



The Saturday morning to start the Cup Weekend away finally rolls around and I'm awake early to meet Scott Bowden and a couple of new riders, Toby and Oli, for their first MSR weekender. We catch up in Yarra Glen to take away the early morning chill with a coffee and then head up to the Yarck meeting point.

The crowd builds as we head towards the 9:30am leave time with many familiar faces and some new ones. People have come from far and wide: Cliffy's commute from Geelong brings his kilometres up to over 860 by the end of the day. Some people I haven't seen since Tassie including David Ward fresh off the boat and just made the start point in time! Rob Langer took the smart man's approach and stayed at the Yarck hotel the previous night for a leisurely sleep in.

In the rush to get there on time, Michael Hendrickson runs afoul of the boys in blue out for the start of the Long Weekend and earns himself 3 points and happy respite from walking for a month from the "kind" officer. (Stay tuned for updates as this is the unfortunate theme for Mikey's trip.)

The commute to Mansfield builds the tension for the roads ahead. Please be good, weather!

Careful attention is paid to oncoming cars, and of course we spot a camera-car on the way. Once in Mansfield we encounter the busiest day of the year, the Mansfield Festival. Cars are banked up through town. Mikey catches a quick splash of fuel while we plough through and on towards the first good stuff of the weekend. We pass a LOT of vintage Indian Motorcycles coming the other way. Ben counted 72 but I think it was 73.

Whitfield Road, one of my favourites. The road is in good condition and little traffic makes for a great run and allows us to all make sure our tyres are fully scrubbed in for the weekend ahead. Once in Whitfield for morning tea, some layers are shed by most as the cold from the early start has evaporated to the first of (hopefully) many sunny days for the trip. (I say hopefully knowing full well what weather we had cos its now Tuesday night and I'm typing this from my couch at home with a beer. But I'm trying to make you feel like you're there, so just go with it, okay?)

A bunch of BMW Club riders are in Whitfield. There were a number of BMW rides on over this weekend as well.

On departure from Whitfield Ben calls in his bodyguard to ride ahead and fend off the hordes of police seeking to rob him of his final licence points. Fortunately, no police were found on this leg of the trip.

We lunch in Myrtleford at the fast and efficient bakery and then ride the great Rosewhite and Happy Valley roads. We pit stop by the road side at The Trees (near Tangambalanga), from where Cindy and Peter Jones take a shortcut to the end point as its quite warm now and there is still a long way to go.

From The Trees we head towards Mitta Mitta where a few head straight into town to cool off and fuel up, whilst the rest of us head up to Dartmouth Dam for a quick spin, and for me, the risk of running out of fuel!

About two thirds of the way up to the hill to the Dam is one of those easily miss-read cresting corners that, as you rise up, you can see the road leading off to the right in the distance. But as you crest the rise, it suddenly becomes dramatically apparent that the road darts left before making the right bend.

It caught me off guard and some quick braking was needed. Rounding the next corner I found a group of our guys by the side of the road, all standing and talking, all bikes upright. A good sign.

Upon dismounting I heard what happened. Aiden had come upon the same corner but at a greater pace and so he was left with less time to react. Off-roading skills came to the fore and he managed to save the bike and himself from more serious damage by keeping himself up on the roadway rather than over the edge. The unscheduled off road excursion left the bike with a broken rearset (even though it stayed upright!) which we cable tied up before heading back to Mitta Mitta to work out options.

Aiden and I weren't alone in our "moments" on this road. Everyone knew EXACTLY which corner was the problem. Rod also had some dirt riding practice of his own.

In Mitta Mitta Steve Mudford tried to ring some welding contacts to help out, but without success. So Aiden headed home on the freeway, and at dinner time, Ben received a text that Aiden was home safe.

We covered another 170km before Walwa and then headed for our digs for the night. Apart from Ron and Sarah Vise's B&B in Towong, everyone was staying in Corryong with Mikey staying in Tintalra.

On the way to Towong, a miscommunication led to our rear rider Nigel continuing straight ahead instead of taking a left, eventually arriving via a different route. He arrived in the few minutes I was back-tracking to try and find him.

Ron and Sarah had lined up a great feed and Ben ferried a bunch in from town for dinner and back when they were full of food and beer. Even with Ben's warning "drink hard and sleep short at your peril" I had a feeling a few would show up bleary eyed in the morning.

**Stu Hosking**