

Canola Canter - 9th October 2005 - Ray Stenhouse

The day of the Canola Canter in 2004 was absolutely perfect. It would be too much to ask to have the same sort of weather for 2005 wouldn't it? Well, it was too much to ask and the weather forecast didn't sound too good, and the rain on the roof overnight didn't help dispel any fears that the weather wouldn't be ideal. There wasn't anything that could be done about the weather. The ride was happening and all that could be done had been so there was nothing left but to get the riders out on the road.

When I arrived at the Wagga Beach at around 6:30 the car park was like a pond with the overnight rain pooling in many places. It wasn't very warm either and there was quite a stiff wind coming from the west. I had barely started to unpack the car when the first rider rolled in, a rider that hadn't registered, so that gave me hope that there were riders out there up for a challenge.

After that the riders started to arrive, some by bike and others by car. There was a bit of a scramble as several more riders decided to register on the day. Keith McCulloch volunteered to scrutinise the 200km riders for adherence to the lighting rules which eased the pressure for me as did the assistance provided by Heather Pearce, Bicycle Wagga Wagga's new Secretary.

All in all, a total of 7 riders lined up ready to take on the 200, down from the 11 last year. A record field for the 100, 32 starters, were keen to go too. A hurried briefing, made all the worse as I had grabbed the 50km Briefing Sheet in my haste, and the riders were sent on their way right on 7:30.

The route for the 100, and consequently the first 100 of the 200, leaves the Wagga Beach and goes out via North Wagga and onto the Coolamon Road. The first of the inclines on the Coolamon Road separated the group as riders settled in for the long haul. About 12 km down the road a right hand turn onto the Marrar Road which has a few undulations in it just before reaching the first control in Marrar itself. Being generally northerly the winds were crosswinds but were fairly buffeting all the same.



Marvelous Marrar. Riders steel themselves for the headwind.

At Marrar the riders were greeted by Joanne Cheshire who has always managed to put on a fine spread. With brevets signed, most spent a few minutes enjoying the fare or was it just a way of avoiding the headwind that now going to make the going difficult across to Coolamon? Most riders had formed little groups and were helping each other taking turns at blocking the wind. It wasn't a day where you really wanted to ride solo.

Last year a couple of riders miscued their turns at Coolamon and ended up riding a lot further than they had planned. This year only one managed to get lost at

Coolamon but at least she had a slightly shorter ride back along the Coolamon Road rather than going a long way over.

From Coolamon the route travels generally southward so the wind, once again, was more to the side than in front. While overall it is downhill to the Old Narrandera Road there are a number of rises that can be testing. Some of the riders reported getting a touch wet along this section but the showers were scattered with some getting around without being touched by moisture at all.

This year the Millwood control was manned by Geoff Marks and Ann Harvey. It was almost a shame to have to pull up at Millwood because once the riders had turned onto the Old Narrandera Road they had a roaring tailwind. But pull up they did, and between them all, the snacks were completely demolished.

With the tailwind the slight push up across the Malebo Range wasn't too difficult. The downhill off Malebo provides a fair bit of momentum anyway so the final kilometres into the Beach was a very pleasant way to finish off.

The 100km riders, finished for the day, headed off home to get into the warmth and settle down in front of the television to view the car races. The 200km riders rested a bit, ate a bit, and coaxed their bodies back onto the bikes. With the tailwind the trip out to Wantabadgery wouldn't be too bad. The Waters family acted as the control at their farm just out of Wantabadgery.

From the farm the route once again heads north so the wind was at the side again. Junee is the next control and the Windsors were waiting for the riders, Jeff having done the 200 last year. Some of the group stopped for coffee in town to steel themselves for the final leg. While not directly into the wind the wind was still a hindrance. At least the temperature was a bit better during the afternoon.

At 8:30 the 50km riders, 7 in total, took to the road. The route takes them out through North Wagga towards the CSU before getting onto the Old Narrandera Road. From there it's out past Euberta to Millwood where they turned around and retraced their tracks.

Generally the 50km riders aren't as strong as those attempting the longer distances and I felt a fair bit of sympathy for some of these, one of which was attempting her first ever 50km ride. They had 25km of headwind to the Millwood control plus the climb up Malebo Hill before they could turn around and enjoy the tailwind. The headwind took its toll with 3 finishing the distance but failing to get back in time.

As always these events rely on the willingness of many people that volunteer their time. Heather Pearce did a fantastic job with the entries. Lyn Stenhouse spent hours of her Sunday at the Beach. Joanne Cheshire went out of her way to be at Marrar control, as did Geoff Marks and Ann Harvey at Millwood. The Waters family once again looked after the riders at Wantabadgery and Jeff and Carole Windsor did a great job at Junee. Without these people this event would not have been as enjoyable for the riders and we are extremely grateful for their efforts.

A bonus this year was that the strong winds probably kept the pesky magpies at home instead of out swooping unsuspecting cyclists. The reports of magpie attacks were few and far between in contrast to last year when there were some very aggressive birds about.

This year saw riders travel a fair way to take in the sights and delights along the route. Riders came from Melbourne, Goulburn, Canberra, Leeton, Yanco, Albury, Young, Cootamundra and Junee. A little under half were visitors. Despite the ordinariness of the weather hopefully all had a good time, even those that did not finish, and look forward to coming back again next year.

Bicycle Wagga Wagga – Ride Report

Canola Canter 2005

Distance	Starters	DNF	Successful
50km	7	3	4
100km	32	3	29
200km	7	0	9
Total:	46	6	40