

Misho Zrakic/Pina Garasi	Honda CBR1000	Bill Kennedy	Kawasaki Z750
Ben Warden	Honda CBR1000	Rob Langer	KTM 990
Roman Berjoza (rear rider)	Honda CBR600	Phill Hotschilt	Suzuki GSXR1300
Rod Merrett (leader)	BMW S1000RR		<i>7 bikes, 8 people</i>

I was woken up in the middle of the night by heavy rain prior to my first lead ride. It left me staring at the ceiling with ominous thoughts of a horror day to come, slipping and sliding our way up the treacherous Mt Baw Baw. I seriously considered whether my not too flash back tyre would have what it takes to lead our extremely talented brigade on this ride.

Dawn finally broke, after my tossing and turning half the night, with blue sky and the sun shining. Thank you Hughie! The gods are smiling. This changed my outlook from trepidation to anticipation: BRING IT ON! We are going to leave blackies from the bottom of the mountain to the top! As someone once said, "My ambition is exceeding my talents." On reflection, you silly old fart, best get brain in gear and consider safety and caution as FIRST priority.

Meeting Phil at the Mernda pub, the two of us made the quick sprint to Yarra Glen in glorious sunshine, keeping an active lookout for our fine friends in blue. Phil would have been scratching his head at various times due to my unnecessary braking for suspiciously parked or oncoming vehicles. I was erring on the side of caution due to the public holiday police blitz and expected to maintain this level of vigilance all day.

Arriving early and first, Phil chatted about yesterday's successful ride with Ben: perfect weather, no incidents or accidents, a well organised day was had by all. (Ben's impeccable planning, as usual.)

Rob arrived on his immaculate KTM. (How many bikes has Mr Nice Guy got now?) Then Ben, followed by Bill, Roman and Misho with the lovely Pina. After going through the formalities, our small but formidable company made its way down the Old Healesville Road under darkening skies. This damp road is well known to the MSR fraternity, so the pace was only restricted by the previous night's rain.

In Healesville at the Toolangi "T" intersection chaos ensued due to a dead heat between two cars requiring a tilt tray and police attendance. Marking the corner, I waited until the second rider appeared only to have him sail past. Noting it was Ben, the grey matter kicked in. I realised we couldn't hang around here cluttering up the intersection, especially when Plod was on the scene.

The run across to Launching Place was fluid in motion. When I hit an intersection the following two riders marked in the right spots, the middle riders followed through until rear rider Roman on his spotlessly restored 600 was sighted, usually with the required highbeam flash. Blast off! Repeat. The whole procedure worked like a well choreographed dance. The only time I've been the recipient of a stuffed up corner mark during my many rides with MSR it ended with ME getting hopelessly lost down Gippsland way, the secretary taking my bike home and me taking his bike home for the night. (We had swapped bikes prior to the stuff-up.) The procedure is there for a reason; do not deviate from it!

We cleared Launching Place and I noted two marked four wheel drives past us heading in the same direction - must be morning tea.

Making our way through Yarra Junction with darkening skies, I knew my luck had to change.

Roughly ten kilometres out of Yarra Junction the rain started. It persisted all the way to Noojee, consistently heavy, unrelenting and bloody cold! The temperature plummeted. Thirty-two kays of cold wetness through those sensational twisties and sweepers. Just my luck. Great! My gloves were saturated and fingers numb and my left boot was waterlogged. Bill noted he could see jack shit, has got water down his neck, sleeves and both tits, and isn't this fun! Tiger Angel apparel is supposed to be the best. BAH ! My elcheapo DriRider pants were doing a sterling job. It makes you wonder. Can anyone recommend a good pair of waterproof gloves? If there was any consolation, everyone was in the same boat, including Misho with his heated hand grips which weren't working. Strangely, Phil's old and cheap gloves worked a treat, staying dry and warm.

Finally, I made it to the Neerim turnoff (three kays from Noojee) and stopped to mark the intersection, dreading the wait in this downpour. I could have run over and kissed Ben when he waved me on. Yah hoo! Hot coffee here I come.

Pulling into Noojee and parking under the verandah the wet gear couldn't come off quick enough, even with numb fingers. The shop proprietor could see the pain and suffering I was in and offered to light the gas/electric fires and provide drying chairs for the incoming drowned rats which were gratefully utilised.

After thawing out, cups of hot coffee (and cold pies), a laugh and a chat for roughly an hour, the rain finally stopped. But after a group discussion it was decided Baw Baw was out of the question and we would turn around and head back the way we had come. As it turned out, it was the correct decision due to Baw Baw receiving 15 cm or 6 ins of snow during the day; that would have been exciting.

The return ride was a drizzly non-event other than being waved on by a person beside an upturned car which had slid off the road and was now on its side, just out of Powelltown.

Rob and Roman continued down the highway at Launching Place leaving the ride. Ben disappeared at the Yarra Glen turn off, while Bill, Misho, Pina, Phil and myself continued on to Kinglake to enjoy one last coffee and hot pie while sheltering from a hailstorm in the warm Kinglake bakery.

Heading down the mountain together after the rain stopped, we parted ways at Whittlesea.

On reflection, if I had known that the weather was going to turn nasty and I was going to get as wet, cold and numb as I did, I wouldn't change a thing! I'd be there with bells on. This Club is all about riding. The passion is very obvious, the calibre of the riders is awe inspiring, the administration is second to none, and the encouragement and welcome new riders receive is to be admired. And I'm a part of it!

Thank you, MSR.

Rod Merrett