



It was with more than a hint of trepidation that I plunged into the Summer of 2012/13 riding season, knowing an intense, risky and potentially exhausting four month period of riding lay ahead. Would I survive unscathed, licence intact and body still functional? Would the bike be mechanically reliable, handle consistently and come out of the season uncrashed if somewhat second hand? It appears, luckily, “yes” to all the above.

First the distance. Referring to my trusty fuel figures as a quick reference I see that between November 3<sup>rd</sup> 2012 and March 24<sup>th</sup> 2013 the Club offered 6 major riding events:

1. 4 day Melbourne Cup Weekend at Corryong (3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> Nov.)
2. 2 day Dargo via Omeo (8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Dec.)
3. 7 day Christmas Camp at Porepunkah (27<sup>th</sup> Dec. to 2<sup>nd</sup> Jan.)
4. 4 day Australia Day Weekend (27<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> Jan.)
5. 10 day Tasmania Epic (1<sup>st</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> Mar.)
6. 2 day Dargo via Omeo 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> Mar.)

The odometer moved from 45,276 km filling at Yea heading for Yarck at the start of the Melbourne Cup Weekend on November 3<sup>rd</sup> to 68,719 km on 24<sup>th</sup> March at Longwarry North at the finish of the Dargo ride. That’s 23,443 in three and a half months. Three weeks later (at the time of writing, 16/4/12) and the odometer has pushed through the 71,000 km mark, the bike purchased new September 30<sup>th</sup> 2011. 71,000 km in a smidge over 18 months.

Not surprisingly, only Pina Garasi, Misho Zrakic and Rob Langer shared all six events with me. Cliff Peters, Paul Southwell and John Willis went close with 5. I think all of this group would qualify as “hard core”, as Pina would say.

I knew coming to the end of this period would be an emotional letdown, particularly following Tasmania and the sheer intensity of riding 500 km every day on brilliant roads with great mates, in perfect weather with little or no traffic, and with a motorcycle/tourist friendly police force whose first option is to give you a warning – almost no matter what! “Back home we would expect to be tazed as the first option”, Billy quipped. Not so far from the truth.

Of course the tremendous trauma of Tasmania (Tim Emons, Andrew Newbury, Peter Feistl), both physical and emotional, has left long term scars and created the element of doubt and fear in every overtaking manoeuvre. Riding has got that little bit harder, the consequences of poor decisions uppermost in our minds. Tasmania has left a profound effect on the Club psyche, reminding us of the inherent danger motorcycling offers mixed with moments of sheer exhilaration.

So to stave off the onset of post Tassy depression, another Dargo ride was organised a couple of weeks later, with 22 starters! Dargo eased the let down and brought the Tasmania survivors back together to share, relive, and start healing. We move on – together.

I have been lucky with accidents, surviving the period with little more than sore elbows, some sort of repetitive strain injury I fear, but I have all winter to mend. This aging thing is a pain with the body more susceptible to aches and pains and certainly not recovering as fast as it used to. Interestingly, Misho, ten years younger, also has sore elbows/arms. But he has a much better excuse doing a lot of two up riding which is very hard on your arms in the twisties.

Sadly, we have just learnt that Fred Stolk suffered a broken leg when he crashed his R1 into the Armco near Loch back on the 17<sup>th</sup> February and was accidentally run over. He was hobbling around for good reason! Sadness for all concerned. We wish him a speedy and fully recovery.

Tim Emons and Andrew Newbury, now conveniently collocated in the Epworth Rehab hospital in Hawthorn, make progress incrementally, with good and bad days. The hourly care and monitoring provided by the hospital staff versus heading home to family and quiet becomes a difficult and more pressing decision as physical ability improves. I don't envy them the choice, either decision riddled with great benefit and great loss. More experienced heads may be able to offer the benefit of hindsight.

Apart from the major crashes resulting in severe personal injuries, we have already had a spate of minor crashes – 10 crashes so far this year, with the consequent loss of glorious machines, often written off after any sort of spill these days. Refer to the 2013 Incident Log for the gory details. It is good to see Rob Jones' Suzuki GSXR1000 reincarnated as Steve Mudford's new steed.

My CBR did not survive the period unscathed though fundamentally it performed brilliantly and is easily the best bike I have owned in terms of performance, reliability, handling and sheer pleasure to ride. Though why they can't make the fairings clip off in the blink of an eye, or took away the oil sight window, I'll never know.

For the record, I repaired three dinged wheels (both black and white rear wheels and the front) over summer. Hitting bumps at high speed is consistently bad news. Luckily they rolled out well though cosmetically the wheels are looking pretty shabby with a number of heat scorch marks. And white seems to absorb the brown bug guts and brake dust particularly efficiently such that they are now more beige than white. A dip in black enamel is not too far away.

A full service just before Christmas proved extremely stressful when the bike wouldn't start, finally traced to swapped electrical sensor plugs, but not before pulling the bike apart a few times and rechecking everything from valve clearances to cylinder compression to fuel pressure. I learnt more about the bike in that week than in the previous year. Throw in a few car issues and it was a hectic week, the final test ride 4 pm Christmas Day.

At Jindabyne, Honda CBR's addiction to oil reared its ugly head, and now regular checking and top ups form the pre-Sunday ride routine. Luckily, the Club is buying oil in bulk these days!

Irregular maintenance back in December unearthed a bird the size of a sparrow in the air filter, very dried and fried, feather down in every paper fold. A new air filter was required. Last week I revisited the air box again, the first time since Christmas, expecting to dig out the usual 1 cm deep collection of bees and wasps and small brown crispy bugs. This time a giant shiny Christmas beetle greeted me – and clouds of dust. The filter came up well after lots of blowing with compressed air. I must ask Cliff what he washes his air filter in.

Never one for bling, I recently succumbed to installing a gear indicator, recovered from President Ian's CBR before he traded it on the 2012 model which has one standard. As it had already been taught the gears, I knew it would be a simple plug and play process – but would still require a half day to battle the fairings – and hence the delay in fitting. It took three hours, though I did get distracted removing the half kilogram of stones accumulated in the belly pan and attempting to remove the tar stains from the fairing leading edges with petrol. Stone chips are doing their darndest to turn a crisp white fairing into a black speckled replica. Too late for the protective film now.

The gear indicator is quite entertaining around town with its quirky behaviours, and is fun learning. It figures out the gear by counting pulses from the front sprocket (speedo) and comparing with the engine revs. It needs a certain number of pulses before making a decision, and dribbling around town results in a delay in the lower gears. And changing from sixth to first in a hurry sends it into a spin, though it certainly locks on to neutral instantaneously.

Tyres, tyres, and more tyres. There is no avoiding the tyre consumption issue, but thankfully a couple of bulk purchases through MotoGC have alleviated the cost pain slightly. The consumption of rears has a nice symmetry – two Bridgestone Battlax (standard fitment), two Michelins and two Sportsmarts. The Battlax only lasted 3,000 km each, the Michelins about 7,000 km each and the Sportsmarts 7,000 and 5,000 km – in Tassy. The fronts are more of a hotpotch: a Pilot Road 3, a couple of 2CTs, a Dunlop GP, and a couple of Sportsmarts. The best wear was on the Pilot Road 3 with 7,000 km followed by the Sportsmart with 5,000 km. The odd front tyre is second hand and if the front and rear are matching, that is pure chance, not deliberate. I rarely change tyres as a pair. And I rotate the fronts if I catch them in time. For the reader's amusement, I am on to the 17<sup>th</sup> front and 12<sup>th</sup> rear.

Summer saw out a set of brake pads and I rotated the front sprocket at 24,000 km. I also pulled the mirrors apart and installed a lock washer which drastically reduced the amount of "shake".

The bike's still on the original spark plugs and runs faultlessly. Fuel economy is good as evidenced by 340 km from one tank on last Sunday's Reefton Pub/Black Spur Ride. Long term the average is 18.0 km/l from Day 1. I'll probably change the plugs at the next full service – at 100,000 km!

Another bright spot over the Summer was the consistently large Club magazines – probably the four biggest consecutive months in terms of pages I have produced – a function of all the brilliant writeups. Thanks to all the contributors. I tell Billy Simpson we're capturing our Club's history for our grandkids who just won't believe we were propelled around the country on two wheels burning hydrocarbons without being speed limited and satellite monitored.

Technology, used for good or evil, is all pervasive. Opening the TAC courtesy letter today reminds me that a life of crime does not go unrewarded and it will be like walking on egg shells for the next few years. The only way to view it and stay sane is to consider it as a form of tax.

See you on a ride soon.

**Ben Warden**