



Ben Warden	Honda CBR1000	Cliff Peters	Kawasaki ZX10
Ian Payne (1/2 rear)	Honda CBR1000	Aiden Baker	Kawasaki ZX10
Paul Southwell	Honda CBR1000	John Willis	Kawasaki ZX10
Misho Zrakic	Honda CBR1000	Gordon Heydon	Kawasaki ZX6
Tim Emons	Honda CBR1000	Ronny	Kawasaki ZX6
Mark Copeland	Honda VTR1000	Chris Pointon	Suzuki GSXR1000
Jesvin George	Honda CBR600	Tony Stegmar	Suzuki GSXR1000
Pina Garasi	Honda CBR600	Fred Stoltz	Yamaha R1
Adrian MacGeraghty (3 <sup>rd</sup> )	Honda CBR600	Cindy Lee (1/2 rear)	Triumph 675
Kurn Bridgeman	Honda CBR600	Jason Gorman (1 <sup>st</sup> ride)	Aprilia RS125
Dave Chisma	BMW F800ST	Paul McLeod (2 <sup>nd</sup> ride)	Triumph 1050
			<i>22 bikes, 22 people</i>

I've never been superstitious, but when I was backing the Kwaka out the roller door on Sunday morning and the power company truck pulled up out the front to extract a fried possum from our power lines, I wondered whether dead body removal was a bad omen for the day? Nar, be sensible John. Get real.

The new Kawasaki ZX10 had sat in the garage for close to a month and I couldn't bear to look at it any longer without riding it. I'd been waiting for what's dubbed a "comfort kit" imported from Germany, comprising of bar risers - a flat set of one piece bars - and extended braided brake lines. Robby Langer put me onto the setup. Thanks Rob.

These bars bring back strong memories of riding my K7 Honda 750 (*in-line 4 cylinder 750cc for the younger members ...Ed.*) to Donnington Park in 1981. It was the first time I'd ever seen or heard of a certain Wayne Gardner, his first UK visit. He was racing against the likes of Barry Sheene, King Kenny Roberts and Randy Mamola. I thought, who the hell is this bloke racing with flat motocross type bars? He stuck out like dogs wotsits. 1981. Bloody hell! I'd already been on a bike five 5 years by then, so how old am I getting? Yep, time flies while you're having a ball.

My *plumbers back* can't do the sportsbike ride position any more. But sore backs could hold me back no longer. The bars are going through customs, apparently. They'll be on for Tassy.

We were in for a warm day through the depths of Gippsland, with a forecast of 35 degrees. There was a last minute change of route by Cliffy at the pointy end, due to the continuing bush fires in the Licola area.

The new BP servo at Officer was kick off point for the first time. It was mucho busy, but with plenty of room for the assembled faithful. We were joined by a new rider Jason on an Aprilia 125 two stroke who had just arrived down to this fair state from Queensland. He had been tipped off about us by fellow member Tony Ripepi who he works for.

Sam and Rita, ex-members from way back, came over to say g'day. They were both riding Harleys with a club, also meeting at the servo.

Cindy volunteered for rear rider duties.

We set off down the highway along the usual back roads with me already fidgeting on my perch, trying to get comfortable. Impossible. The new bike felt very stable, after the incredibly quick steering on the 1000 Ninja. I'd backed the steering damper completely off to regain some quicker inputs. The wider flat bars, whenever they arrive, will help in that department too. More leverage.

Finding myself behind Tim on the first open back road section of the day, it came far too easily opening the taps. Ear to ear grins were in order, the ten feeling reassuringly smooth. I realised just how easy you guys have had it while I've been battling the *old man style* Ninja.

The roads were clean, dry and in good nick. Pina was looking her usual smooth self, and Jason on the strange smelling ringer-ding-a-dinger, was going well on his first ride, the "Be careful" message sinking in his scone, me thinks.

I was one of the last to fill up at the Moe servo, and the guy was saying someone had left without paying. We didn't find out who the tea leaf was; maybe they made a mistake?

Tony was drinking up his veggie juice brekkie, and we sat talking healthy eating. Old age must be causing some reflection of our selves. We have both lost a couple of kilo's and feel all the better for it.

Onward. The good stuff lay ahead. I don't know how our ride leaders memorise so many roads in their grey matter. I'd have no clue without getting the map out, so I'm not about to pretend I knew where I was going but that's only one of the great things about our Club.

The ZX10 was singing to me. I became more familiar with her as the day passed, almost as quickly as the scenery. The power is addictive and the brakes awesome. At one intersection I came close to overshooting, the corner marker guys obscured on approach. But as I pulled up hard I realised it was a one finger effort on the front brake. On the old Ninja I'm sure I would have sailed by and done a U-turn.

Victoria is so crunchy dry again, it's scary. But Gippsland is still a beautiful place to be riding, despite the lack of greenery. It's one of my favourite areas to be belting along with like minded souls, though now, even at speed, the day was getting a tad warm under the perforated leathers.

Misho was his normal fast and safe self, on the reincarnation of the yellow Fireblade. I hooked up with him for a while. I just love his lines; "confidence inspiring" comes to mind.

As lunchtime approached, we passed through Mirboo North, and the next 10 or so kilometres had sections of road works with accompanying fine gravel to catch you out if you were not on the ball.

Cliffy pulled us up for a regroup and photo for the mag. Six of us waited for the rest. And waited and waited. Thoughts turned to who's broken down or worse, who's gone down. Finally, Cliff got on the *dog'n bone*; the rest of the Club had taken it upon themselves to have lunch in Mirboo North. It was not the designated place at all for our sustenance stop, so we back tracked. I thought, whose ride is this? Cliffy's or not?

Cindy was looking through the local antique type shop while Mark Copeland had a puncture to repair with all hands on deck. We completely took over the seating on the pavement outside the bakery.

Puncture fixed, Mark went the 100m to the servo to put some wind in the tyre. In the mean time we set off, unknown to anyone, leaving Mark to his own devices. I later phoned Mark to apologise for my unwitting part in his early ride departure. Mirboo North blunder number two for the day. Is there something about that place? I remember last year corner marking on the way to Mirboo North when a certain rear rider (who's often leading our rides) went sailing by me and I was lost from the ride. Not good either. But no-one's perfect; well not many of us any road.

Ride section three for the day saw me fiddling with the traction control settings and power modes on the Kwaka. Aiden had filled me in at lunch time re the finer points of the dash layout and elec trickery bits. I settled on full power input and number 2 traction control, to keep me safe on the new steed. As I became more at one with the bike, I was following Cliffy up front for a good while without the usual thoughts of, "just let up 3%, Cliff, and I'll have no problems staying with you". The quick guys really are smooth.

Fred on an R1 Yamaha I wasn't familiar with started to be in the mix during the afternoon. I had never met or spoken to Fred before today but that was about to be rectified in the worst of circumstances.

There was Cliff up front, some 100 or so metres ahead, then Fred, closely followed by yours truly, Aiden a little further back. We were in these positions for probably the best part of 10 minutes on a great stretch of road heading towards Loch for afternoon tea. I was thinking, come on Mr R1, step on it a fraction more, I would like to be right on the back of Cliffy, testing out my new steed. Then, in the blink of an eye, going into a right hander, the R1 was down and I was right on top of him, with nowhere to go. I hadn't thought for a second we're into this corner a bit hot. Fred's bike just folded under him. I had noted his lack of a brake light, so wasn't sure if he'd touched the brakes and lost traction as we were cranked over. In these circumstances it's instinct that takes over, and you don't have time to think. You just DO it.

I yanked on the brakes so hard I nearly busted the lever, washing off an amazing amount of speed before I inevitably hit the grass. Bits of R1 were being thrown about as the debris came back off the unforgiving Armco barrier. Fred was off the bike and both were still in motion. I had rider, R1 and Armco to try and avoid. I was shouting inside my helmet one very loud F word. Somehow, probably due to the awesome ABS (don't buy a bike without it), traction control set on position 2, lady luck and a smidge of rider input, I avoided most of the carnage apart from Fred's ankle which I rode straight over, and then just brushed against the Armco on my brand new bike!

I was thinking the worst as I put the bike on the side stand, amazed I was still upright. I looked back and Fred was already up, Aiden with him. Fred was going to be okay. Better than his trashed bike. His ankle was swelling but he was putting weight on it.

A local farmer was good enough to stop and then return with a trailer. Then Fred's bike was unceremoniously laid on its side for the short trip back to the farm for the wait while Yvonne, his partner, drove down from Moe with a trailer to pick up him and the bike remains. The bike was not insured.

I had installed the vinyl wrap over the majority of my new bikes' paintwork while it had been waiting for its *Wayne Gardner* handle bars. On Monday morning I plucked up the courage to peel back the damaged areas of glad wrap that had brushed with the Armco during the accident. I was gob smacked. There was not a single mark under that clear, slightly rubbery plastic coating. It had paid for itself already! New bike, go get it installed; highly recommended.

The Loch cafe was its usual very welcoming place to be for afternoon tea, and for me to calm my nerves back down. Phew. My fuel light had been flashing and the Kwaka needed some go juice (I'd averaged 16.1 kms per litre so far) but the servo had closed for the day. The cafe owner took it upon herself to rustle up the new young owner from across the street, who was asleep. She woke the baby, too! What service! High octane fuel for those in need.

An ice-cream went down a treat; bugger the diet, it's stinking hot.

Just before we left I noticed a garden tap in between the fuel pumps, but no watering can with it, so what else is a sweaty person to do but sit down right next to the tap and let it run all down your back and front inside your leathers. That feels better.

We finished the day off back at the Officer BP servo on the freeway. I was aching all over. Decrepidance (new word) creeping upon one's bones. I sent my Lou Lou a message to say all was well, be home in an hour. She was a little worried about the new bike and crook back scenario. I rolled in home at 7.10 pm after a long, eventful and mostly fun day with no plod. Thanks to everyone for making it such fun.

Tassy, here we come.

**John Willis**