

Towong Day 4 Tuesday 5th November



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| Misho Zrakic | Honda CBR1000 | John Willis | Kawasaki ZX10 |
| Ben Warden (leader) | Honda CBR1000 | Andrew Newbury | Kawasaki ZX10 |
| Pina Garasi | Honda CBR600 | Mark Copeland | Kawasaki ZX10 |
| Rod Merrett | BMW S1000RR | Marc Marais | Kawasaki ZX10 |
| Pierre Ong | Aprilia RSV4 1000 | Phil Hotschilt | Suzuki GSXR1300 |
| Stu Hosking | Aprilia Tuono | Duane Rafferty | Suzuki GSXR1000 |
| Cindy Lee | Triumph T675 | Steve Mudford | Suzuki GSXR1000 |
| Rob Langer | KTM 990 | | <i>15 bikes, 15 people</i> |

It's been four days since returning from Towong and I have just had time to catch my breath with getting back to Melbourne Tuesday afternoon, printing the Magazine Wednesday night, distributing the hard copy Magazine at the Social Sip Thursday night, and pasting up the softcopy to the Members area, with pictures inserted, Friday night. And a thing called work in there as well.

Tuesday after the ride saw some minor maintenance items attended to – replacing the headlight globe which Misho had noticed earlier in the day, and finding a nut for the clutch pivot bolt which had almost (a couple of threads left) wound itself out by the time I got on to the Craigieburn By-pass. And I thought the clutch cable was stretching madly as the mechanism started to malfunction. The bike had to be ready to battle the peak hour traffic the next morning and the rest of the week – and be able to be ridden at night of course. I topped up the oil as per the daily ritual making 800 ml used for the 2,350 km home to home trip.

Day 4, the trip home, didn't get covered in the Magazine and a few things happened. First of all we were down to 15 "hard-core" members, those who had survived 1500 kilometres of relentless hard riding over three days straight. The plan was to form up at Walwa with a nominal departure time of 9.30 am. Note: for future reference the General Store, which does cooked breakfasts, opens at 8 am for business, despite being Melbourne Cup public holiday. Very convenient.

Steve was nearly a cripple and clearly in pain, his injured back heading straight to the Chinese doctor as soon as he got home. But that was forever away, with every bump jarring and stabbing. The rest of us were holding up well, another perfect 29 deg day promising dry roads and additional sunburnt faces – I'm now peeling despite sunscreen every day. And everyone's tyres were holding up well, the first time in living history where someone hasn't had to shoot off to Albury Monday morning to procure a front or rear so as to continue the ride. All those veiled threats and warnings paid off – and tyres are just better – grip and life. We seem to be enjoying another quantum jump in tyre technology improvements, with each model noticeably better than the previous. Good times.

We were very lucky to still have our three guardian angels to share the lead on the potentially heavily policed roads, the Triple M combination of Misho, Mark and Marc, though Marc was conspicuous by his absence at the pointy end. I would especially like to thank Misho and Mark for their help, which allowed us to make good point to point time, travel at our “normal” safe speed, and not fall asleep with boredom on the straighter sections. Much appreciated.

None of the previous articles mentioned the state of the roads – in remarkably good condition everywhere except for a couple of spots in NSW which appeared to be flood damaged. Mansfield twisties; Happy Valley and Rosewhite Roads; Esk, Mitta Mitta and Dartmouth Roads; Granya Gap and the Lake Road; Cabramurra and Elliot Way; Bondo Road; the list doesn't stop! Very clean – apart from the fresh horse droppings near Sue City on the Elliot Way, and no road works to speak of. The dirt section was even a bit shorter, another kilometre lopped off around Adjungbilly.

Misho eventually came past on the glorious Lake Road and John Willis sat behind me behind Misho. I love those dangerous off camber blind sweepers just before Granya.

Rounding the last bend before the straight into Granya we ran into a few hundred sheep on the road. Duane knew the trick and went right over to the far right, blipped the throttle and *voila*, the sea opened and through we went. Not sure how many others followed.

We had been advised that there was a fixed speed camera box in Granya in the 60 zone – which has now been extended a further 500m either side of the town consisting of only five houses. Duane shot past me on the outskirts and we rode together, eyes wide open. Nothing obvious, so normal transmission resumed. Conditions were perfect! I'll say no more. We regrouped at the far end, those in the know swinging past and heading straight for Tallangatta for fuel.

It was still early, and “only” another 148 km to Myrtleford, so we pressed on, taking the Omeo Highway, and the magnificent series of signposted 65 and 70 km/h sweepers down towards Esk before cutting back up to Tamgambalanga to recover under the trees, and perform the ritual visor clean. The bugs haven't really got going, the cold mornings – 3 or 4 degrees - putting a damper on their breeding. But with the grass everywhere 1.5 metres high and lush, it will be a messy and dirty summer I'm sure, as the bugs feast.

It was a very fast group – just look at the names and bikes, rear rider Rob never more than a minute behind. A group photo, last of the thermals stowed away, and we were off again.

The Happy Valley Road was in fine condition, Misho and I catching a few cars on the last corner, the only interruption to the “flow”. Misho overshot the Rosewhite Road turnoff but was aware enough to see me disappearing around the right-hand corner and quickly returned to corner-mark. This is a great road too as it ducks and weaves in the middle to finish with a series of fast off camber downhill sweepers. Prior knowledge is a tremendous asset on this road.

Myrtleford for lunch and coffees. I noticed a guy on a red VFR800 having no luck starting his bike, the motor cranking, but not catching. I immediately thought “regulator/rectifier” as I had been working with Simon Wastney the week before, his bike having similar symptoms – turned out to be the stator. Misho and I tried to bump start “Theo's” bike but an old, heavily worn rear tyre, probably with a lot of pressure, just refused to grip, even in third or fourth gear. Luckily I had a pair of jumper leads!

I had made them a few months before with small alligator clips to suit bike batteries – two metres long to reach between bikes – using special high current carrying silver plated copper wire which is relatively thin and flexible. We pulled the headlight globe out and noted to Theo that once started the motor couldn't be stopped (as it wouldn't start again). Of course he had an empty tank and needed petrol to get back to Melbourne. Luckily, he had a spare key for the tank!

It took a few minutes to get to my CBR's seat off – bag off, pillion seat off, tools, front seat off, to expose the battery, but the VFR fired straight up with the jumper leads and Theo was soon on the road again, hopefully incident-free back to Melbourne. Someone recognised him as being a long standing Ulysses member.

The Oxley Highway is super boring and super deadly. Mark Copeland did the honours, and we made excellent time down to Whitfield to regroup in the shade at the park opposite the servo, along with another bunch of bikes.

Then we set off up the hill, Misho now in fuel conservation mode, as I had shown him how many litres he had in his tank at Myrtleford and hence “should” make Mansfield easily with 8 litres. Steve caught up and then Duane and we travelled at a lively rate in the twisties and steadily on the more open sections, allowing all 15 bikes to catch up and make an impressive site in the mirrors. Fantastic stuff.

We arrived in Mansfield without a reception committee, the first time in three years. But the servo in the main street has gone, and a few of us did a parade the length of the main street before returning to the Caltex on the edge of town. Misho had been on reserve for a while, indicating what the reserve fuel counter was up to every now and again with his gloved fingers. (On CBRs the reserve fuel display counts up from 0.0 to 3.7l at which point the bike runs out of fuel). Misho managed 286 km out of the tank which was some sort of world record for him, only bettered when he was running the bike in – the first one.

It was too hot in the sun so we moved across the road to the grass under the trees on the opposite corner, under the active magpie nest. Where was Rob?

Cindy, rear rider on this last leg, advised that Rob had waved her through, and had dropped off the radar somewhere around Tolmie. John Willis decided to go back and look for him and offer assistance if required, while the rest of the ride continued on as a group, though ostensibly the ride was now over, our farewells said and handshakes completed.

Ten kays down the road, Triple M came by Stu and me, easing the pain as we headed for Bonnie Doon. Sure enough a marked white police vehicle cruised past, hunting, hunting. Not today. The road was chockers with 4WDs towing mainly big boats, all the waterways at record levels. For instance, at Bonnie Doon the water is only a couple of metres below the bridge, a rare sight in the last decade.

At Yea people went in all directions but soon enough I found myself following Pina following Misho, Duane and Rod at the front, and Phil bringing up the rear. Pina impressed with her speed up and over Junction Hill and later on up the last 60 and 70 km/h sweepers before Kinglake West. Just to punctuate the weekend, Misho got halfway around a slow car, just as we came out in to the open, when his brake lights came on. Gulp! Pina and I, following mechanically, took evasive action and dived back in behind the car just as an evil, dark blue, fully kitted TOG car burred past. A glance in the mirrors saw no lights of the disco type, or of the braking type. And so we ponder our good fortune. How Duane and Rod weren't pinged remains a deep mystery, let alone Steve and Cindy running into him at the exact same spot, ten minutes later! Must have had his fill for the day.

And so it was we stopped for the final time in Whittlesea for Misho and Pina to fill up, ready for Sunday's ride!

Rob had left a voicemail message indicating that he had broken down 6 km south of Tolmie and that the RACV were transporting his bike to Mansfield where he intended to stay overnight. John had found him and waited for the RACV to arrive. I rang Rob Wednesday afternoon at work to get the final outcome. Rob had managed to limp home, issues with the fuel pump, fuel filter or fuel pump relay all in the diagnostic mix. As the relay had recently been replaced, suspicion was falling on the fuel pump, with maybe a lack of pressure the issue, which seemed to fit the previous high speed running issues. Hopefully, Rob will get to the bottom of it before too long and advise us of the cause.

Another fantastic weekend over with a minimum of incidents and no crashes, though there were a couple of close calls – Aiden and Rod. A brown snake crossing the road reared up at me and following bikes was about the extent of danger I was exposed to. I did accidentally squash a big blue tongue lizard sunbaking on the road, and rounding a corner near the whoopsy doos after Adjungbilly, I was confronted by a roadful of sheep runny helter skelter which raised my heart rate a notch or two, though the new Brembo disc brakes are well up to the task.

Till Dargo then.

Ben Warden