



I had been looking forward to this weekend for a while. I had a new front tyre fitted a week before and the rear tyre had about a thousand kms on it, so things were looking good. I packed the gear on Friday evening to be ready for Saturday morning and managed to leave by 7.45am.

On the way to Yarck I like to travel through Yarra Glen, Black Spur, Marysville, Buxton, Acheron, and the back way to Alexandra. I usually ride the Molesworth road as well. I checked the time on my watch and decided that route will do for another day; I didn't want to be late. This way I had time to clean my visor and have a chat before leaving on our epic ride. This year was exceptional; usually we have trouble filling 12 places but tomorrow there will be 33 people.

Ben gets on his soapbox and explains the details of our journey for the next four days. Whoopee! Time to hit the frog and toad. I'm last to leave as usual. There were lots of vehicles on the road: cars, cars with caravans, boats, some with jet skis, lots of 4WDs, even motorcycles.

En-route to Mansfield we were blessed with a convoy of Ferraris, all shapes, sizes and colours. Worth a few dollars too and something you don't see everyday. The main street wasn't blocked off like it normally is; no Mt Buller Sprint. Instead we were greeted with a collection of vehicles at the other end of town, waiting to proceed through the main street.

The first vehicle was an open top tourer with kids dressed in white uniforms with black spots. It was an old International truck with wooden spoke wheels, built about mid 1920s. It had a couple of old motorcycles on the back including a Sun. A low loader with kids on dirt bikes looked good and clearly a lot of work had been put into it. The kids seemed to be enjoying themselves.

I reckon the parade would have been worth watching, or at least having a good look at the old stuff.

Leaving Mansfield we continue riding at a steady pace, for obvious reasons. At the end of the straight, where the road curves to the right, there was a lot of heavy machinery in the paddock where the glass houses are built. The owners are probably doing some extensions.

Now in the twisties, the tail riders are slowly catching up, though the pace hasn't changed much. We get caught up with some other bikes and do our usual round 'em up. Lots of fun. Eventually, the pace picks up and all the fast riders end up at the front. I was enjoying myself going across the top, passing a few stray motorcyclists on the way. Into Whitfield we go.

As you come into Whitfield, just before you turn left, there is large shed with a bow in the roof that was the old locomotive shed. There used to be four narrow gauge railways in Victoria. There was the Wangaratta to Whitfield Line, opened in 14th March 1899 and closed 10th October 1953. Second, the Upper Ferntree Gully to Gembrook, opened 18th Dec 1900, closed 1954 and reopened 1962 till present. Third, the Colac to Beech Forest and Crowes line, opened 1st March 1902 and closed 30th June 1962. Lastly, the Moe to Walhalla line opened 15th March 1910 and closed 24th June 1954. This line has been restored from the Thomson River to Walhalla and reopened on the 13th March 2002 to present.

I stopped at the servo and filled up so as to not run out of fuel like I did last time on the CBF1000.

Back on the road again: Moyhu, Oxley, lots of people here, big market happening. Markwood, at the end of the straight, first corner, I see flashing lights. Hmm. Wonder what's happening. Looks like Ben picked up first prize in the Government Raffle. (Everyone's a winner, YOU PAY...)

I didn't realise I had got to the front so quickly. There weren't that many people corner marking; they must have been hiding somewhere. I corner mark at Gapsted, then it is Myrtleford for lunch. We stop at our favourite bakery. Lots of yummy food was consumed. Talk the talk.

After lunch it's off to Mudgegonga, Carrolls Road to Rosewhite, and then hit the Happy Valley road. If this road doesn't put a smile on your dial, I don't know what will. Next Running Creek, Dederang, Kiewa to Tangambalanga. It is a relatively boring ride consisting of mainly straight roads. We stop under the trees after 90 km to our clean visors. Then on to the Locharts Gap Road which is a great road with no traffic. Eskdale to Mitta Mitta. Ben took the turn off before Mitta Mitta to go to Dartmouth Dam.

Just before the turn off, there had been an accident with a Ford ute, same as a Mazda BT 50. It had been coming down the hill on a right hander, and someone coming up the hill had failed to take the left hand bend and hit the ute on the right rear wheel, and pushed the diff back, with the wheel being punched into the tub. Tow truck job. An ambulance had been called.

I had to shoot into Mitta Mitta to get fuel; otherwise I wouldn't have made the round trip. There seemed to be a lot of other riders with the same idea. Back on the bike, I head for Dartmouth Dam. I love this piece of road and ride at full noise from the turn off at the river all the way to Dartmouth, and then up the hill to the dam wall.

Last year the tide was way out, but this year the dam's full. It is hard to believe but I have pictures to prove it. We certainly have had lots of rain, and a full dam has brought the people back, which is good for business.

Photos, and then back to Mitta Mitta for fuel and food. Some people parked under the trees opposite the pub to get out of the blistering sun.

From Mitta Mitta we hit the Omeo Highway all the way to the Murray Valley Highway and then on to Bullioh where I corner marked the turn for the infamous Granya Gap. Grouse! Finally the last rider goes through and I get myself fired up for the run across the Gap.

I had only travelled 2.5 kms when I saw a bike parked on the side of the road. Cliff and Cindy had pulled up. Michael on the BMW had a broken throttle cable - stuck on full throttle. Not a happy chappy. His cable broke coming into the corner and he managed to save himself. A bit scary! We couldn't do anything to fix it because the screws had Torx heads and we had only Phillips head screw drivers. I told Cindy and another person to go, and that we would catch them later.

Michael couldn't get phone reception where we were so he rode the Beemer down to the bottom of the hill, freewheeling. I followed him down soon after, along with Cliff. In the meantime a nephew of mine and a friend of his were also riding their bikes over Granya Gap. It's amazing where you bump into people. Down the bottom, Michael had a job organising the RACV, but it eventually happened. Someone from Tallangatta would come out and pick him up.

Once it was all done and dusted, Cliff and I left him there and we continued on to Walwa, Tintaldra and Towong where I left Cliff and continued on to Corryong. The servo was shut, so I did a drive through Corryong looking for another servo, but couldn't see one.

The local cop was talking to Steve and Cindy on the footpath. I found out later that they had been breath tested. The cops were checking everyone so I turned around and went back to the motel where the others were staying.

I was glad to get off the bike and have a shower because it had been a long day. Rob Langer, Rod Merrett, Paul Southwell, Dave Ward, Ian Payne and I had tea at the restaurant. It was a long wait, but well worth it. There was one cook and one person out front, so they did very well under the circumstances. After tea some people went and saw the Jones clan at the other pub. I was just glad to go to bed.

Ron Johnston