanks go to Kym for his great job as RO and to John for his excellent support. These roles are particularly challenging when multiple distances are involved, not least because it means the support team is subject to the same fatiguing factors as the riders.