

Bustiers, Beards and All Things Damp

Dino (Maverick) Morgante

This riding journey is written in memory of Lawrence "Lozza" Hennelly, a team member of our 2011 Petit Oppy team "Miss Kitty and the Bearded Bikers". Lozza passed away suddenly on 27 September 2013, doing what he liked most, being "at one" with the outdoors. I had started to write this piece in 2011, and as with some of my articles, they never got finished. I figured this would be a good reason to finish the piece and present it in memory of Lozza, a gentle and fun-loving man who provided us with many practical insights in the short time we knew him.



This Opperman trial is a real odd thing, you know. It brings together cyclists from around your locale, the state and perhaps, if you are really desperate, the far country. The main aim, of course, is to get on well with your team members and have a jolly great time. Well, the QLD Petit Oppy team were at it again this year and up to its usual high-jinx.

2010 Petit in Review – A New Team Member

We last left you in 2010 with our bedazzling efforts in the inaugural Petit Opperman for the good state of Queensland, lashing out with the eclectic collection of Aussie riders on English bikes attempting to be French. Yes, we had a hoot of a time with some outlandish high's, but tempered with a few sobering low's.

Well, this year was hoping to be no different with a plan to diversify and perhaps go a little "country and western". But first, we need to corral the old team – Sue, Peter, George and myself.

Email chatter amongst the all conquering 2010 team started around late January 2011, coincidentally the same time as the previous year. The usual topics of team name, team theme, team captain and where to ride this year were discussed yet again. Needless to say, Peter Jenkins was looking to resurrect his plans from last year, which I had unwittingly and surreptitiously rail-roaded after being blackmailed into the plumb job of "team capitan".

So, it seemed things were getting off to a good start with lots of ideas being bandied around for teams, themes and where the heck to ride. Peter's suggestion of rekindling the ride around Rosewood and surrounds had the country appeal. However, we didn't want to over-step the mark on this one given we would be riding around country areas of Lowood that were heavily damaged by the rains and floods earlier in January – perhaps a more low-key approach was to prevail.

We hadn't heard yet from George yet, but no panicking just now as we were catching up with him at the QLD AGM ride in another week. Sliding one week we receive the devastating news that George could not ride the Petit with us because he was attempting the Tassie 600 – yes, something slightly more ambitious. Dang! Who the heck will we find on short notice, but more importantly, someone with a personal oddity or trait that would fit with this eclectic bunch.

There was also a whisper at the AGM that day, that a new bloke on the block was looking to get into an Oppy team. However, like Peter, I had thought he was looking for the Full Monty Oppy, so our ears unpricked themselves and kept on with our conversation. But having seen Lozza for

the first time, I saw nothing but this big bushy beard, and thought, "hmm, now that would go nicely with our feted petit party theme". Anyhow, as luck would have it, Sandy contacted me during that week asking if we would like to have another member for our team. With the team "criteria" in front of me ready to be cross-checked with Sandy's proposal, I didn't get past the name "Lawrence", and said "Oh, yes, the dude with the big bushy beard?" He'll fit the scene nicely.

It turned out that our new team member resided on a property on Carneys Creek Rd smack bang on the border of Queensland and New South Wales. Luckily for Lozza, he had the smarts to swear his allegiance to the might of maroon, otherwise we would have had to think really hard about letting him into the inner sanctum. Well, the email chatter took off again and after some time discussing team names and ride strategy, we settled on "Miss Kitty and the Bearded Bikers" captained by Peter.

A couple of weeks later, at the Brisk Beaudesert Ride, Lozza turns up, and it's like "Man, what the where's ya bushy beard gone dude?!" Lozza had made an on the spot decision to shave his beard off. Whoa, this was going to put Sue in a spin, almost having conniptions I reckon, as this was now going to blow the team's budget on fake beards – another \$6 – ouch.

Day One

The Gathering and The Going

With weather forecasts looking damp and a bit glum, we all gathered at the Country Comfort Inn at Raceview, only a short hop, skip and jump from our start and finish point at Brothers Leagues Club. With paperwork and stuff sorted, we toddled over to our start location at Brothers.



Lozza, Peter, Dino and Sue – ready for damp Day One

With our bodies now well warmed from the two minute ride to the start, it was time to leave on Petit Oppy epic adventure No.2. Well, an epic start it was not.

Bike Mechanicals Brought to You by PJ

I have always been a firm believer that things happen in three's, not that I intentionally wish for things to happen nor in the vein of bad luck either, but *it* just happens that way. No sooner had we turned our wee pedals to get moving, when the chain on Peter's bike decided it didn't like to be restrained anymore and popped off the chain ring – hmmm, that's a rather inauspicious start now, isn't it - *Strike One*. Then, we had got no further than Yamanto and 6km into the ride when Peter signals there is something not right with his bikes handling. We all stopped to find the rear tyre was going flat – *Strike Two*. While we waited for Peter to forage through the deep bowels of his riding bag, the rest of us discussed the likelihood of changing weather conditions – for the better we hoped.

With Peter now pumped-up and ready to go, we slinked off along the road again, then making the right turn onto the onramp to the Warrego Hwy. It was about this point that Peter signaled yet again – oh crap, what this time! It was another bloody flat tyre – *Steeerike Three*. So, by the time Peter had completed lesson two of his Tyre Changing 101 class, we had only completed the sum total of 9km in 50 minutes – surely a record for any continuing Audax ride anywhere in our country, or even better, overseas.



Peter attending to puncture No2 on the Warrego Hwy onramp

Anyway, as luck would have it, and given we were so drunk on good luck at that point, we had only ridden another 5km along our route when the

heavens opened up – ohh man!! There goes my calculated risk of no wet weather for the weekend. With another 35km to our control point in Laidley, this was going to be just a little miserable. And, it only got better, with the rain steadily increasing from Grandchester to Laidley.

While we wandered through this dampened but colorful country side, our newest member also became our impromptu tour guide. Lozza, as it turns out, spent a lot of time living in Ipswich and the surrounding rural areas. His knowledge kept us engaged, showing us houses and sheds where used to live and visit. There was a real keenness in his voice, and you could also see it in his face, this man just loved the outdoors and wanted to share it with others.

Whether it be Wet, or Weather it be

While on a section of Rosewood-Laidley Rd between Rosewood and Grandchester Range, the weirdest sight I had seen was literally happening in front of me. The road was covered with hundreds of little freddo's and toado's making a run for their lives. How strange this was, like some kind of Amphibious Armageddon. But unfortunately, as with many of their fellow web-footed friends, they were not likely to make the crossing to Mecca safely.

Anyway, we arrived in Laidley looking like an absolute soggy mess. While standing on the footpath, I tried to squeeze every part of my body to remove water from it before entering the café and snack bar – with a few raised eyebrows from waiting customers. Even then, I still had water seeping from areas I didn't think were possible – sorry shop lady. But, needless to say, the warm shop surrounds, hot chocolate, and warm muffins went down a treat for all.

With morning tea completed at Laidley, it was time saddle up and move onward into the cooling and wet conditions. I had rolled off with Sue while Lozza and Peter were making final adjustments to their wet weather gear (damn it) before leaving. As we made our way out of Laidley, the protection from the wind disappeared and we were accompanied by very cold winds. Oh shit – it was freezing! "Sue, can I please ride really close to you to get warm, I'm getting really cold here?" For about half an hour I literally was freezing to death in the middle of March – huh? Eventually, I found comfort in some slightly tree-lined sections of the route, which let me unthaw just a little bit.

Having being sheltered a little by the surrounds of Forest Hill, the open lands of Coominya provided nowhere to hide – I want my mummy, sob sob, this is too cold. With not much of anything above the height of road-side barbed-wire fences to shield me from the cold and bitter crosswinds, I finally gave up my soul to the wind demons to ravage me the rest of the way to our lunch stop at Coominya.

Now, the lunch stop at Coominya was a stately affair. Afforded the luxury of an Edwardian styled bench seat, we reclined and consumed our toasty ham, cheese and tomato sandwiches while sheltered from the incessant precipitation on high. Included in the meal deal was a photographic sitting, for which we kindly accepted.



Peter, Sue, Dino and Lozza literally hamming it up for the camera

This also gave me a small opportunity to try and dry out while the rain still continued on outside. Calling time on our lunch feast, it was back onto the bikes and back into the water. Even though the rain was persistent, it didn't dampen our enthusiasm about the ride, but we were also looking forward to our next stop in Lowood.

Dangerous Roads and Dangerous Rivers

This next stage took us from Coominya to the Brisbane Valley Highway, across the Wivenhoe Dam, and then a turn west to Lowood. It was along this section that we noticed the return of our web-footed friends, however this was now of Amphibious Armada proportions – the Bufo Marinus. Holy Crap! And there were lots of them – unfortunately assigned to the same fate as their more attractive cousins we encountered earlier – the Litoria Caerulea. Not only did we have to contend with pot holes in the road, but we now also had to dodge bloated land mines. Wow, breeding migration really is dangerous in this neck of the woods.

Crossing the Wivenhoe Dam opened up to spectacular views of serenity looking across the calm mass of water, recently topped up by savage and heavy storms only two months earlier. But it was also a sobering reminder of the devastation that occurred some distance downstream when dam water was released to keep the dam in check. As we passed through Fernvale then our turn to Lowood, the very stark reminders of the power of water remained freshly surreal with deep scarring to the landscape, and all manner of debris hanging from trees more than 10m above us – this must have been a harrowing experience for those in this area.

We continued on and meandered our way along Forest Hill – Fernvale Rd finally depositing ourselves at the café in Main St at Lowood. Our stop here was short, given the light was dropping fast in the overcast conditions, and we wanted to make good time back to Rosewood for our first day end point. A few drinks and snacks were gobbled down quickly and we were soon back on the bikes.

About 2km after leaving Lowood, Sue's rear tyre succumbed to a puncture. Changing tyres in the dry is easy, in rain, not so. We all did our best to limit the amount of moisture getting on the tube and inside the tyre, but I think the rain won. It was about this time that I really started to feel the cold, and Lozza kindly offered me his multi-coloured woolen top to throw over my jersey. It felt a bit prickly and weird to start with, but I eventually got used to it.

We returned momentarily to Fernvale before heading due south to Glamorgan Vale. Sue tried her best to slow us down just a little bit more by dropping her chain, not once, but twice along Fernvale Rd. A quick fix and we were back to it, passing through Marburg and heading for the "Pinch of Pain" known as Tallegalla Hill, 500m of over 10% grade. With switch-backs being the order of the night, we soon crested the climb for the descent on the other side. Given the wet road conditions, there were no breakneck speeds this time round, what with many unprotected drops off steep banks and a quarry floor for a not-so comfortable resting place.

Day One Done, But I Still Feel the Cold?

We arrived at Rosewood at about 6:30pm, and it was still raining – surprise surprise. We quickly loaded the bikes onto Pete's waiting chariot and hot-footed it back to the warm comfort of the motel rooms at Raceview.



Loading the bike and bods for the trip back to Raceview

We arrived at the motel and quickly indulged in nice warm showers and clean fresh clothes – that's much better. A stop at the front desk to pay for our rooms, then we headed off to the restaurant to get a decent feed for the night. The restaurant wasn't anything flash, but comfortable at least. We placed our orders and chatted for a while. And a while. And just a little while more – hmm, better see where the meals are at. I had ordered the pumpkin soup with croutons, but upon receiving it, it was like – COLD. This is no good, so I had the wait staff come back, and explained to her that the soup was cold. For some reason that attracted the snarliest face I had seen in a while, only to then be greeted with the coldest shoulder effort when the soup returned – and I did say thank you. Wow, did it just drop 10 degrees in here?

With dinner finished, we headed back to the motel rooms for a bit more chatter and Sue's homemade fruitcake slice. Meanwhile, I decided to get some clothes washing done, temporarily having the title of Sadie the Cleaning Lady bestowed upon me. Since we were living the high life, we cracked open a bottle of Bailey's Irish whiskey and shared a good drop to warm the cockles of our hearts. Sue also took a tip from Lozza, when he offered advice on drying out wet and soggy shoes – stuff them with newspaper. Sue took on this advice.

Day Two Missing Captains and Doggy Pit Stops

With an early rise to re-rack bikes and head back to Rosewood for our restart, the team was refreshed and ready to tackle the remaining

distance to our finish line at Brothers League Club in Ipswich - and Sue was happily wearing a set of dry cycling shoes. Upon leaving Rosewood, we decided to stop at the toilets to refresh and then continue on our way. However, Peter did not hear this and kept on riding. No problems, he will realise shortly and turn around – ahh, nup. Where did our captain go? Immediately, I cast my memory back to last year's inaugural Petit, when in his French persona as Pierre, he kept on pedaling past our control at Mt Cotton. Oh Peter, where are you? It took us some kilometers to finally catch up to him in Walloon. The remainder of the distance back through Ipswich, went on without a hitch, with us taking a quick detour and pit stop to our motel rooms to change into our themed attire for the final few kilometers to the finish.

Yee Haa and Yaa Hoo!. We arrived at the leagues club riding in our metal steeds looking more like a vaudeville stage show gone terribly terribly wrong – no, I mean it was just PLAIN WRONG! Ahh, never mind, it was all in fun, and in the spirit of participating in the Petit Oppy charade.



Sue, Dino, Peter and Lozza completing the ride in style??

With the ride complete, we freshened up at the motel and returned to join our fellow Oppy riders for salutary breakfast. Lozza was a picture of contentment, with a smile the width of a bike wheel and really happy to have ridden around being part of possibly the oddest cycle team he had ever been with. Sue, Peter, Lozza and I all enjoyed each other's company, particularly learning a bit more about the area we were riding in, thanks to Lozza's formative life.

To Lozza, mate we only knew you for a little while, but you left a lasting impression with your knowledge of your surrounds and your love for all things outdoors. Take care up there pal.