



I was very excited in the lead up to my first trip to Tasmania with MSR. New tyres, bike serviced, gear packed and annual leave booked. All that was left was to count down the days.

Cliff and I had agreed to meet at the usual place in Geelong and head up the highway together. The traffic was relatively light until we reached the big bridge so a few tactical manoeuvres were employed in and around Todd Road. I remember working in Port Melbourne in 2007 and, if anything, the traffic is worse, not better, despite the huge amounts of money spent on road upgrades. However, all this is not a problem when you're on a motorcycle and you're not afraid to use it! We arrived at Station Pier before most.

One by one, participants arrived. Bikes shining, smiles beaming, steeds looking like desert camels equipped with nine day's supplies and more tread than a John Deer tractor. We were ready to go!

With about an hour before boarding time, Mark suggested chips and fish might be a good option as opposed to the \$25 buffet onboard the boat. "Sounds good to me," I said, and that's what we did.

Being my third trip to Tassie on the Spirit I knew the procedure well. Tim and I were tempted to board the ship Robbie Madison style, over the run-up ramp, increasing our RPM's in short bursts to upper levels, but had a last minute change of mind. Probably a good idea!

Next thing you know we were standing on the bow of the ship, wind in our hair, enjoying the view of Melbourne as we made our way down Port Phillip Bay en-route to Devonport. We all enjoyed a few drinks and a chat before I retired reasonably early.

Day 1: I had arranged to spend the day at my brother's house. He lives in Tassie now on the north west coast and even though I speak with him regularly, I haven't actually seen him in about three years. The plan was to catch up with the Club at Tullah where our first three night's accommodation was booked. So even though I didn't ride with the Club on the first day, I did get to do a run from Somerset to Tullah on the Murchison Highway which of course traverses the famous Hellyer Gorge. I think I ended up doing 240km for the day as opposed to Cliffs 500 plus km. Welcome to Tasmania.

Our accommodation at Tullah was modest but clean. I've stayed here before so I knew what to expect. It fits the bill perfectly for a large group like we had and its location close to all the great roads on the west coast was perfect. The food was over priced and opinions varied as to the quality, which lead us to eat elsewhere for the next two nights. The morning breakfasts were fine.

On Day 2 we headed out to Savage River via Waratah. Marc and I paired up and enjoyed the beautiful weather whilst zipping along the fantastic road to Savage River where we took a short stop for a photo before the 26 km of very loose white gravel road to the township of Corinna. "Don't worry, it's hard packed, just like bitumen", were the words ringing in my ears as I struggled to keep my now white with dust (originally black) GSXR upright. Of course, Ben truly believed his own words. Words that would see him get ribbed about it for the rest of the trip. But I knew deep down that he believed those words. Probably because he came past me on said gravel road like I was standing still. This in itself wouldn't have bothered me except that he had Julie perched on the back of the Blade hanging on for dear life. Clearly he likes "hard packed gravel"!

I was about the fourth bike to reach Corinna. I remember thinking to myself, "If we all get here in one piece it will be a miracle." Then, low and behold, I hear a loud noise. I swung around to see a bike on the ground with a rider standing beside it. I ran back up the hill to find Mark's orange baby on the road. He was okay, which was the main thing. I helped him lift his bike up. "What happened?" I asked. Turns out an old bloke in a 4x4 had come out of a driveway not expecting traffic. He braked hard but because he was on a steeply sloping gravel driveway his tyres locked and he slid another meter or so forward. Just enough to take Mark out.

With details exchanged and mostly cosmetic damage, we moved on.

We then caught the ferry across the Pieman River. Not all the bikes could fit on the barge on one trip so the process was a little slow, but no one was in a major hurry anyway.

Up at the T-intersection near Reece Dam regroup we met Dave Ward and his mate Athol who had ridden across from Hobart that morning. Fantastic effort! Then it was on to Zeehan for lunch.

In the park at Zeehan there was a fair or fete of sorts taking place. A local girl told me that it was "Tassie-As Day", a day where Tasmanians come together and celebrate the wonderful state they live in, and the lifestyle that comes with it. Now if there isn't a joke somewhere in that, I'll go he.

The weather was sensational and it was the first time I'd ever been to Zeehan when it hadn't been grey and miserable.

After lunch some of us decided to take a look at the tin mine tunnel. This is, as the name suggests, is a tunnel cut through a rocky hill many years ago to allow the transport of tin ore from one side of the mountain to the other via train. Well worth a look. It's obviously now disused except for motorcyclists, not seeking tin, but pleasure, as they ride through this rather impressive relic from the past.

Off to Strahan for a coffee and some fuel and where we watched Tony do an illegal U-turn right in front of a police car which everyone saw except Tony. The look on Tony's face when he realised they were right behind him was hilarious and I think that Mr Plod saw the funny side as well because he didn't even blink. Then it was off to Queenstown for an excellent meal at the Empire Hotel opposite the railway station.

A blast along the Lake Plimsoll Road back to Tullah after dinner was what I'd been really been looking forward to. That concluded a great day indeed!

Day 3: Leaving Tullah at about 9am we turned left onto the Reece Dam road. After 90 km of twisties we stopped at the Dam wall to regroup and take a photo. The bulk of the conversations centred around how awesome the road was. And still more to come as we headed to Zeehan for a cuppa.

The Pit Stop cafe in Zeehan is definitely worth a look next time you're in that neck of the woods. It is done up beautifully like a 1950's garage and is run by an old fella and his wife. Good coffee too!

Thanks to a call of nature, I was last to remount and all bar Mark Copeland and the rear rider had left when I got back to my bike. "No probs," I thought, catching up is half the fun over here. As I left Zeehan I failed to see the local Mr Plod sitting in his 4x4 on the side of the road. But when I did, it was like the call of nature returned without any warning. I thought to myself "That's it, Billy, you're done". But to my surprise, he didn't even look at me. Phew!

When we stopped at Tullah for fuel Ben told me that he and several others didn't see him either and that their speed was substantially greater than mine. He must have been on smoko or something!

After the brilliant Rosebery Road we refuelled in Tullah before a very boring Highway ride north to Hampshire which included seeing a police vehicle in a big hurry with his lights on. At Hampshire we turned right down a great road to Upper Natone. After a regroup somehow Dave found himself leading along the ridge road to Natone before Ben resumed leading and darted off to the left and took us towards Burnie via a short but very twisty and challenging road. It certainly relieved the boredom.

Burnie was looking great. Sun shining, happy people. But could we find a park for the bikes? No parking on the foot path in Tasmania, a rather senior looking police officer told us. So when someone finally found a park, 12 bikes piled into it.

After lunch we headed to Somerset, Yolta, and Wynyard and returned to Yolta doing a giant loop around a pine plantation. Fun, but the roads were a bit grubby. Then the road many had been waiting for. I had already ridden it on my first day but for others it's often referred to as their favourite road in Tassie. And for good reason. It is the Murchison Highway or Hellyer Gorge road.

I headed off with Misho (Pina on the back) right behind me. All I can say is we had a ball. So many tight twisties which seemed to go on forever. Heading into a 25km right hand hairpin with Misho all over me, what did I do? I missed a gear. Bang! He was past. I think he could almost hear me swearing in my helmet just as I could hear him laughing in his. But when we stopped for a break and a regroup shortly after, the smiles and laughter we exchanged at the situation was truly magical. It's got to be part of the reason I love riding with such fantastic MSR people.

Waratah for fuel and then a "find your own way and in your own time" ride back to Tullah.

Off to Queenstown again for dinner in the highly recommended pub. Cliff and I opted for pizza instead and because we finished eating earlier than the others, we rode up to the Queenstown lookout and then back down the hill with the motor turned off - a gravity run. This is the perfect road to do it on, and I always find it a lot of fun. Of course, I beat Cliffy down. Will we mention that I started my engine and gave it a squirt just before the finish line? All's fair in love and war, Cliffy. Ha, ha, ha!

Day 4 was an accommodation change day. We headed off towards Queenstown after a quick detour to the Murchison Dam for a look. I remember following Cliffy back down from the Dam lookout and I saw him checking something out over his right shoulder. I took a glance myself and saw an entrance to a large tunnel. As I looked forward to see where I was going (not where I'd been) I noticed Cliff in the gravel. Luckily, we were only going slowly and we had a laugh about it later on in the day.

Lake Plimsoll one last time (for me. Some did it again on Day 10.) and then a regroup at the Queenstown lookout. And another stop shortly after to look at a big hole in the ground that was full of green water. Well, I think it was water!

What happened on the next leg of the ride was a serious downer. I'm sure you're all aware by now that Tim Emons had a very nasty accident about 50km short of Derwent Bridge. My heart almost failed when news came through. Of course, he's alive and, despite a longish recovery period, will be fine, which we can all thank our lucky stars..

Without going into a whole debate about this motorcycling passion we share, and the potential problems associated with it when something goes wrong, all I will say is, we all know the deal. We roll the dice and accept the outcomes, both good and bad. I didn't see the accident nor did I see the aftermath. I was closer to the front, but huge thanks should be extended to those that stopped and helped Tim at the scene. Another great example of mates looking out for one other. Is it okay to say that the road from Queenstown to Ousse was fantastic? Well it is. Despite the accident.

Cruising along the road, if cruising is the right word for it, I see a bike coming up behind me. Normally I wouldn't be looking in my mirrors but the rider was waving at me frantically. WTF I thought. So I slowed right down. Turns out that stupid me had forgotten to zip up my Ventura bag after leaving the Hungry Wombat Café at Derwent Bridge. Thanks to Rod and Ian for picking up all my socks, jocks, wet weather gear, and maps, etc. I felt like a dill but later in the day someone else did the same thing and I was the one doing the picking up. After that I didn't feel so bad!

I quickly dumped my gear at our new (very comfortable) lodgings in Maydena and then it was Strathgordon, here we come.

Having to refuel before I left meant I didn't get away with the main group. I caught Marc quickly but only because he was picking up Ben's stuff off the road. (Remember the unzipped bag story?) We enjoyed a lovely brisk ride to Lake Gordon and then walked the wall, joked around and took some photos before returning to the Strathgordon cafe for a cool drink. Then back to Maydena for a delicious dinner and an early night.

Day 5 and it was destination Bruny Island. At first I didn't want to go. I thought "I came to ride, not to sight see", but I'm very glad I went. Except for a huge section of dirt road en-route to the South Bruny lighthouse, it was a very enjoyable day which included a lot of laughs, free fruit and just a touch of nude French backpacker action. Ooh la la!

We left the Island and did a lap of the Cygnet Peninsula before going up to Mt Wellington for a look. On the way we saw a some crazy lady in her old Commodore flicking us the bird and looking like she was about to pop a blood vessel in her forehead. I'm not sure why. I thought I should blow her a kiss as I went past. I think that will have calmed her down, don't you? We also saw two police cars with their lights on. I didn't know what was going on until I saw a tow truck dragging away a newish looking Z1000 Kwaka that had obviously messed up on a tricky corner.

Back to Maydena via New Norfolk to end the riding day. That night Stuart and I headed up to the local RSL and had a few beers with the local yokels which was good fun and we turned in soon after.

Day 6: A BBQ dinner at Dave Ward's home in Hobart Thursday night was planned. Some of the riders decided to ride to Lake Gordon and back then do some sightseeing at the Museum of New and Old Art. I opted to go with the other group lead by Marc Marais and head north to Poatina via Bothwell. More great roads, more great fun before a delicious dinner kindly provided by Bron and Dave Ward in their most excellent house in Hobart. Thank you both very much for a great evening. Pity we had to leave so early but the weather was looking suss and the Tasmania wildlife at night is seriously suicidal.

Andrew did a great job with the help of his GPS getting us back to Maydena in the rain and the dark with no road kill to report, and only one wrong turn.

Day 7: The day started with coffee and fuel in Westerway. Then Bothwell for morning tea via Ousse.

I got to Bothwell behind Ben and didn't have to corner mark because I was the third bike behind him. We waited for a long time and started to think that something must have happened. No more bikes were arriving and then Ben got the phone call from Cliff that Andrew had had a really big crash. "Oh no" was all I could think. We saw the local fire truck roar through town and an ambulance as well. We headed back to the accident scene.

Slowly more information rolled in and we discovered that Andrew was alive but not good. Also that his bike had burnt to the ground. Then I guess there was some small relief to find out that Andrew's injuries weren't life threatening, but nonetheless extensive. Maybe that speaks volumes about the quality of safety gear everyone in the Club wears!

We took the time to debrief and console each other before we moved on.

After leaving Bothwell I found myself out the front. Not sure why but I knew the way and figured that Ben will catch and pass me at some point anyway. I came up to a police car doing 100 km/h. I sat behind him as we went through a road works 60 zone. We slowed to 60 km/h and I followed for about five kilometres. I still hadn't seen any road works nor could I see any for miles ahead so I assumed that the road workers had forgotten to take the sign down from work done days before. So what did I do? I overtook the police car and moved up to 100km/h.

Lights on, pull over driver. "Doesn't a 60 sign mean anything to you, mate?" the officer queried. I explained that there isn't any road works and of course he tells me it's just around the next bend. Three more km's away. Lucky for me, he conceded that they had put the sign way too far out for it to be really effective and he just gave me the "BE CAREFUL" lecture.

More roads, more fun. It never seems to end in Tassie. Poatina, Campbell Town, Avoca, Rossarden, St Mary's, St Helens, Derby, Lilydale, Tamar Bridge to Beauty Point where we were staying for the next three nights. Small rooms compared to Maydena but good food at good prices and awesome breakfasts too!

Day 8: Cliff and Peter had left early in an attempt to get tyres fitted to their bikes. As it turned out, we wouldn't see them till we returned at the end of the day. I fuelled up at Beauty Point and the others fuelled at Beaconsfield. We headed off to try and find Pete and Cliff at the Shearwater bike shop but there was no sign of them. I checked out the collection of second hand bikes and Kurn got himself a new pair of gloves coz his old ones were knackered.

Then it was off towards Deloraine for morning tea at a cool 50's themed coffee shop that the bloke at the bike shop had told us about. It was really well done and we checked it out whilst we sipped coffee and told yarns. With the weather continuing to be superb, the next part of the day was a ride to the Great Lake along the Golden Valley road. Twisty after twisty, it's so easy to understand how addictive Tasmania is for motorcyclists.

When we got to the end of the road where it turns to dirt, we stopped for a rest and a photo. A red CBR1000 pulled up almost at the exact same time. As it turns out, it was Kate, one of Dave Ward's friends. We had meet Kate at Dave's BBQ a few days earlier but I didn't know that she was a serious motorcyclist! She had ridden up from Hobart that morning to meet us and go for a ride. Approx 160 km including a decent section of dirt which is where we had just stopped. Pleasantries exchanged, we returned to Deloraine bakery for lunch. Well, most of us did.

I was behind Ben and therefore took up corner marking position about 300 meters before a T-intersection that required a right hand turn. I parked a fair way back from the intersection: (1) Because it was hot and there was a large tree offering some shade and (2); it gives lots of warning to the riders behind of the upcoming intersection. I like to mark this way wherever possible. Mark Copeland then followed and he marked the corner in the direction we needed to go." All good," I thought. Next bike was Robbie Langer on his BWW. He went past me and turned right and then stopped right in front of Mark. I thought it a little strange but it's not that unusual for a rider to stop at a corner that is already marked and make an adjustment or whatever so I didn't put too much thought into it.

As the other riders went past including the rear rider, I took off towards Deloraine as per normal corner marking protocols. As there are many corners to be marked through Deloraine, it wasn't long before I was corner marking again. It soon became apparent that there was a problem somewhere back down the road. I waited for a very long time before I got word via Ben that Rob's BMW had stopped and that Roadside Assistance had been called.

It turns out that when Rob rode past me at the last corner his motor had cut out and he was just rolling to a stop. That would be the last time we would see Rob riding on this Tassie trip. He ended up getting a rental car and put it to good use over the next few days visiting Tim and Andrew in Hobart and some other sightseeing activities as well. A side note to this story: it turned out that Rob's bike had a simple broken wire that was easily fixed but not only did it end his ride, it cost a bomb to fix considering the simplicity of the problem. And took over a week! Very frustrating indeed.

After lunch we headed towards Mole Creek to the end of the road, stopping at the bridge to regroup. Then back and left and up more sensational roads to the lookout near Moina for another rest break and a yarn or two. We also said a happy goodbye to Kate before heading to Sheffield for a coffee and a piece of homemade chocolate fudge. Thanks Kate for riding such a long way to join us and then showing us your great motorcycling skills. Kate had a very long ride to get home after leaving us. Very impressive indeed.

Then, with fading light, we returned to Beauty Point via Latrobe and along the Frankford Road. I'd like to say "Hi!" to the stupid scarecrow riding the tractor in the paddock that waved to me just before the almost 90 degree unmarked right hand corner. A word of advice: don't wave back to a scarecrow when you should be concentrating on the job at hand! It's foolish! I think Misho did the same thing and had to make the same quick adjustment in order to make the next corner. Another memorable day's riding.

Day 9: After refuelling in Beauty Point and Beaconsfield, depending on your preference, we headed south to the Batman Bridge which crosses the Tamar River, but not via the standard route. Ben discovered a few back roads that weren't long but were still fun and, in the true MSR tradition, kept us off the main drag. Lilydale, Scottsdale, Branxholme and Derby followed. Then north to Gladstone before turning around and back tracking to Pyengana and the awesome Saint Columba Falls for a look. Here we saw a rather large snake sunning itself only feet away from us. But thanks to the steel grating at the observation deck we all felt safe and out of harm's way.

Lunch was calling so we decided to return to the Pyengana Dairy Company Cafe but not before stopping to say hello to the pig at the "Pub in the Paddock" tourist attraction. Unfortunately, the pig was sound asleep in her kennel. Maybe because of all the beer she had been fed. Pina decided that she would jump the fence and wake the pig up. That's right, the fence that said "Don't enter the pigs yard". "This should be fun", I thought. We laughed and made noises like wild pigs and Pina soon realised that if the pig actually woke up, it might not be as happy to see her as she first thought. So, in the glorious Italian tradition, she beat a hasty retreat.

Next stop the Dairy Company Cafe just a short distance down the road. We quickly realised that the combination of glorious weather, a long weekend, Sunday and their 21st Birthday meant that the cafe was packed. So we changed our plans and continued on to St Helens for lunch. I think I put my helmet and gloves on and off 30 times today!

Fuel, lunch and a coffee hit the spot nicely before a brisk back ride to Scottsdale and then south 25 km to Targa – till the end of the good road. Then back to Scottsdale and home to Beauty Point in the reverse direction to earlier that day. End day 9.

Friends, if you have managed to read this very long ride story that I have put together for your enjoyment this far, you will be glad to know that there is no more.

Day 10 for me was a no-ride day. I made the decision to drop in and say another hello to my brother in Heybridge before meeting the remaining MSR riders at the Spirit on Tasmanian terminal at about 6pm on Monday afternoon. My spirit was strong, but my chain was weak; stretched actually. And the fact I rarely see my only male sibling compelled me to call it a day.

By all accounts Day 10 was one of the biggest day's riding. Not that it was planned that way but it's just how it worked out. Cliffy has already written a story about this day in last month's magazine so although I'm not covering it, you won't have missed out on all the fun.

Can I finish by saying thank you all very much for the trip of a lifetime. Despite the two very serious accidents, I think it's fair to say that most people had a great time. I know I did. Thank you for your friendships, for listening to, and occasionally laughing at, my silly jokes. Thank you for supporting each other when it was needed and letting me get to know you better during the non-riding moments of the trip. Thank you for sharing chain lube, visor cleaner, washing powder, tools, accommodation, great photos via Facebook, email and everything else! I guess the point to all this thanking is to highlight why a trip like this with a Club like this is so special. The people!

Let us not forget Ron and Julie Johnson and Julie Warden. Their logistic support as well as their company enhanced the trip. Thank you.

To those that did rear rider duties at various points, a big thanks. To Mark Marais and Tim for your stints as lead riders, thanks as well!

Now the biggest thanks is saved till last. Ben, we can only imagine the amount of effort that you must put into organising a trip of this scale. Add to the fact that you were leader for most of the week and words become hard to find that would express our gratitude. Clearly, it's a labour of love and we should all feel very lucky to have you in the MSR. Thanks mate!

Tasmania 2013, a truly sensational ride.

Billy Simpson