

Mirboo North

Sunday 4th August 2013

Ben Warden (leader)	Honda CBR1000	Cliff Peters	Kawasaki ZX10
Misho Zrakic	Honda CBR1000	Mark Copeland	Kawasaki ZX10
Ian Payne (rear rider)	Honda CBR1000	Marc Marais	Kawasaki ZX10
Simon Wastney	Honda VFR800	Rob Langer	BMW F700GS
Pina Garasi	Honda CBR600	Jesvin George	Honda CBR600

10 bikes, 10 people, 12 deg cold and wet, 80% wet roads, shortened to 317 km and early finish

After the fuel filling procedure at Officer, I hastily reduced the tyre pressures, which I was supposed to do at home before the tyres warmed up. But I was running late and it was okay to run on slightly high pressure rather than miss the ride. Just in time for the ride brief with the die-hard regulars. Ian Payne volunteered to be the rear rider. I noticed he is doing a lot of rear riding these days. Riding a superbike at his age is quite an inspiration.

Soon after 10am we headed towards Drouin. On the freeway a truck was making unusual movements which made me feel uneasy, so I dropped back. The truck driving now in the right lane moved further right crossing the white line, spraying water onto the riders behind. It took some time for the truck to move back within its lane which made me think - was that deliberate? Pina Garasi got a free shower and later the truck moved violently into the left lane. I enjoyed the show from behind but secretly wished Pina would make some sort of finger communication to the truck driver.

Boring freeway, boring straights, rain and cold made the journey so far, less interesting. But soon the medium-paced corners started appearing and, though I am still not clear of the exact route, I felt some of the corners were familiar which was good.

There were wet patches, tree branches and gravel on the road, so the pace was down a bit from the usual 'down a bit'. Everyone seemed to be riding cautiously through the corners to Korumburra, not wanting to upset their bike tyres' traction. Quick spying on every bikes' rear tyres proved this to be right: there were chicken strips on everyone's tyres. You chickens! Do some knee scraping in the rain. OK, now I am feeling better.

The sun shone for a while during the tea break before we headed to Mirboo North. Sadly, the sunshine didn't last long. With rain pouring, throttle control is becoming more and more important. Honda, traction control please. The wide corners of the Grand Ridge Road were a relief as I was looking for the safest possible line through the corners. When it rains, isn't there a bit of oil in the middle, even though most of it gets washed away? Left side of most of these roads are at a lower level than the middle. Does that mean the oil gets washed down the left side and makes that side slippery too? Well, I am asking too many questions.

These concerns from winter rides have resulted in the squaring-off of my front tyre at the sides. When I bought it, the tyre was a "U" shape which now has turned into a curvy "V". At least this time I managed to wear out the sides first, unlike the last tyre where the centre part wore out first. I asked Misho what is the best front tyre for winter, he said, "There is no such thing as a 'best tyre'." I got approximately 12,000km out of the front Dunlop Sportsmart but I am happy to trade off 4000km for more wet weather grip.

The pace was low, even on the second leg, the continuous wet roads taking the fun out of me.

Most of the time the corner markers were a duo combination of Misho, Mark and Marc. One or two small but frightening rear tyre slips were duly covered before reaching Mirboo North. Again, Mr Amish Honda - traction control please.

The sun started shining again while resting at Mirboo North. All the bikes lined up under the nose of the enforcer's building. Marc Marais, trying to find the balance between fun and the family, left for home after lunch. We took our time, waiting for Mr Sunny to dry the roads.

During Rob Langer's small talk about his recent European trip he mentioned the tricky mountain passes where one needs a head-turning angle like an owl. "Where did you rent the bike, Robbie?" "I rode my own bike; it was safely stored in the UK". Ah ha! Let me guess: he's got one on every continent.

The third leg was the best. The roads were mostly dry, the ride went faster, and I was sure Misho would do some monos. Well, he didn't disappoint. The pace was maintained until we hit the 45-55km/h turns running down into Trafalgar. Rob Langer went past me, his skills polished from Europe. Second gear through these corners is no good, making the bike jerk as the acceleration passes through the dip in the torque curve. Third gear is too slack and first gear is too sensitive.

North of the highway and heading for old sale Road, the corners got wider and the speed increased as did the grin. I was absolutely hammering, indulging myself. The corners appeared and disappeared in a glimpse. Hang on? Did I see out of the corner of my eye leader Ben waiting for corner markers? I grabbed a handful of front brakes on the damp road and yes, they are not good as they once were, the pads and front tyre nearing their wear limits. I stopped just in time to corner mark. Phew!

Back to indulgence. Cliff and Misho passed Ben through the Crossover sweepers. I was the third rider following Ben. Overtake or not? Stuff it, I am following Cliffy. Hit one gear down, hit rev limiter, hit one gear up and twist the throttle until vision gets blurred. See! Overtaking is easy, given the roads and corners are wide like a rainbow. Eventually I slowed at the T-intersection where I saw Misho and Cliffy waiting for the leader. I forgot we overtook the leader and almost headed off to towards Neerim South and Jindivick but Cliffy made hand gestures to calm me down.

The great third leg finished. While regrouping at Officer we saw a copper on a BMW bike hanging around at the fuel station. Riding back home I saw him with a pulled-over car. After I passed him I kept glancing in my mirrors and sure enough, he eventually caught up. I was doing more or less 100km/h so he must have sped along the freeway to catch me. Long story short, he tricked me between two cars on the left lane him, riding on the right, so I can't 'safely overtake' without getting a ticket. Since I didn't violate any road rules he pulled me over for a 'full licence check'. He wrote down my details while I had my helmet on before merging back onto the freeway with unbelievable acceleration. Souped up BMW?

Just to make sure he doesn't slap a ticket on me later, I wrote down his name and the time of the incident. We have got faith in the legal system, don't we? So I continued the journey to home, cautiously, just to be sure he was not hiding somewhere, trying to catch me again. Later I saw he had pulled over a bike which looked like Kawasaki ZX14.

No incidents during the official ride. It was fun! Thanks to Ben and Ian for the head and tail duties. I will be back.

Jesvin George