

Ben Warden	Honda CBR1000	Cliff Peters (leader)	Kawasaki ZX10
Paul Southwell	Honda CBR1000	Gordon Heydon	Kawasaki ZX6R
Misho Zrakic/Pina Garasi	Honda CBR1000	Rob Langer	BMW F700 GS
Ian Payne (rear)	Honda CBR1000	Steve Mudford	Suzuki GSXR1000
Simon Wastney	Honda VFR800	Glenn Aspden	Suzuki GSXR1000
Jesvin George	Honda CBR600	Rob McDowall (1 st ride)	Yamaha R1
Cindy Lee	Triumph 675		<i>13bikes, 14 people</i>

Preparation for this Sunday's ride started a few days before; a new tyre and some heated grips were installed on the blue Suzuki GSX-R1000, my pride and joy. I turned up the week before only for Cliffy and Ben to point out that my front tyre had a bald section right where I needed it. Jamieson the weekend prior, did more damage than I'd realised. Better safe than sorry, so I was sent home.

Misho gave me an excellent tutorial a few weeks before, changing my rear tyre and explaining everything he could on tyre changing and the equipment required. So I purchased the tools and gave it a go. It's amazing the satisfaction I get from doing my own maintenance under the guise of saving money, and I'm actually having a lot of fun.

The heated grips took quite a bit of work to install. I had to take nearly every fairing panel off and lift up the tank because the wires span from the front of the bike to the rear, where I wired up a relay switch to the rear tail light. The grips will now only run if the bike is powered on, to save my battery, if I ever forget to turn them off, quite a likely possibility.

I was so glad for the heated grips on the way to Officer South; it must have been below 10 degrees. The forecast was "mostly sunny". When I left home the sun was out and it was looking like a beautiful day. Then a few kilometres from Officer South it started pouring rain! I stopped under a freeway overpass to put my wet weather gear on. Simon joined me for the same purpose.

As we gathered at the petrol station I heard what sounded like a Ducati with no mufflers arriving. It turned out to be first time rider Rob, on a Yamaha R1, baffles removed from the twin Akropovic exhausts. That cross plan crank makes for a sweet sounding machine. I wish my Suzuki made that noise. There are rumours Suzuki are working on a cross-plane engine and I hope they're true.

Sadly, some of those who arrived weren't dressed for rain, and turned up soaking wet in full leathers and decided not to ride. We agreed it would be a horrible day without the right gear. So Aiden Baker (Kawazaki ZX10), Scott Bowden (Honda CBR929) and new rider Paul (CBR600) sat in the Officer South servo for two hours waiting for the rain to clear. It turns out they probably would have been better coming with us, but who can predict the weather? Better safe than sorry.

By the time we left Officer South my hands had gone numb from the cold. I even had trouble doing up my helmet and jacket to leave. I put the heated grips on full, so when we got to Moe for morning tea my fingers were just thawing out. The rain made it fairly slow-going from Officer to Moe. We did the usual back roads, avoiding freeways, but I felt like we were biding our time, getting through the boring stuff, hoping the rain would stop.

At one stage I was going at a fair pace, rain coming down, leant over, riding about 100km/h around a 70km/h (signposted) corner when I hit a bump which lifted both wheels in the air. Not good for the heart. One thing I've learnt is to ride at no more than 90% of my ability in any situation. So when something unexpected happens I've still got that 10% to spare, that extra foot of road, for when I need it most.

I was surprised to see a lake at one intersection. Looking at a map I see we were near Blue Rock Lake near Willow Grove. I'm certainly getting to know my way around Victoria, thanks to MSR.

The rain stopped just as we arrived in Moe. I had a chat to the usual suspects then introduced myself to new rider Rob on the R1. Rob was having a great time already. "Wow, that was so much fun!" he said. I had a little chuckle and replied "That was nothing, you wait until it dries up and we hit some proper twisties". It cracked me up that what I thought was boring, was to a first time rider something quite fantastic. Rob McDowall was in for a good day if he enjoyed that part.

Jesvin was riding faster than usual and showing a high level of confidence in the rain at high speed. It must have something to do with the new Ohlins shock.

The rain started again just as we were leaving Moe. But it got lighter and eased off as we sped along to Tyers for a quick fuel stop. It was still very cold but the rain stopped completely before we got to Lake Glenmaggie. Instead of immediately left to Licola, we continued on to the T-junction and then turned left over the new concrete bridge. I'd never been over the old wooden bridge, so I was pleasantly surprised at what a fantastic road it was connecting us back up to Licola Road.

The road to Licola really is something special. I feel alive riding this road. It's got everything: steep hills, sharp bends, long fast sweepers, blindingly fast straights, road works, road kill, four-wheel drives coming the other way on the wrong side of the road. Everything! Today there were a few very big and very dead wombats in the middle of the road and a medium size kangaroo. None of this put anyone off, certainly not from what I could tell. I worked my way to the front of the bunch, finding myself behind Steve, following Misho and Pina, following the leader Cliff.

When we got to Licola where Cliff turned right to go up Tamboritha Road, somewhere I'd not been before. I followed Cliff, wondering what it would be like. Boy, was I in for a pleasant surprise! What a road it is! I was following Cliff from a respectful distance, but close enough to tell how sharp the corners were based on how close Cliff's foot got to the road. I've never seen anyone go from upright to scraping feet so quickly. Cliff gets that green machine on its side so quickly. Corner after corner the road just seemed to go on and on, short corners, long corners, with an excellent surface. By the time we got to the end of the bitumen I was puffing, the result of the effort involved in keeping up with Cliff. But I was smiling from ear to ear!

Half of the riders stopped in Licola while the other half did the Tamboritha road. Cliff and I were joined fairly quickly by Ben, Misho (without Pina), Rob Langer, Ian Payne, Gordon Heydon and new guy Rob on that wonderful cross-plane crank Yamaha that came burbling around the bend. Rob's eyes were popping out of his head by this stage, having the time of his life. That road is 23 km of absolute fun (despite the big black cow on the wrong side of the fence on the return journey, which wouldn't have been fun had it jumped out onto the road).

Rob Langer took some happy snaps to put on Facebook, It was his last ride for a while because he's off to Europe on another two-wheeled 60 day adventure.

Back we went to Licola for lunch which is always a humorous affair. Ben and Ian had swapped bikes for some suspension comparison. Cliffy tried to steal my GSX-R beanie to go with his imaginary new bike. I'm starting to think he didn't actually buy the GSX-R in the photo he shows everyone because he's always riding his ZX10. Having just rebuilt the rear shock after 130,000 km, I don't think we'll ever see the imaginary Suzuki. Maybe he's just wishing he had a Suzuki; a lot of people do! Or maybe the photos are real and he just wants a Suzuki to look great in his shed.

Misho and Pina said they saw sheep running after Cliff when they corner marked. Cliff is a retired sheep farmer and he may have given up on the sheep, but the sheep clearly haven't given up on him. Being from New Zealand, I was pleased to see a lot of sheep on this ride. The fields were very green which reminded me of my homeland.

Back to Melbourne. The wet weather gear was required once we were back in Tyers, stopped to refuel. The body was getting tired and the weather got worse and worse as we got closer to the finish, Officer South BP servo. But we had had great weather for the best part of the ride, those magical roads around Licola. Rob McDowall said it was the best day he'd ever had on two wheels; "I'm definitely joining this club; I never knew these roads existed. I can't wait! I'll bring my friends too. They'll love it" he said. When I heard Rob say these words it caused me to reflect on the time I've spent with the club. I feel very much a part of the Club and yet when I look up the date of my first ride I was surprised to see it was only six months ago. It feels a lot longer than six months. This is clearly just the beginning. See you on Sunday.

The ride length was 478km from Officer South (outbound) to Officer South (inbound).