

Conditions beat Oppy riders

Despite valliant efforts by the teams from Wagga Wagga, two teams failed to complete the Fleche Opperman in November. Although the riders were obviously dissappointed, their determination in the conditions showed their true randonneur spirit, and the Audax aim of striving to achieve a challenge wasn't let go easily. *Ray Stenhouse* reports on the conditions that lead to their plight.

The Bureau of Meteorology forecast issued at 15:31 on the Friday predicted moderate west to south-westerly winds with the temperature being warm to hot. The wind was as predicted, possibly stronger than the 20 to 29km/h that the Beaufort scale calls moderate, which was very unfavourable. However, the temperature was the most significant factor being in the high 30s.

My team, called Wheels And Gears Going Around, was made up of myself, Craig Gibbins who was in my team last year, Peter Dixon who rode with Ian Loble's team last year, and a new boy, David Walker. Peter's brother, George, who also rode last year pulled up lame and couldn't make it. Circumstances prevented us having any rides as a full team however I was quietly confident that we would all work well together on the day.

The first leg to Holbrook went well with the wind generally at the side. We got caught at the first traffic lights, less than 100m into the ride. We even had the rare privilege of overtaking another vehicle. There was a horse-drawn caravan plodding down the road. Peter wanted the draft the draughthorse but it was considered too slow to be of benefit. We had a good control at Holbrook near the submarine, out in about 7 minutes on our way to Walbundrie via Culcairn.

We were directly into the wind now and 11.5km from Holbrook I ran my front wheel into Craig's back one trying to get the draft. I went towards the road surface and unfortunately brought Peter down as well. With both wheels out of true and binding even with the brakes off I was ready to send the others on. Peter's wheels weren't too good either however I asked him to ride up the road a bit to check it out while I fiddled with mine. Peter went up and came back to announce that it was far easier riding the other way. I loosened off the brakes so that these no longer rubbed but now had little in the stopping department. Overall, as bike crashes go, I suppose we weren't too badly off. Peter had a bit of skin off and I had hurt my left knee and jarred my back fairly badly but there wasn't much blood



to be seen. It did rob us of a bit of confidence to draft effectively for a while though, especially me with no brakes.

We were starting to feel the pinch with the temperature up to 38 degrees and working hard into the wind. We stopped at Culcairn to get more water and despite this was nearly out before getting to Walbundrie. At Walbundrie Craig advised that he was cramping and felt that he was holding the team back. After giving him some time to think about it he decided not to continue. My back was not much fun and I told the other two that we could cycle on but I wasn't that hopeful of completing the distance. I iced the knee and had some painkillers and we left Walbundrie headed for Howlong. David came out of the Walbundrie Pub as white as a sheet after the liberal application of sunscreen much to the amusement of his team mates and the support crew.

While the wind wasn't directly into our faces the going wasn't good. It was quite a strong sidewind carrying a lot of dust with it. This wasn't any fun at all. There was talk of stopping at the Brocklesby Pub for a drink or seven, and in hindsight this was probably a great idea, but we pedalled past hoping that things would get better. Further up the road David started cramping and this was the death knell for the team. When we finally turned onto the Riverina Highway just out of Howlong the road surface was melting which was a great indication of how hot it was. It was a bit difficult on the bike to know how hot it was. We were going through the fluids very quickly though and had we been able to continue would have had to stop at Howlong to fill up again and rest a while.

At Howlong I made the telephone call to Phil Bellette to advise him we were withdrawing. We had another 250km with most of it directly into the wind before getting to our motel and with David cramping, and me being very uncomfortable, it was decided it wasn't in our best interests to continue. Peter decided he'd keep going just for a personal challenge and continued through to Corowa where he too decided enough was enough.

The other team that left from Wagga also suffered similarly with the wind and heat. This team was comprised of Keith and Gillian Helyar joined by Clyde Morton, Keith's son-in-law from Canberra. Clyde also suffered from cramps and pulled the pin at Howlong. The two Helyars were on a mission to try to ride 400km before having a significant break as they have plans of doing PBP and were told you need to do this over there to be successful. So they pushed on to Mulwala before their sensibilities kicked in and they called it a day too. Keith was very dehydrated and couldn't eat so they wisely packed it in.

The team that left from Leeton had slightly better conditions in that the wind was more to the side for most of Saturday however they still had the extreme heat to contend with and long distances between water stops. After taking some time off the bikes at Deniliquin they found themselves into a fierce headwind for the 110km remaining to Rochester. This took them 6 hours to achieve, a tremendous effort given the taxing day before.

While the Wagga teams are disappointed not to have achieved their goals we are happy with the decision to have abandoned the challenge given the circumstances. Next year is another year and another challenge so we'll see what happens then.

However, the majority of the Victorians were smiling on the day except for perhaps the team that started in the North Eastern region of Victoria. Just to rub it in a bit I overheard one of the riders from a successful team answering her support crew's question as to why she still had so much water was because it's pretty hard to drink at 40km/h.

I won't bother asking Phil to organise the weather a bit better next year. I did last year, and he's failed miserably. Great job again organising this year's event Phil and crew, weather excepted. Thanks again and we will be back. Although if it's a raging headwind like this year we might just accidentally arrive in Dapto, blown off course.

Photo: Oppy and the French flag at Rochester, a welcome sight for weary riders at the finish. Courtesy Andrew Raadgever

Quality versus Quantity

Tanya Bosch

"I average around 150 to 200 km per week but with no regimented program other than probably 3 rides of 20km during the week and a 40 to 50 km on Saturday followed by an 80 to 100 km ride on Sunday. This is all the time I have due to work and family commitments. Would this level of commitment or a slight increase be sufficient to cover the PBP distance? My longest ride to date is 200km which I have completed four times."

This is a question I received in response from the previous issue and probably reflects what a lot of cyclists experience: lack of time. For ultra endurance riding can one just concentrate on quality and forget about quantity?

I'm not in favour of it but being realistic there are a lot of time starved cyclists out there so the following is a suggested way to best use your training time.

First of all, buy a heart rate monitor so that you know what intensity that you are training at. Find out your maximum heart rate through testing or self testing and plan what rides you are doing in what zones and stick to it.

Previously I had said to do 80% of your riding in E1 (65-75% max). For a cyclist with limited time you can afford to make that figure 50% and do a lot more of your riding in E2 (75-85% max). Your longest ride should be mainly E1 but the rest of your rides should largely be E2. One way to do that is to ride at 75% for the whole ride. Another way is to do it in some 10-15 minute intervals at 80% with 5 minutes at E1 in between. As you are not riding that frequently in the week you will have more recovery time for the higher intensity.

Make your long ride of the week as long as possible even if it means you are not riding the rest of the week. It is necessary to train the body to burn fat rather than glycogen and to lay down the building



blocks to enable your body to exercise for a long time for PBP or any Audax events.

Make your qualifiers a significant part of your training. This may seem very obvious but if possible space out your qualifiers (or series or whatever you are aiming for) so that you have time to build up and to recover from each one.

Those experienced at this who are time limited may even want to consider some more intensity like improving your strength for the hills, raising your anaerobic threshold or improving your VO2 max itself by doing some short but intense work intervals. I will write more about that in the next issue.

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