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| Bill Simpson (leader) | Suzuki GSXR1000 | Ben Warden (rear rider) | Honda CBR1000 |
| Cliff Peters | Suzuki GSXR1000 | Misho Zrakic/Pina Garasi | Honda CBR1000 |
| Glenn Aspden | Suzuki GSXR1000 | Marc Marais | Kawasaki ZX10 |
| Neil Silver (1 st ride) | Suzuki GSXR1000 | | |

It was cold! Just as the forecast predicted – 15 degrees max! And with a strong westerly wind in the morning which turned southerly in the afternoon, we spent the day dodging showers, for the most part successfully. From Anakie back to Werribee was the heaviest drizzle, enough to leave me damp in various places despite waterproof over-jacket, full leathers, waterproof pants and boots and full thermals. Julie threw in some some motorcycle thick socks to wear as well.

Home now, I have washed the bike, removing a layer of light brown mud most noticeable on the wheels and frame. It's supposed to rain for much of next week - and so the bike will get dirty again with road grime sending the white front wheel black – but at least it will look good tomorrow morning!

After the ride I shot up to Misho's to drop off Pina's 180/55 Sportsmart which got lost amongst all the 190's in the bulk tyre order finishing up hiding on my tyre rack along with three other 190's. I am also in the process of replacing Julie's Magna's CV joint/axle and Misho just happened to have a Magna manual surplus to requirements. Thanks muchly.

At Point Cook, Glenn arrived on what appeared to be a new bike. No, just imported Chinese fairings covered in racing decals. He has done a fantastic job fitting it – 9 am till 9 pm the day before with a couple of hours break during the day. Neil was somewhat perturbed by Glenn's repeated and matter-of-fact reason for why he put them on: "For when I crash." Neil is another Hangmore refugee. Apparently when it turns cold and wet they don't ride. There appears to be an element of that in our Club with numbers falling dramatically over the past month, today down to single figures. Just the "hard cases" as Pina would say. Though the forecast was particularly bleak.

Cliff arrived on his new Suzuki, a very pretty blue and white job with bright red headlight surrounds giving it quite a distinctive look. He seemed to be running it in – or trying to conserve fuel – as he wasn't his normal busy self. Maybe other things are playing on his mind.

Leader Billy was back from his family ocean cruise and yes he managed to get up on stage and run through his joke repertoire finishing with the piece de resistance, *Lucky, Lucky, Lucky!* Had a thousand people in tears and begging for more, he reckons. He gave a quick rendition of his latest jokes and had us laughing heartily at first stop, Meredith. But I jump ahead.

With only five starters at Point Cook we set off, Ben leading, and Misho and Pina bringing up the rear. The plan was to pick up Billy on the outskirts of Werribee or worst case, at Anakie as pre-arranged. It turned out Cliff was also at Werribee bringing the total participants up to 7 riders.

We regrouped at Anakie after 58 km where Billy ran through the day's route and food stops. Everyone was in full wets and hence getting clothes and jackets sitting just right proves quite time consuming for some. Now rear rider, it proved a leisurely ride with new rider Neil and Cliffy cautious in the sometimes wet, always windy conditions.

Next stop Meredith, though Billy did warn us that we would be passing through Maude at least 10 times for the day. (I counted four.) The plan was to ride most of the roads in the Brisbane Ranges – the best roads for the day – and then have a coffee break in Meredith. So after Anakie (my, that has now got a long 80 km/h section) we followed Billy's usual route including the 300m of hard packed sandy road towards Maude before looping south down towards Bannockburn, over those tricky narrow bridges along the volcano floor before climbing back up to Maude again and then the blast through Steiglitz to reach Meredith after another 53 km.

Just as we arrived at Meredith we witnessed the departure of another Club with an eclectic mix of bikes, from old Nortons and Triumphs to a C-plated Z650 and even a BMW K750 naked. Everything looked at least 20 years old and there were more of them than us, unusually. I am sure Ron Johnston would have had a field day chatting up all the old blokes.

The coffee addicts headed off to greener pastures in town proper while Cliffy and I sat outside the servo café and soaked up the rays, munching on morning tea from home. The sun was shining brightly and sunscreen was deployed. I remember a couple of weeks ago on a similarly cold and overcast day I came home quite red and sunburnt.

We headed off to She Oaks and Maude taking the first right spiralling down to Lethbridge (another tricky bridge) running around the inner rim of another volcano. Great roads – in small sections – as Billy observed later. The trick is to link them up without too much highway in between! There is a great set of sweepers just out of Shelford which the regulars were pleased to note were dramatically improved after roadworks were completed removing some large dips. Our taxes at work!

Inverleigh for lunch, preceded by a fuel stop for most after 171 km. I figured I had another 120km in the tank so didn't need the extra weight (!) and proceeded to the usual takeaway joint across the road.

Billy purchased a giant banana and pineapple cake with cheesecake-like topping called a *Wasp*. His cholesterol was flagging and needed a top up, he suggested. Cliffy and I flopped out our lunchboxes and were nearly done when second course arrived! Thanks Billy!

Billy teased us all day about what the next stop might have been – afternoon tea at the Simpson household. Not today, but promised for next time. So we trundled through Bannockburn and headed north on our last leg, back to Maude, through the Brisbane Ranges again, turning right near Steiglitz and taking the bitumen twisty link road down to Anakie. Then we made our way east in the scenic drizzle – looking across the plains from a high vantage point it looked quite spectacular – towards Werribee and the finish. We passed the Ford Proving Ground, shrouded in mist, quite appropriate given last week's announcement by Ford of ceasing manufacturing operations in Australia by 2016. I wonder if that name will stick!

Something is going on west of Werribee – a major road and flyover is forming, concrete pillars rising out of the ground behind a kilometre of hoarding. Looking cross country you can see a major road being carved through the flatlands. I must pay attention to the papers and see what is being built – and if it will be useful to us! In the interim, the result is a chopped up and muddy road, with the speed dropped to a boring 80 km/h.

Werribee servo proved frustrating when two pumps refused to pump. I eventually complained to the manager, and on the second occasion he demonstrated how to pump petrol. It “needs oxygen” apparently. In the delays and confusion I forgot to write down my petrol figures! But managed to work them out at home remembering the ride length was 280 km servo to servo and I was 1.7 litres into reserve.

Thanks Billy for great company, barely a car on the good roads, no kangaroos as previously warned, and lots of laughs all day. I'll book you in to lead out west in a month or so. And thanks to my fellow hard cases for making the effort to get out of bed on this cold winter's day.

Ben Warden