

Apollo Bay Sunday 28th July 2013



Ben Warden	Honda CBR1000	Cliff Peters	Kawasaki ZX10
Paul Southwell	Honda CBR1000	Marc Marais	Kawasaki ZX10
Misho Zrakic	Honda CBR1000	Jason Wilson	Kawasaki ZX9
Pina Garasi	Honda CBR600	Ronny (1/2 rear rider)	Kawasaki ZX6
Petro Georgiou (1 st ride)	Honda CBR600	John Marshall (2 nd ride)	BMW K1200RS
Bill Simpson (leader)	Suzuki GSXR1000	Rob Langer	BMW F700GS
Chris Pointon	Suzuki GSXR1000	Geoff Dick (1/2 rear rider)	BMW R850R
Matt Vitagliano (1 st ride)	Aprilia RSV4R	Dave Chisma	BMW F800ST

It was great to return home after my trip abroad. Even though I had a fantastic time, I rode on my own most of the time, so I was really looking forward to be back riding with the MSR. I even checked the weather forecast for Sunday while in the departure lounge at Heathrow airport: cloudy, 16 degrees, possible late thunderstorm. Perfect mild day, I thought. And that would give me 24 hours to get over any jet lag.

Sunday morning started off dry and by the time I arrived at the Point Cook departure point it had warmed up to a mild 14 degrees. At the Shell servo there was a larger group than I was expecting including two new riders. Ben gathered the group around and gave a pre-ride talk outlining the plan: he would lead the first leg to Moriac from where Billy would take over.

Geoff Dick volunteered to be the rear rider and thirteen of us rolled out on to the Geelong Freeway. We turned off the freeway around Little River and took back roads to Lara, being watchful for police and camera cars.

As we were approaching the outskirts of Geelong my mind wondered back to the last time I rode through here following a rider called Cheeky Dunlop. On that occasion he misjudged the tightness of a 35km/h

right hand bend at Moorabool resulting in a coming together with the Armco railing. Just as I was visualising that incident, new rider Petro passed me as we were about to enter the same corner, and déjà vu, I saw the whole incident replayed before my eyes. Petro's bike hit the Armco in exactly the same spot as Cheeky. Unfortunately, the impact snapped off his front brake lever. He was unable to continue the ride but able to limp home using the rear brake. His mate Matt, on an Aprilia RSV4R, also turned back and shadowed Petro home.

At Moriac Billy and Cliffy were waiting for our arrival together with second time rider John from Ballarat. John was riding a BMW K1200RS and that brought the number of BM's on the ride up to four, a first in a long time.

Billy outlined his plan to go to Apollo Bay for fuel via Deans Marsh and Forrest, and then on to Lavers Hill for lunch. After lunch we would retrace our path back to Deans Marsh for afternoon tea and then on to Batesford for breakup. He warned us to be careful on the Forrest-Skenes Creek road because even if it didn't rain, there would be slippery damp patches that could easily catch you out.

As we left Moriac I noticed my outside-temperature gauge drop to 10 degrees and the road surface became damp. Ah, I thought to myself, these are the damp patches Billy warned us of. I didn't have to worry for long as it started to drizzle which quickly turned into steady rain which saturated the entire road surface. No more damp patches.

By the time we got to Forrest the temperature was down to 7 degrees but I was still hopeful it was only a passing shower and didn't bother stopping to put on my rain-proof jacket. This turned out to a bad mistake because by the time I pulled up at Apollo Bay for fuel my jacket was soggy and my gloves wet. Paul Southwell, Dave Chisma and Chris Pointon called it a day and headed home. I now really regretted my decision to leave home without my waterproof gloves. The rain continued for the rest of the day...

The road to Lavers Hill was slick and shiny in places with regular muddy streams of water running across it. I was very glad to finally see Lavers Hill and quickly dismounted in the pouring rain and headed straight into the store to order a burger and a mug of café latte. Geoff got out his map in search of the most direct route back to Tatura. By the time we were ready to leave my jacket had dried out a little but it was all in vain as it didn't take long for my gear to get soggy again. Geoff and John had left us and Ronny was now rear rider.

The road from Skenes Creek to Forest was treacherous; I counted three cars that had slid off the road. I had a long slide coming out of one corner after which I rode more cautiously.

Visibility deteriorated quickly as the fog moved in making the ride even more challenging.

The stop at Deans Marsh for afternoon tea was most welcome particularly as the manager had a roaring fire in the Coonara. I dried out my neck warmer on top of the Coonara, turning it frequently like a pancake to stop it from burning. Marc left us here and chose the direct route home while the rest of us headed to Batesford via Moriac.

For one brief moment, just as we were turning onto the Midland Highway, the sunshine burst through the gloomy clouds with such ferocity that I was blinded as I tried to see if it was safe to do a right hand turn. This sunny spurt was short lived and by the time the eight remaining bikes rolled into the servo at Batesford it was raining again.

After some quick goodbyes at Batesford I got ready to head home. Together with Misho and Pina, I latched on to the back of Ben for the run to Melbourne. He seems to have an uncanny knack of being able to carve his way through heavy traffic at a good pace. Maybe it's all those years of practice commuting every day in all conditions.

By the time I arrived home I had done 514 kms for the day. It was pitch black and I was happy to strip out of my soggy wet clothes and get some warmth back in my body.

Thanks to Billy for leading the ride and to Geoff and Ronny for doing the rear riding duties. See you next ride.

Rob Langer

I agree with Rob – those were some of the toughest riding conditions I've experienced for quite a while, particularly riding up from Skenes Creek to Forrest in the cold, heavy rain, thick blinding fog making for dark-like conditions through the foreboding overhanging drenched canopy, mixing it with strings of five 4WDs nose to tail – and praying that any oncoming vehicle had its lights on because you weren't going to see it otherwise, all the time battling badly a fogging visor resulting in stinging eyeballs from the shards of splashing rain. Up and down with the visor, trying to keep it cracked open, finger repeatedly swishing away the condensation, contemplating taping something in the opening, watching the waters part, carving our own Red Sea, riding as smoothly and accurately as possible, brakes dull with the cold and infrequent use. Cold water was already wicking up to my shoulders from the second pair of now completely saturated gloves (and boots and crutch). Of course Misho had caught up and we made an evil pair, patience long gone, white lines invisible under the water (Officer). You should have been there. Pina deserves a medal! ...Ed.