

Ben Warden	Honda CBR1000	Pina Garasi	Honda CBR600
Tim Emons (lead)	Honda CBR1000	Ben Fuller	Suzuki GSXR1300
John Rousseaux (rear)	Honda CBR1000	Byron Morrison	Suzuki GSXR600
Paul Southwell	Honda CBR1000	Rob Langer	KTM 990
Tony Stegmar	Honda CBR1000	Peter Hill	KTM 990
Misho Zrakic	Honda CBR1000	Frank Hutchinson	Yamaha R1
Paul Simonson	Honda CBR1000	Pierre Ong	Ducati 1098
Dennis Lindemann	Honda CBR600		<i>15 bikes, 15 people</i>

The Committee moved the Christmas BBQ to the first week in December to allow Tim to lead on the second week on December, such is the paucity of leaders these days. Thanks Tim for making the time and commitment.

Nine a.m. at Berwick saw 13 bikes and riders assembled. The plan was to meet Ben Fuller at Tyers at 10.45am and Peter Hill at Briagolong around midday, Peter living in Stratford. This would bring the tally up to 15, but for how long?

After Tim provided a refresher on the proposed route, a glance at the threatening weather – occasional showers suggested for the areas we intended to ride, and John Rousseaux installed as the rear rider, as is his strong preference, we were off.

Down the freeway to Tynong and then running parallel to the freeway on the Old Princes Highway before crossing at Longwarry North, straight through to Buln Buln and the Old Sale Road. Then up and along the Willow Grove sweepers and Yallourn North dips and rises to regroup at Tyers. The rain had held off and the roads were dry, the outlook promising. Ben Fuller was ready and waiting.

Nine CBRs had us looking like a Honda Club though Pierre's 1098 and Rob's KTM added some exotica to the group. Pierre had invited his riding buddies, Paul Simonson, Frank and Byron. Note to self: must sign up Paul and Frank; Byron was on his first ride with the Club.

A splash of fuel for some and then we were on our way taking the usual route towards Licola but diverting around the spectacularly full Lake Glenmaggie, the water almost lapping at the roadside. Making good time, we arrived in Briagolong for fuel and a group photograph. Peter Hill on his recently rebuilt (rings, pistons, bearings) 100,000 km old KTM was there to greet us.

Byron and Frank had luggage mounting issues all weekend, at one point Frank's R1 pillion seat and bag ejecting. Their ride to this point was punctuated with frequent stops to re-attach their seat bags. Straps had been purchased only the day before. It was fairly noticeable that the regular members nearly all had racks and bags, though Tony has physically screwed his tail bag to the pillion seat with self tappers. His bag isn't ever coming off. On these sorts of trips, put function before form.

As food options in Briagolong are limited I suggested we press on to Bruthen where a couple of bakeries can better meet the demand of 15 hungry bikies in a timely fashion. This leg is longer than it appears on paper as we avoid all the highway sections including picking up Beverley's Road and back roads north of Bairnsdale eventually rejoining the highway at Wuk Wuk, just out of Bairnsdale. Off the highway again to enter Bruthen from the south along more twisting roads in amongst the tall trees including the corner where Cliff was hit in the hand by a flying rock a couple of trips ago.

After a leisurely lunch break, including a coffee fix for the addicted, the really exceptional riding began: The Great Alpine Road north to Omeo. With riding conditions now perfect, the bikes shod with near new tyres, and skills honed and polished by the previous stints on secondary roads, the afternoon ride could be enjoyed to the maximum. In management-speak, this was a key deliverable of the ride! As we were doing a loop, Pina climbed aboard with Misho to miss a couple of hundred

kilometres of potentially tiring and demanding riding, bearing in mind she still had the brilliant 40 km run in to Dargo to finish up with.

After 68 km of glorious riding along The Great Alpine Road, we turned left at Swifts Creek taking the alternative six kilometre longer route to Omeo, regrouping at the lookout, a few kilometres out of Omeo. Pierre was concerned about his fuel consumption and we suggested filling in Omeo on our way through. Off we headed for another 100 plus kilometres of great road.

I found myself behind Paul Southwell who steadily increased the pace, keen for me not to overtake. Misho and Pina sat behind me. At some point I had a light bulb moment and decided that the pace was sufficiently fast that I could enjoy the by-play rather than stick my neck out in a desperate passing manoeuvre. Paul's bike was leaving a cloud of black smoke on corner exits as he hunted the higher rev ranges of the mighty CBR. So the three of us travelled in tight formation in the corners and Paul stretched the elastic along the straights. Misho was keen for me to push past, but Pina was not happy with the wheel to wheel embraces, lights in each others' mirrors, I later learnt. Her recent string of crashes may have tempered her enthusiasm for the 'Yee ha' factor.

Paul Simonson came whizzing by, bored with our antics. He set off in pursuit of Ben Fuller riding the big Hayabusa at superb levels, confidence much improved after front suspension mods by Steve Mudford – stiffer springs, new oil, etc.

Tight twisties and I'm on the brakes hard. Really hard, wondering why Paul Southwell is braking to a near stop. And then it becomes clear.

Paul Simonson has overcooked a double right tightening apex corner. He's sitting on the road and the bike is four metres down a 60 degree embankment, upside-down. After passing Ben F., the road tightened unexpectedly. Paul has almost hung on, riding on the verge for a period before the lower fairing has dug in and pitched him over the bars resulting in minor gravel rash to his hip and the bike disappearing over the edge. He remembered seeing his laptop go sailing past his line of sight, and it's now hiding down there somewhere.

Ben Fuller pillioned Paul the 22.4 km to Bruthen to begin the recovery process starting with ringing his wife and eventually organising a neighbour to come and pick him up. In the interim a group of us looked for the lost laptop in a black tail bag including John Rousseaux way down the gully in the creek and out of sight. After about 30 minutes of searching Tim found the laptop wedged in a tree another 4 or 5 metres further on from the bike. Good work. We took a few photos to commemorate the find.

Back on the bikes, with maybe an hour lost, we headed for Bruthen. Eleven kilometres out Pierre was stopped at the side of the road in earnest conversation with Frank. He had run out fuel, not seeing the second open servo in Omeo, the first being shut. And gambled. And lost. Something about his carbon fibre tank holding a litre less than the standard tank.

After refuelling in Bruthen, Frank went back to Pierre as the siphon hose of the rear rider (a bit hazy here) doesn't seem to work with low-fuel CBRs.

I suggested to Tim that he press on as the Dargo Pub would likely stop food taking orders at 8 pm and rather than wait for Pierre, he go, and I would look after them. Agreed.

I rode the 11 km back towards Omeo to find Pierre and Frank just about ready to leave. So the three of us, now 30 minutes behind the main group, set off in pursuit. Forty minutes later we caught the tail end of them.

Byron had crashed on the Fingerboards Road after a heavy shower of rain had made the roads wet. We missed the shower but not the wet roads. Byron appeared to have locked up the rear wheel on a tight 45 km/h right hand 90 degree bend, and high sided into a tree. Fatigue was probably a factor. The bike was not going anywhere. An ambulance had been called and was on its way – Byron had a

strong pain in his bum which thankfully turned out to be just bruising. Frank and Pierre stayed with Byron until the ambulance arrived, with instructions to catch up with us in Dargo, only one more right turn away, or about 60 km.

Paul Southwell had departed, so that left me to catch up with the group in Dargo to sort accommodation - three B&Bs, with the group distributed across the three and meeting together at the pub for the evening meal. Paul was heard to remark that he had “regained his Mojo” on the Omeo Road, after two years. An eventful day!

I caught up with Maggie and Dan McIntosh at the General Store, and member Lyn Duncan. Dan and Maggie are looking to sell the Store but continue to improve the site while a sale is progressed. Dan’s latest challenge is creating a new, larger fuel tank by cutting in half a recently acquired one and welding in a new section. He has had to get accreditation for his welding and various engineering signoffs along the way. I wondered what the 4 car wheel and axle arrangement was in the shed – to rotate the tank while welding. What a process!

Next morning saw the group arrive in dribs and drabs for an egg and bacon burger, and a coffee as part of their \$50 a night bed and breakfast. At least half the people had a room to themselves, so it was exceptional value. Thanks Dan.

It was raining. A constant heavy drizzle. Nothing for it but to don the full wet weather gear and enjoy the ride. First stop Briagolong for fuel at the 90 km mark. As luck would have it the rain cleared and we headed for Licola for the next challenging road. Luckily we had a good breakfast, as Licola is not much chop for lunch. Pina had discretely secreted a ‘spare’ egg and bacon roll away, so she and Misho were fine.

Another 90 kilometres to Tyers for fuel and to perform a puncture repair on Tim’s rear tyre which strangely deflated when a long sliver of plastic was removed from the tyre. My fat reaming tool was not a good match for Tim’s thin liquorice plugs, so the repair took slightly longer than usual, with fat plugs being the answer. They are available from Repco and don’t need any glue.

On to Moe for a late lunch at either the bakery or Subway. The group had dwindled down to 10 riders with Frank the last to leave at Tyers, seeking a direct route home.

Noojee here we come. The road was the usual high standard up through the Willow Grove sweepers. But the tight twisty section from Fumina South to Icy Creek was diabolically slippery after the recent rains and windy conditions had left decaying leaf litter on the road. I was chasing Pierre and we caught and passed Misho. Pierre was on a mission and was untouchable. Those Diablo Corsas must have been working really well. He could smell home.

We broke up at Noojee after a reflective break and made our separate ways home. The official ride length was 1188 km from Berwick to Noojee. Home to home was closer to 1350 km for me. Apart from the crashes it was a brilliant weekend with fantastic road selection. We avoided the majority of wet weather, seeming to ride around it on Saturday. And all the good roads were dry except for Dargo Sunday morning. Thanks Tim for leading and John for rear riding duties.

Ben Warden

Postscript: Talking to Paul Simonson a couple of days later, he noted he eventually got home at 2.30am after coercing a neighbour to drive from Melbourne down to Bruthen (~300km) and collect him in a van, and conveniently pick up Byron's crashed GSXR600 on the way back, and then Byron at 11 pm from Bairnsdale Hospital after X-rays revealed mild concussion but nothing broken. Paul's wife and two kids were happy to see him when he got home.

Paul then returned the next day to recover his yellow CBR with a tow truck required to haul it up the embankment - \$500 thanks. He was very interested in the Power Commander and speedo healer.