



Quinn Myers	Kawasaki ZX14	Ben Warden	Honda CBR1000
Garry Boucher	Kawasaki ZX14	Misho Zrakic	Honda CBR1000
Aiden Baker	Kawasaki ZX10	Paul Southwell	Honda CBR1000
John Willis	Kawasaki ZX10	Pina Garasi	Honda CBR600
Ronny	Kawasaki ZX6	Jesvin George	Honda CBR600
Phill Hotschilt	Suzuki GSXR1300	Kurn Bridgeman	Honda CBR600
Tony Stegmar	Suzuki GSXR1000	Rob Langer (lead)	BMW F700
Glenn Aspden	Suzuki GSXR1000	Cindy Lee	Triumph 675
Steve Mudford	Suzuki GSXR1000		17 bikes, 17 people

I'll admit to a small amount of trepidation going into this ride. It was my first overnighter with the Club (no big deal) but more importantly, my first Club ride since I, err... *upgraded* \*cough\*. Three months since my spill and although I had put plenty of miles on the bike since getting hold of her, I was a little wary of maintaining Club pace while staying safe. Would I be able to keep my ego in check? Would I again succumb to allowing my ambition to exceed my ability? All that disappeared after about 30 minutes on the road and I felt like I had never been away. Good times.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Drama began even before the ride briefing. I saw **Tony Stegmar** digging out the cable ties to fasten some loose fairing from a minor bingle earlier in the morning. He seemed fairly optimistic about it all which was good to see. If I'd just done that to my bike immediately before a ride there may have been some random bystanders being accosted and minor stabbings involved. The ride briefing had a sombre note with **Ben Warden** highlighting safety as a major buzz word for the weekend - four crashes in the previous four weeks and no one wanted to see any repeats. Also, the whole platoon seemed to be dropping like flies - five dropouts due to various ailments made the group considerably smaller than initially planned.

On the first leg, making our way to Tyers, I noticed **Misho Zrakic** pulling up and parking on the side of the road. As I went past, I slowed down and turned in the saddle to check if there were any problems only to be waved on. Turning back around to focus on the road ahead again and the

reason for him stopping was apparent. Ben has made himself popular with the local constabulary - not even 100 km on the clock yet. Could it be that we've found the tone for the weekend early? As the rest of us sedately cruise along waiting for someone to step up, **Paul Southwell** moves to the front and normal service resumes.

The group pulls into the servo at Tyers and breaks into conversation. **Steve Mudford** makes some quick on-the-fly suspension adjustments to his Gixxer - on its first outing since a rebuild I believe. He mutters something about not having had any time for any developmental testing but seems happy with the results. Ben then nonchalantly slides into the servo and announces that he has incurred nothing more dramatic than a spot licence check. I notice the slightest hint of a good natured, smug grin cross the face of **Rob Langer**... he had called it right five minutes previously.

Fuelled up again, we resume riding towards Briagolong for morning tea. I bail up **Garry Boucher** and wistfully discuss his 2012 ZX-14R. "Ya' know Gary, I used to have one of these but then decided that the 2009 model was much more to my liking." (Yeah, right – oh, how I miss thee).

After stopping in Bruthen for lunch we set off again towards Omeo. We'd only been in motion for five minutes when I saw an unfamiliar bike steaming up behind in the mirrors - this guy is moving. Open faced helmet and knees all but scraping, I make room for him to come by me... as if he needed it. I didn't even have a chance to identify the bike other than it being naked. At our next stop, Ben recounts how he saw the guy matching Misho before Misho let him past. Old mate then swallowed up a number of others before (to quote Ben) "Steve just left". I never did find out if there was any sort of tussle going on and more importantly what the outcome was. At the end of the day I think this chap added an interesting element for many to what was already an awesome piece of road. Oh yeah, his naked bike was a Kwaka Z1000 (I'm not a Kwaka fan-boy, honest.)

After regrouping at the Lookout and then refuelling at Omeo we made our way back to Bruthen for our final stop before reaching Dargo. **John Willis** makes a pit stop for fuel and as he is waiting at the counter hears the attendant on the phone. "Yeah, there's a red one, a yellow one, some green ones..." John can't believe that this guy is obviously giving a detailed description to the cops of the bikes in the group until... "Sorry mate, that was the guy on the Z1000; he says you should all swing by for a beer if you want". Wow - nice bloke. In the end he showed up again 10 minutes later and had a chat with some of the group.

Back on the road once more for the final stretch into Dargo. I spent the majority of the run sitting behind **Pina Garasi**. I'm absolutely knackered due to a shocking night's sleep the night before and I'm very grateful to have a spotter in front. Pina later apologised for holding me up (!) which couldn't be further from the truth.

Soon, the bustling metropolis of Dargo is spread out before me. I've never been here before and my immediate thought is "Dammit - I forgot to bring my banjo!" This turns out to be a disgraceful disservice to the place. Decent pub, great food, very welcoming people... just don't drink the water from the tap, eh.

Due to my previously mentioned elevated state of knackery, I bail for bed relatively early. I'm keen to get a decent sleep before the inevitable rude awakening I expect from a high velocity pillow at some stage in the night. Either Garry has a hearing problem, is far too kind to say/do anything, or, shock of all shocks. I no longer snore with the frequency and volume of a stampede of heavily laden freight trains? Regardless of the reasons, I enjoy a restful sleep and awake ready to tackle the return journey... right after coffee and the most important of breakfast ingredients... bacon.

Just before departing Dargo, another group of riders on dirt bikes are heading off. I wondered how they managed their fuel. This was quickly answered when their support vehicle pulled up. Good

planning there. Dirt riding I wouldn't mind doing but I get the feeling that it would be much more physically demanding than road riding so maybe not 'til next year... or the year after.

More great riding fun followed and I was happy to note that our luck was holding. No more attention from Holdens with fancy, flashing roof racks. At the first stop (again in Briagolong) Ben mentions that once we hit Licola, there will be the option to stop straight away or continue up the hill. There is one of the best winding hill climbs to be negotiated if we continue up the hill.

Licola is another destination I haven't had the privilege of experiencing so I am careful to follow Ben's instructions to the letter. I headed across the bridge, past 'town' and followed the road up the hi... whatdayamean 'Road Closed'? Bollocks to that! Yet another advantage that bikes have over cars - Road Closed signs leave a significant gap that a bike can fit past without any trouble at all. If the sign was intended for bikes as well as cars, it would have been wider. Stands to reason.

Ben wasn't kidding. What a great, but all too short, stretch of road. Made even better by the various bits of cliff and tree scattered across the road to dodge on the way up. In the end, only five of us decided to 'not see' the Road Closed sign. Absolute magic and well worth the slight indiscretion.

Back down the hill again and we stop with the rest of the crew for lunch - cunningly organised the day before and picked up that morning along with breakfast. I did however feel the need for a caffeine boost and was thrilled to see that the Licola store did have coffee on the menu. Dismay ensued when I discovered that I had just forked out \$3 for a cup of instant. I guess it's a sellers' market in the back of beyond.

After lunch we wound back through the road we had just arrived by. I spent some time getting close to regretting my choice to attack the summit prior to lunch as my remaining fuel versus remaining kms 'til fuel stop wasn't a favourable equation. Some frugal riding saw me through, though I felt the need to apologise to **Jesvin George** who had taken over rear rider duties as I had been forced to dump the pace somewhat in favour of economy and, despite him shrugging off my apology, I must have held him up.

Safely, and with fuel to spare, I pulled into the servo at Tyers. **Ronny** was looking somewhat less than enthused considering the top notch weekend that he had just been experienced. A look at his bike provided an explanation. A close encounter with a kamikaze bird had led to the ZX6 ending up on its side briefly. All told the damage was minimal and Ronny appeared to be 100%, so after some heartfelt commiserations and a quick caffeine boost we leapt into the final leg.

Nothing else of any interest occurred (at least, not that I was aware of) except for a last dash of awesome riding. And so the riding activities were drawn to a close at the servo at Longwarry North.

An enormous thank you to Ben for leading and organising a brilliant weekend. Also thank you to Tony, Pina, and Jesvin for sharing the rear rider duties. Same again next weekend? Guys? Guys??

**Quinn Myers**