

### Vote 1 Canola Canter -10 October 2004 – Malcolm Cook

It's been a cold and bitter winter in Canberra this year and because of that I have not done as much riding as I should. And it gets worse, the Oppy is arriving fast. Team Blondie is riding to Rochester again and I need miles on my legs. So I look at the calendar and see my friend Ray Stenhouse is organising a 200km brevet ride in Wagga the day after the Federal election. That's the one for me!!

Election Day and after doing our bit for democracy, and a quick birthday lunch for my son Alfred (he turned 16 that day), both Alfred and I headed off from Canberra to Wagga. Alfred has convinced me that he should ride the Oppy this year (after being in our support crew last year) and I have given in to him. The Canola Canter should be a nice flat course I tell him as we drive over (how wrong I was) and will a good test for the Oppy. That night we enjoyed dinner with Ray and his wife Lyn.

All up 45 riders presented themselves for the three options of 50, 100 kms and 200 kms. There were 11 starters for the 200. For our 200 km ride our objective was to ride 20 kms an hour on the road to simulate Oppy conditions.

The 200 km ride consisted of 2 loops - the first loop took us through some really beautiful scenery up to Marrar, across to Coolamon and back to Wagga through Millwood. It was a truly beautiful day with the canola out in bloom and hardly any wind. The country seems to be recovering well from drought. This is truly beautiful touring country and is strongly recommended!! The only problem was that the native bees were out in force and one lodged itself in my jersey and I ended up being stung numerous times before I could remove it. Alfred also reported being stung a few times. Thankfully native bee stings are not as painful as European bees and the discomfort did not last long.

After 20 kms or so we let the majority of the 100 km riders to ride off into the distance and cruised along at a more relaxed pace. I wanted our legs to be fresh for the second 100 kms. The course was undulating and more than a few times we found our speed on the hills down to 10 kms an hour. We arrived back into Wagga (102 kms) right on 12 noon for lunch (average 24.5 kms an hour on the bike or 22.7 kms an hour on the road). We stopped for half an hour for lunch and then remounted our bikes just as the last of the 100 km riders were rolling in. A few hundred metres up the road, however, I noticed my rear tyre was starting to deflate and Alfred suggested we return to the car to use the track pump – clever boy!

The second loop was pretty challenging with lots of long hills mixed up with rollers. While they were not steep individually they certainly drained our strength. On top of that we had real difficulty locating the Control at Wantabadgery (about 140 kms) and rode an extra 6-7 kms trying to find it. It turned out to be right where we stopped a few times – I should have listened to Ray more carefully at the briefing session. This section was not easy and we did not seem to get over 20 kms an hour for 30 kms. It took us 3 hours 25 minutes to do the 68 kms between Wagga and Junee. About 30 minutes of that was trying to work out where the Control was - but even taking that off it was still a slow section.

It sure was a relief to get into Junee (170 kms). I called Ray to let him know we were still on the road and we stopped there for about 40 minutes as both Alfred and I were in desperate need of food and drink. The stop refreshed us as we flew the last 39 kms into Wagga doing it in about 1 hour 25 minutes. I did this entire section on the front so clearly Alfred was either: tired, lazy or just plain smarter than me. Now I think about it, probably the latter.

We arrived back in Wagga just after 6 pm to finish this wonderful ride of to clock up 209 kms – 7 kms more than the official ride. Despite our problems we still averaged nearly 20 kms (actually 19.6 kms an hour) on the road.

I know this is meaningless as problems always seem to crop up on long rides - but taking off time we wasted looking for the control and for the flat tyre we would have averaged nearly 21 kms an hour on the road. And that would have got us into Wagga well before 5.30 pm (a 10 hour ride). So I convinced myself that our objective was achieved and that our Oppy preparation is back on track.

I would strongly recommend this ride to all fellow Audaxers. The country side is wonderful and the organisation by Ray Stenhouse and his helpers was superb. Particular thanks go to the people manning the various Controls.

So next October, think about a lovely weekend in Wagga riding with the extremely friendly Bicycle Wagga Wagga people. You could do much worse!

By the way, of the 11 starters, 10 finished the 200 km.