



Ben Warden (leader)	Honda CBR1000	Cliff Peters	Kawasaki ZX10
Paul Southwell	Honda CBR1000	Ian Payne	Kawasaki ZX10
Misho Zrakic/Pina Garasi	Honda CBR1000	Ronny (rear rider)	Kawasaki ZX6R
Simon Wastney	Honda VFR800	Mark Bell (1 st ride)	Suzuki Bandit 1250
Roman Biarzoza	Honda CBR600	Glenn Aspden	Suzuki GSXR1000
Jesvin George	Honda CBR600	Paul Robinson (3 rd ride)	KTM RC8R
Rob McDowall (2 nd ride)	Yamaha R1	Rod Silver	KTM RC8R

Summary: 14 bikes, 15 people, 13 deg.,(cold, 80% wet roads, a couple of heavy showers), 350 km from Officer to Officer.

This is one of my favourite routes and the ride preparation kicked in as early as Thursday.

Bike Prep: No wash, no lube, no love. Correct tyre pressure - YES. Tune preload, compression, and damping – YES.

Rider Prep: Thu, Friday and Saturday - pumping body cells with H2O. Sat night - high carbohydrate dinner (rice), no alcohols and a good night's sleep. Sunday morning – light breakfast with a mix of fast (banana) and slow energy (bread) release.

The morning looked like Spring with strong sunlight putting a smile on my face. Despite the promising sunlight, it was chilly enough to wear three layers of clothes. Cold mornings are just another day these days, thanks to Glenn Aspden for installing Oxford heated grips on my CBR. With winter kicked in white smoke from the CBR exhaust which lasts for the first few minutes after igniting the spark plugs.

On the way to Officer I passed Simon Wastney and Ian Payne, still on his loan ZX10 while his CBR1000RR is waiting for shock repairs.

After filling up with fuel at Officer I met Glenn, the now world famous owner of FIXI bike, and asked for his autograph. His bike recently gained popularity after changing the OEM Suzuki fairings to Leon Camier's FIXI CRESCENT SUZUKI graphics Chinese aftermarket fairings. The bike's photos came into the limelight via Wayne Maxwell's tweet and AMCN magazine. Whoever corner-marked with Glenn on today's ride would be thrilled.

I was glad to see a Suzuki Bandit parked and looked around for Ron Johnston. He is supposed to be getting his license back by mid-June, but was nowhere to be seen. I realised my mistake when the new rider introductions were made. Look who else is here: Ronny on his ZX6R with new pair of BT016's which he later praised for their good grip, even on today's wet roads. Haven't seen him for a while and he promptly told me that he *was* and most likely *will be* busy with family commitments. I understand very well.

Ben did the pre-ride brief and introduced first time rider Mark Bell. Roman Biaroza and Ronny Utama fought for the rear rider position. Fighting for rear riding is very uncommon, isn't it? However, when it came to the writeup, no-one fought for it - and that is very common. Ronny, being absent for a while from rides, the judgement went to his favour. I guess Roman wanted to practise some trail braking at the rear. At least that is what I do when I rear ride: practise some dreadful techniques so that if I crash I don't fall into someone's path. I practise evil things when no-one is looking ;-)

The ride went fine through boring freeway and small towns and back roads. It took at least half an hour before the ride gained pace. Last time when I rode along these roads - Nyora and Loch, it was washed with gravel and grit from rain. Now the surface looks decent enough for late entry and flick the bike. Nevertheless, I didn't feel confident to do it when the front brake is engaged. I guess the more front brake is applied, the harder it is to turn the bike. I have got a few more weeks to go before I can successfully claim one year of 'safe riding' on the CBR so no adventures for the time being. I was also learning to 'ride smart' by switching into *attack mode* only when the corners are coming, rather than ride like a mad dog for the entire trip of corners, straights, hills and dips. The result was noteworthy: I didn't feel dead tired after finishing the ride. I saved my concentration levels for where it is most required - corners.

I occasionally rode with the KTMs enjoying their distinctive exhaust note and saw them pulling away from corners with no sweat.

After reaching Loch for the first break, I started wondering why there aren't many Yamahas in a group of 100 plus riders! In 2012, Yamaha's North American sales profits were up, but total sales were down globally. I have a soft spot for the recent R1 and R6; they look fast even in the garage.

Very few people refuelled at Loch while Ben was busy signing up Paul Robinson. Pina noted that Paul had had a big gap between this and his first MSR ride. No wonder I haven't seen him before.

The rain started pouring cats and dogs and some of us ran out to save the helmets from a drenching. Looks like I was the only person who was happy about the rain because I got a free bike wash.

Roman showed signs of heavy excitement, wanting to continue the ride without the long break we took due to the rain. I reckon he has found a way or two to put his knee down and wanted to test the waters in the rain.

Pina was doing her homework on challenging the big ticket slapped on her on last week's ride to Pheasant Creek. She went and took photos from their hiding spot and it looks like there is no clear view from their spot to where she was riding. She was busy confirming some facts like how many riders were tailing her, what distance, etc. I highly doubt I could do a 100 on such tight twisties.

Once the rain changed to drizzle we continued to Woolamai. It was a painfully slow ride due to more rain along the way. Rod, Cliff and I formed a convoy and I sat behind Cliffy, watching his green leather bum most of the time. Most of us slowed down. Paul Robinson was riding well in the rain, possibly due to his dirt riding experience. Misho, with Pina on the back, overtook us through the rain in a 'slow' and steady manner.

I have installed a Michelin Pilot Power 3 on the rear specifically for winter riding, expecting to get magical grip. But my confidence wasn't inspired. Disappointingly, the grip felt the same as my previous Dunlop Sportsmax. Next winter I will mostly likely try Bridgestone Battlax. I'm glad to see motorcycle tyres are getting updates every now and then. Good for us.

There isn't much exciting to write about the leg two rain riding. I felt like I was almost commuting. Due to the rain we didn't stop on our usual spot where we can get a glimpse of sea at the wrong place and take a few photos. I was very glad when we reached Korumburra for lunch.

Simon and I talked about doing Superbike School Level 2, preferably together, this coming summer. After gaining skills and experience, he is hammering the VFR. I think the limiting factor for him now is the bike. He sat on my CBR600 to get a feel of it. However, being a hardcore rider with no car, the VFR suits him for his pursuits. Maybe a superbike with removable soft panniers and top load bag will do the job from Monday to Saturday. I have seen a touring prepared sportsbike and its accessories on the Internet. So there you go.

Last time I didn't get a chance to speak to Rob McDowall on his first ride so I was glad to catch up this time during lunch. He explained he had had a slow speed spill on the second wet leg while taking a right hand turn and going a bit wide, running out of bitumen. He suffered a few holes in his rain gear, damaged pride and one hole in the engine cover, the leaking oil causing him to say farewell. Pina noted "Crash? Another R1?" We were on the same route on February 2013 and a first time rider managed to write off his R1. So comparatively, Rob is very lucky.

Fuelled by lunch and spirit lifted by sunshine, the third leg started to Crossover twisties and Jindivick. I found myself in good form and enjoyed the medium to high speed corners. I now remember a few corners through here which helps me to push the bike further. What fun!

On one of the corners, while Ben was waiting for the second corner marker, I asked him whether he counter-steered the bike while trail braking on wet corners and he nodded his head in confirmation. I am still unsure about what is the right pressure on the handlebars to flick the bike, so I will leave such circus experiments for dry roads for now.

After waiting for a while Ben left, probably not wanting his tyres to cool off. I felt that the corner was not clearly visible from distance so I did a U-turn and corner marked 40 meters before the turn. Simon and Ian appeared and rest of the group soon followed.

Going through Jindivick, Ian was on my tail. I tried to shake him off by increasing the bet from \$140 to \$160. I went through a few corners and Ian was still there, sitting behind me, probably whistling some country music and enjoying the scenery while I am sweating. I keep twisting the throttle further and he was still there after a more few corners. Okay, he's getting the hang of that Kawasaki and probably not going to return it back to Rob Langer. Paul Robinson seemed to enjoy riding behind behind Ben and was going for it.

These roads are still in great condition with good grip and feel. All you need is *Jinba Ittai (rider and horse as one body – Japanese design philosophy behind Mazda MX-5)* and good concentration. There are some tricky bends with one or two hiding immediately after steep uphill sections making it hard to judge whether the road is going left or right.

Finally, we finished at Officer South. I later headed home (420km door to door) while the Secretary and President were in serious discussion. Back at home it's time to pressure up the tyres for the next five days of commuting and prepare things for work. How I wish I was retired, like Cliffy, and ride every day. I am Kawasaki green with envy.

Jesvin George