

Dargo via Omeo Mk II

This was only my second ride for the year and as soon as the Committee gave the green light, I put my money down!

Finally, the day before the ride arrived. After coming home from work, I planned to put my Pirelli tyres on - to finish them off. But the ambiguous weather forecast didn't help. So after the rain on the Melbourne Cup weekend, I decided to put touring tyres on as I was convinced it would rain most of this trip. The front was finished anyway, so I only had to change that one for another new touring tyre I had sitting at home.

After looking at the new tyre for a while and trying to figure out why the tread pattern looked so different to the rear, I consulted the Internet and found out I had ordered the wrong tyre, a BT-023 GT - suitable for heavy sport-touring bikes! I even had to drive to the service station to pop the bead as the tyre was so stiff it wouldn't seal using the foot pump. This tyre is going to be great on a 600, I thought! I decided to have a cruisy weekend and not be put off by the rain or non-flexing tyres – but I whinged about it all night to Bianca anyway!

How wrong I was.

I arrived at Berwick with most of the starters already waiting, the sun out. I saw a few new faces, but not new to the Club. The weather was fine and I couldn't wait to go. Tim provided us with the ride briefing while John and Pina fought over whom would be rear rider: John.

We headed down the usual route towards Gippsland on the M1 and took back roads from Longwarry North. I gradually increased my pace and felt more comfortable along the way and stopped thinking about tyres, unusual vibrations, and noises. Instead I enjoyed the roads.

We stopped in Tyres for morning tea where I noticed something stuck in my tyre. The tyre wasn't leaking, but I thought the nail or whatever would just drive in further, the farther I rode. Tim used his pliers and tried to pull it out – luckily it was just a piece of wood which fell apart pulling it out .

We departed for Briagolong with some nice roads around Lake Glenmaggie and then a brief stop for fuel in Briagolong. Peter Hill joined us here on his KTM.

Beverly's Road was next and I noticed very dark grey storm clouds looming ahead of us. Every time we changed direction I was relieved. But like last year, we eventually headed straight for them. I can still remember the skies from last year and these clouds looked identical, hovering in the same position.

On roads I can't remember with way too many direction changes, we rode into Bruthen. I noticed a few drops of rain before we stopped, but after filling up the bike it started pouring heavily. Everyone looked for a dry spot to park their bike before hunting for food. A couple of other bikes were here as well, but soon they left. Tony Stegmar and Frank were missing.

They soon arrived, coming through the rain into town from the opposite way we came in. Apparently our rear rider took off without them in Briagolong. The rain stopped and we got ready for my favourite part of the weekend: Bruthen to Omeo. The scenery here is probably beautiful, but who cares if the twisties are that exiting and fast.

Unfortunately, the roads were all wet due to the 30 minutes of heavy rain we just had...WRONG! After 10 minutes I started lifting my visor to double check the road ahead as I didn't believe what I was seeing. Dry! All the way to the lookout where we stopped to enjoy the scenery we had just missed. Only here I realised that my tyres weren't bad at all. I never had a moment or the front felt unstable. My only concern was that there was little or no graining on the tyres given the corner speeds we were doing.

The roads were great with hardly any traffic and the most fun you can have... the longest anyway ☺

We headed back the same way to Bruthen via Omeo. Out of Bruthen we were pretty much spread out, but after the fast straight bits after Omeo we were all bunched up which I thought increased the speed – a bit.

I let the big litre bikes pass me as I wanted to save fuel and kept the rev's low ;) and watched the cat and mouse game from behind.

Misho with Pina on the back was trying to overtake Ben before a left-hander and after a few seconds of riding next to each other I had to think of these 60's movies where two people drive towards a cliff and the first who stops loses. Most of the time the winner also ends up going down.

Misho was persuaded by Pina (hitting him in the back) to back off and play nice; which he did.

Coming around a blind right hander I saw Tim, I think, waving on the side of the road to slow down. Paul Simonson was sitting on the side of the road with Pina next him. He seemed fine, just a bit shaken and bruised, which was lucky looking at the corner, the position of the bike and where he could have ended up... way, way down or stuck in some trees.

Ben Fuller, who was behind him at the time, said that he was running wide and hit the gravel on the side of the road. The bike started bouncing and while he was trying to get back, one bump catapulted him out of the seat and over the bike which landed him on the side of the road where the bike went straight down the embankment.

He was missing his tail bag and while he got a lift from Ben Fuller back to Bruthen the rest of us went looking for his bag in the bushes. John even went all the way down to the river to find an old 4WD chopped in half. I found a pair of sunnies and Tim eventually found the bag. We took a picture after retrieving the bag and then continued on to Bruthen as well.

My fuel light had been flashing already for some time and so I tucked behind the screen, much to the amusement of Misho and Pina. A few kilometres before Bruthen I saw Pierre on the side of the road, but with someone already assisting him, I kept going. Later I found out that he had run out of fuel and couldn't siphon anything as everyone else was also low and couldn't reach the bottom of their tanks.

Back at Bruthen Paul Simonson was organising the pickup of his bike and himself.

We took the same roads back to the Dargo turnoff, except for the bit of highway to Bairnsdale. It rained for five minutes on the way to the turnoff which left the road in this horrible condition where you didn't know whether it was dry or not.

Riding on the semi-wet roads, I saw a couple of bikes parked ahead of me and another bike on its side in the grass. Byron had locked up his tyres and then slid sideways off the road and probably flipped the bike as well. He was okay - just his bum was hurting, he said.

The ambulance was called as his helmet had deep scratch marks on the back. Eventually everyone arrived and we continued on, picking up road to Dargo. Unfortunately, the first part was still wet, and only dried up briefly a couple of kilometres before Dargo.

First stop in Dargo was the Pub for a beer and to order a steak before the kitchen closed as it was already 7.30pm. Ben organised beds for everyone.

After a quick feed, we grabbed a couple of take away drinks and met down at the house on the river where Rob, John and Tony were staying. The fire was already going when I arrived with Rob, John, Tim, Paul Southwell, Ben W., Pierre, Frank, Peter, Tony and I talking about the day, bikes and random stuff. Lynn also stopped by later on.

Next day started with rain. We met at the Dargo General Store for Bacon and Egg Rolls and coffee. The rolls were delicious and just right for the day ahead. I thought about them again when we had lunch.

A dozen or so dirt bike riders were also getting ready, although I think they liked the weather more than I did.

One by one we left Dargo on wet roads. After a while Pierre overtook me, not for the first or last time that weekend. He was bloody fast in the wet and even Misho told me that he backed off at one point as it was too fast for him. I enjoyed the lonely ride out and had a smile all the way. I didn't mind the rain/drizzle and it actually stopped after we left Dargo. We re-grouped at Briagolong and then it's off to Licola. Rob told us about troubles with his bike here as he was losing power at high rev's. Fuel pump? He left the ride. A quick break in Briagolong for fuel where Frank left us as well.

We rode the same roads back to Lake Glenmaggie and then the great road down to Licola. I tried to keep an eye out for my crash corner from last year, but I missed it.

A few riders went up the McCallister River Road for more twisties while the rest of us lunched in Licola. Pina wasn't amused when she found out Misho left without her for the extra loop.

On the way back out of Licola I looked out for birds and everything similar from last year – stupid superstition. I wanted to check my crash corner, but Pierre let me go past and I missed it again. Going through the section in my head later in Tyres for our break, I couldn't work out why I crashed. I must've been riding way too fast because I thought today's pace wasn't slow. I especially enjoyed the last bit of open road along the ridge where the man-high grass occasionally hit my helmet going around the corners.

A quick break and fuel in Tyres where I saw something white stuck in Tim's tyre. He used the pliers again, as on the day before on my bike, but in his case the removal of the object was accompanied by a constant hissing sound. He plugged the hole with one of those sticky strips and put air back in. Pictures were taken during the repair process.

We went back on a wet Icy Creek Road and instead of breaking up at Powelltown, Tim decided to extend the ride, given time of day, by going home via Jindivick and finishing in Longwarry North. Somewhere after Noojee I caught up to a Commodore going quickly through the corners; he used a lot of the road too. In a right hander he went straight up the road and I blindly followed him. I thought "This is not the main road. Where is the corner marker?" After 2km I did a U-turn and saw Pina and John approaching who saw me going the wrong way.

The roads after Jindivick are always fun with those blind high speed corners.

I was well and truly stuffed after that. I think I'm still riding too stiff as I always had to remind myself to loosen-up my arms. I guess more frequent rides should fix that.

Thanks Tim for leading this ride. I enjoyed every minute of it. Thanks to John for looking after us from the other end and to all who came along. I hope this tradition will carry on!

All the best to Paul and Byron. I hope you get back on the bikes as soon as possible.

Dennis Lindemann