

Misho Zrakic/Pina Garasi	Honda CBR1000	Cliff Peters (leader)	Kawasaki ZX10
Ben Warden (leader)	Honda CBR1000	Marc Marais	Kawasaki ZX10
Tony Stegmar (rear rider)	Honda CBR1000	Jason Wilson	Kawasaki ZX9
Ron Johnston	Honda CBF1000	Gordon Heydon	Kawasaki ZX6
Cindy Lee	Triumph 675		<i>9 bikes, 10 people</i>

I will be leaving Melbourne soon for some contract work in South Africa. The dates aren't set yet but it's coming soon. So this was potentially my last ride for a while (four weeks overseas, two weeks back home) so I was really keen to meet up with everyone and get a decent ride in. I know I'll be itching to ride while I'm away – the 'fix' doesn't last that long!

The weather was terrible, rain/drizzle but I thought I'd at least ride to the Yarra Glen meeting point and say hi/bye and then ride back home. Only Misho, Pina, Ben, Tony, Ron, Cindy and Gordon were at Yarra Glen. Cindy arrived not long before we were to leave wearing only her leathers; she wasn't expecting it to rain! Needless to say she was a bit wet but decided to continue on – awesome! The ride left late at 10:30am – delayed by lots of chatting and hoping the rain would ease off.

I said my goodbyes and headed home via Christmas Hills. When I got to the top of the ridge above Yarra Glen the weather cleared up a bit and I saw some blue sky. I suspected it wouldn't last but at least there would be some clear weather on the ride. Being my 'last' ride for a while, I thought why not make the most of it, despite the weather? So I turned around and headed for Warburton – the direct route to re-join the ride at the first stop.

I arrived to find Jason outside the bakery (actually, the coffee shop downstairs – but the bakery is more visible from the road). He'd missed the start and headed straight for Warburton too. I haven't seen him a while so we got to catching up.

We waited and waited for what seemed like an age. I started to wonder if something had gone wrong. Ron had said they were taking some 'interesting' roads to Warburton but only 65km worth, so not much more than I had just done. Eventually the group turned up, sans Ben and Ron. My fears were confirmed. Ron had crashed on Sunnyside Road in East Seville due to a diesel spill on a wet wooden bridge (a bad combination). Ben pillioned him home and Ron now has a large bruise on his hip, but otherwise seems to be okay.

Ron's bike suffered a ripped open crankcase caused by the Oggy knob – sometimes they save you cash on repairs and sometimes they end up costing you more! I had knobs on my bike up till recently but had to remove them as the bracket cracked due to vibration. Kenma said they would refund me (good on them) as they don't have an improved design for the ZX-10R. I've heard others having issues with knobs too, in one extreme case an insurance claim was denied due to "unspecified modifications" causing damage to the frame – although this is hearsay.

Cindy left us at Warburton – too cold and wet to continue. We waited around having a great time drinking coffee and chatting for what seemed like a long time till eventually Ben returned from dropping Ron off.

Now without a ride leader, Ben took over and we headed off to the next stop which was originally going to be Marysville but we pushed on to Eildon instead. Much to our surprise we met up with another two MSR riders, Cliff Peters and Paul Southwell, at the Eildon servo. Paul had rung Cliff up early on Sunday asking him to join him for a coffee. Then they decided to meet up with us at Eildon and rode up via Whittlesea and Yea. Paul headed home and Cliff continued on with us. With Cliff on his ZX-10, it was great to see four green Kwakas and four Hondas; we're getting there, Team Kawasaki! ☺

The next leg was via Fraser National Park (Skyline Road) which had a few dry stretches – love that road. From there we headed to Alexandra, Yarck, Gobur, Caveat, Highlands and Seymour. We stopped just

short of Seymour to regroup and take a group photo before Ben took us on roads I'd never seen before and I got quite disorientated. Not the twistiest of roads but still interesting, quiet, back roads leading us through Trawool, Tallarook and eventually into Broadford where I finally recognised where we were!

After a short break (it was close to sunset after all the delays) Ben, Cliff, Gordon and myself headed back on the Old Hume Road to rejoin the Hume Freeway at Wandong for the remaining trek into the city. At this point it was cold, dark and pouring with rain.

I was stoked that I'd recently fitted heated grips and that I could now crank them up. The visibility was atrocious on the Hume, not helped by the amount of traffic whipping up the water on the road. I really enjoyed the fast ride home from Broadford following Ben, for some masochistic reason!

Tony, Misho, Pina, and Jason headed off to Strath Creek, Flowerdale, Kinglake West, Kinglake, Mt Slide and Yarra Glen, Misho and Pina to retrieve Pina's bike. She had left it there in the morning and gone pillion with Misho due to the wet weather. I heard they got home well after 7 pm, Pina with frozen hands and feet, scared stiff of hitting a kangaroo along the Christmas Hills road in the dark and rain, riding very slowly and carefully, prolonging the agony!

A great ride – the best I've had in a while in spite of (or perhaps because of) the weather. The 'fix' should last me at least a week – question is what to do for the next three to four weeks while I'm overseas? Anyway, it was great. Thanks to all those that came along to share the experience.

Marc Marais