

Tasmania



The slow countdown of remaining sleeps had finally come to an end. New "touring" tyres fitted and scrubbed in (okay, so they'd done one Sunday ride.), 72,000 km service completed, spare set of front brake pads packed just in case, and new RJ's Vector breathable rain jacket finally sourced. I'm ready to roll. I even found the time to get the ladder out and clean out the guttering after work - the 12 years of growth up there clearly explained why they've been overflowing in recent heavy downpours!

The family waved me off as I wobbled out of the driveway, yet to adjust to the towering weight of luggage on the back, and cruised up Beach Road to find a group of equally excited familiar faces congregating near the Spirit of Tasmania ferry terminal.

The bay was a wild mess of whitecaps as we were buffeted around in the strong wind, receiving the occasional sandblasting as we chatted and waited for time to board. With conditions like this in the bay, what would Bass Strait have in store for us? Stories of wild seas and sleepless nights spent vomiting were revealed as we waited in nervous excitement. Finally, the call was made, and we boarded the belly of the boat and set off.

Billy gave us a rundown of the ship he's currently working on as we passed it on the horizon, and naturally he kept us all in stitches with his entertaining delivery of stories (all true of course). As it turned out, the big ship cut through the choppy bay just fine, and after a bit of a wobble going through

the Heads, it was relatively smooth sailing overnight. I was heading for bed around midnight, and went outside to watch the rolling swell clearly lit up by bright moonlight.

We disembarked to a fine, crisp morning, as we followed Ben south past misty valleys with the rugged escarpment of the Great Western Tiers on the horizon. The sun was still painfully low, blinding us and making several corners an act of faith as we dodged roadkill on the way to Deloraine for breakfast.

We were treated to some great roads on the run up to Great Lake. My thoughts went out to Misho behind me as I ran over a dead animal, not sure if I'd splattered him with its innards or not. After taking in the views at the top, and posing for the daily "front cover" shot, I locked in behind Marc and Mark for the cracking run back down the road.

Then we picked our way west through Meander, Caveside and Mole Creek and on through picturesque forests, aiming for fuel for the thirsty Kwakas at Moina, but the facilities were closed. We ended up heading north on some brilliant sweepers to Wilmot for fuel and lunch instead. Marc, Mark and Arc all had nervous fuel issues throughout the day, with reserve lights prompting them to back off and preserve fuel at times, but only Marc actually ran out.

After a leisurely lunch in Wilmot (thanks to the stressed out staff in the shop), we were led up some steep and tight roads to the scenic Leven Canyon lookout, with me experiencing a "wake up!" moment on the way back down, meeting a large truck on one of the many hairpin bends causing a quick tightening of my line.

We made our way back down before Cliff and I were treated to an absolute blast of a run following Ben all the way from Wilmot past Cradle Mountain to the Tullah road turnoff. Sweeper city!

Once the crew had passed through, I chased Cliff along the great road into Tullah. After a short break, checking into our rooms and unloading some gear, we set off on a brilliant loop down to Rosebery towards Zeehan. I managed to keep Ben in sight until my cautious overtaking techniques made it hard work catching him again each time we'd come up behind cars.

Mark set a cracking pace up one of his favourite roads after we corner marked at the bottom of the Plimsoll road. It was my first time on this road and it was brilliant! What can I say but WOW! These Tassy roads just keep getting better!

I had a great run back from the Lake behind Misho and Pina who were following Arc at a fast pace. I kept the 'Blade in 6th gear for most of the final leg, trying to preserve fuel as my reserve light had been on for some time, and I didn't want to have to siphon fuel from the Kawasakis which had all filled up before the 100km loop.

Day 2 - Ben sat next to me at breakfast and informed me that I was leading today, as Julie was going to pillion for the day, and he was worried about trying to reach the Club's maximum speed of \$137 without copping too many blows to the ribs. I quickly scoured his map and remembered the necessary points, and off we went. An easy start to the day, heading north through the misty hills, to turn onto the phenomenal Savage River road. What a way to start your day! The road starts out gently winding through lush forest, and gradually morphs into a wild, tight and twisty racetrack (I mean road). The final stretch seems to be suspended in the air between the hills, with continuous Armco on both sides.

We regrouped at the start of the 26km of "good gravel" - more like deep, loose ball bearings! All managed the journey without mishap apart from Mark Copeland who encountered a camper van exiting a blind driveway too fast, which then locked its wheels and skidded into him, knocking the previously pristine Kwaka to the ground. All within meters of the end of the road!

It took two ferry loads to get us all across the Pieman River, then a further 12km to regroup at the main road, where we were greeted by Dave Ward and a friend Athol. It was great to catch up with Dave, as I hadn't seen him for a long time.

I rounded up the troops and we set off for morning tea/lunch in Zeehan. I really tried to keep the pace pulled back to keep the group together, but the glorious sweepers reeled me in, and soon enough, I had a smile as big as my helmet would allow across my face. I backed off on the straights, allowing the keen to catch up before diving into the next set of corners. We were all smiles as we pulled up in Zeehan opposite a kids festival, complete with stilted ladies.

After lunch, Ben took us to visit the tunnel at the Argent silver mine, which is now complete with boardwalk through its entire length, possibly reducing the "adventure" value of the passage. We returned and picked up the rest of the crew in Zeehan and set off on the ride down to Strahan, where we fuelled up, and then parked in formation along the footpath (an offence punishable by law in these parts), but the local cop left us alone - even after Tony completed a U-turn across double lines in front of him! Tony gave us all a good laugh anyway. Incidentally, Tony made clear his disappointment with his milk shake here, declaring it the worst EVER!

The next leg of the ride took us on yet another magnificent road heading towards Queenstown. Dave caught me sleeping, and woke me up with a screaming fly-by. I attempted chase briefly, then waved Cliff and Misho through, and in no time, all three vanished into the distance. Sensational, watching these guys pull away while riding so comfortably and smoothly.

Leaving corner markers along the way, I set off on the reverse of last night's 100km loop, filling in time before dinner in Queenstown (originally planned for Rosebery, but they knocked back Ben's attempt at booking). We regrouped for a breather at Lake Plimsoll, before tackling the final leg into Queenstown for a delicious meal at the Empire Hotel.

We all made our way back to Tullah separately, taking off as soon as meals were finished, in an attempt to reduce the road kill risk as we were leaving right on dusk. The only casualty turning out to be Julie Johnston who was driving Ron and Julie Warden back to Tullah, but missed several turns, adding a few extra hours to the trip, along with adding to the road kill count and one minor off-road misadventure!

Overall, a fantastic day's riding on non-stop brilliant roads - unlike my efforts two days later... But we'll leave that for another time.

Tim Emons (from his hospital bed in the Epworth)