

Moutlon! Moulton! Moulton! Brompton?

Dino (Pepe) Morgante

Yet another first for the Queensland region had last season seen the birth of the Petit Opperman 2010. What started from a couple of enquiries became a full-frontal optical assault to surely scare the pants of the unsuspecting Queensland public. And in a real show of eclectic style, this ride could be best described as *'Four Middle-Aged Australian Cyclists Being French While Riding English-Made Bicycles'*. But be warned – sometimes the adventure doesn't always follow the best planned script.

Many, many years ago, someone sprouted the saying that "Things always happen in Threes". That may be true to some extent, but having four like-minded cyclists take on the behemoth that is the Petit Opperman – now you can't beat that!

It is also interesting how enquiries and ideas have a habit of sprouting wings and taking flight – sometimes a little awkwardly at first, but when the momentum builds there is no stopping. This is how our adventure got started, and ended.

During early February, I received an email from Peter Jenkins enquiring about the route slip I used for the Midnight Century, while at the same time receiving an email from Sue May enquiring about my potential interest in joining a team to ride the Petit Opperman. Coincidentally, it turned out Peter was looking for a course for the Opperman for the same team as Sue.

To be honest I did not really have any intentions to ride at this time, due to my lack of riding in recent months, and was hedging my response to Sue by sitting squarely on the fence, hopefully without causing too much injury to myself, of course.

I duly sent Peter a copy of the route slip while indicating to Sue that I most probably would not be a contender for the team. Just out of curiosity (now with my ride mentor hat on), I did ask Peter how he intended setting out the ride for start and finish points, and given the 12 hour stopping requirement on the Petit, where and how would he be organising the overnight stop.

When Peter replied with some sketchy ideas of an overnight stay in Rosewood or Lowood, I thought to myself "Now that's no way to 'live-up' an entire vacant night when a little bit more fun could be had". I guess after a few more curious suggestions about after-hours activities, Sue baiting and blackmailing me with the prospect of being the Team Capitan, and a proposed change of course, I was taken in 'hook, line and sinker'.

I won't divulge too much detail of the bevy of emails that ensued, except to say I could tell Sue was very much blushing in her email responses after she pretty much suggested she would do anything to get me on the team - hmmm.

After a few weeks of to-ing and fro-ing with names, courses and themes, and with just as much ebbing and flowing with rider numbers, we eventually settled on all four aspects. The main impetus for the choices came on the back of the specific and rather elitist selection of bicycle. Being a Petit Opperman, what else could possibly

satisfy the script but using small-wheeled bicycles. Hence, the "little bike" title of this piece.

So it followed, with petit being of French origin (sorry to state the bleeding obvious) we assumed a French appeal, with apparel for the complete look, including the team name "Les Petits Cane Toads". Ok, I know it's not completely French, but there had to be a Queensland flavour somewhere. And so it was set, the first ever Queensland Petit Opperman would take to the road on 20 March 2010.

At around 7:00am, the team of Peter, Sue, and George Row started arriving at the "Chalet on Delville". We sorted out the usual pre-ride paperwork, overnight sleeping arrangements and first control point food supplies. The Day One course comprised a 150k loop from Moorooka to Tamborine, back through Beenleigh, to Mt Cotton, Wynnum returning to Moorooka.

After a customary group photo on the front lawn of the chalet, in full French regalia no less, and a touch after 8:00am, we set off on our inaugural 'petit' journey. Les Petits Cane Toads – Madame Suzette, Monsiuer Georges, and Monsiurs Pepe and Pierre (Zee Pashley Brözers). The morning conditions were great with just a light smattering of cloud cover and a cool breeze, with the possibility of showers during the afternoon.



Georges, Suzette, Pepe, Pierre – ready for Day One

Oh yes, the bikes. As mentioned earlier, we took a very elitist approach with the bikes to be of the small-wheeled category. As it turned out, all bikes were of British make. Pierre and I were each riding the Moulton Pashley TSR30, Georges a Moulton '83 AM7, and Suzette a Brompton S6. Gearing amongst the bikes also varied from a 14-speed Rollhof hub, to a 6-speed internal hub to two-chainring 6-speed freewheel.

Anyhoo, back to the riding stuff. The first part of the journey took us through light commercial and industrial areas of Coopers Plains and

Salisbury, then residential areas of Sunnybank and Drewvale with mainly undulating terrain and being incident free. Turning into Browns Plains I was feeling rather thirsty, and needing a top up took the liberty of pulling into the first available service station.

I think the gent at the checkout didn't quite know what to make of the outfit as I donned the felt beret. After a quick refill by a few of the team we were back on the road. The only problem was the lack of toilet facilities – a little odd considering it is a "service" station. Not to worry, as we would stop at another one a few kilometers along the route.

Back on track, we got into a steady rhythm while slowly leaving the urban trappings of Browns Plains behind us and traversing the now rural aspects of Chambers Flat and Logan Village on our way to Tamborine. The atmosphere amongst the team as we rode along was good-humoured and light-hearted – after all this was always intended to be a very relaxed ride with very little pressure on time and distance constraints. So how relaxed was it you ask? Well, so much so that Monsieur Georges would amuse himself by weaving in and out of imaginary traffic cones while offering advice on many detailed topics – a man of many talents.

There were also numerous attempts at engaging unsuspecting motorists and pedestrians with our pigeon-French language skills and bonafide French accents, which generally received an encouraging smile, smirk or the occasional wave back. Well, I think they were waving?

Arriving at the first control point in Tamborine, the team was in good spirits. In keeping with the script and theme, I replaced my helmet with my beret before walking into the rural Shell servo. After absorbing many fleeting glances from the counter operators, while waiting behind Suzette with my purchases, my turn came to allay their fears.

In my best French accent I greeted them warmly and announced that my friends and I were embarking on a long distance ride while riding on those tiny little bikes that I pointed to parked outside. So convincing was my dialogue, the young girl behind the counter thought it was all for real. Still in my best French accent, I explained that I was not actually French, my moustache was in fact drawn from \$12 long-lasting eyeliner, my beret was bought the night before at Myer, but we were still riding a long distance.

With the fun over for the time being, we replenished our fluids while taking the opportunity for a relaxed food and drink stop. Suzette was good enough to grab a quick snap shot of us three amigos as we got ready to return to the road.



Pepe, Georges, Pierre – rest stop at Tamborine

The next stage of the ride would take us through Cedar Creek and Wolffdene along some nice winding, tree-lined and undulating terrain and onto Beenleigh. The heavily treed areas also gave us some much needed shelter and respite from the hot sun during the middle of the day.

The remainder of this stage of the ride to Mt Cotton was relatively uneventful, with the exception of the laborious trudge up to and along Mt Cotton Road on our way to the next control point. I was starting to feel a little lethargic while noticing Suzette slipping off the back, and Pierre and Georges nudging further away at the front. It's one of those sections of road that just won't go away and seems to take an eternity to traverse. Yes, even the Capitaine had to stop briefly to rest his weary legs. I caught up to Suzette, and by the time we got to the BP servo stop we could see Georges but could not see Pierre anywhere. "Oh frère, où es-tu?!"

Figuring he couldn't be too far away, we headed into the servo to get some refreshments. Again, playing the French village idiot, yours truly donned the beret and went the full savoir faire. This time there were a few extra yokels present in this well-to-do establishment, that is, compared to the isolated Shell servo we last stopped at. So rather than picking up a sense of bewilderment or curiosity during the early stages of my masterful Marcel Marceau charade, I got the distinct feeling my efforts were going to be truly wasted on these non-cosmopolitan types. What a dour and senseless lot – in protest to their snarls I shall not utter a single word. Well, ok I did, but not with French accent.

Just as I felt the routine was going south, like a nervous comedian on stage for the first time, in came my trusty French brother, Pierre. Thank God You're Here! – someone to momentarily take the focus off me. Oh Pierre, my little pedal-friend, where have you been?! It turns out Pierre was having such a great time out front by himself he had simply forgot to stop.

Apart from really feeling like I needed to have a sleep, and we collectively being momentarily disorganised, we finished off our snacks and prepared to leave for our next destination – Pandanus Beach on the Wynnum foreshore.



Zee Pashley Brözers – only our mözer can tell us apart – can you?

The outskirts of Redland Bay with its subtle undulations came as a welcomed distraction from the recent grinds around Mt Cotton and Sheldon. The smooth asphalt runs were also a nice change from the previous terrain and keenly acknowledged. So along we chugged at a comfortable cruising pace and chatted about the day's events and the waiting dinner stop at the Pelicans Nest on the Wynnum Esplanade.

So far the day had unfolded without any issues, no harassment from motorists and no mechanicals. I shall add that to the script, but with some reservations.

Having completed our trek through Capalaba and Manly, we turned onto the esplanade with our minds and thoughts squarely on the magical feast waiting for us at Pandanus Beach. Like a dog looking longingly at its food through a glass door, I was salivating so much I had to keep wiping my mouth on my shirt sleeve. In order to mask this embarrassing and uncontrollable urge I ended up spraying water over my face just to settle down – guess that's what you do to dogs, don't you? I don't know, I don't own one.

As we dismounted our cycles at the Pelicans Nest, we drew the expected curious glances from customers gathered in the al fresco dining area (that's cosmopolitan for footpath dining). Without too much concern from our end, Pierre grabbed a photo or two for the scrap book of memories before heading in for our order.



Suzette, Pepe, Georges – rest stop at Pandanus Beach

One curious onlooker asked us about the bikes because he had never seen one before, let alone four at one time. We explained the whole charade to him, but this time without the French pizzaz. He gave a bit of a muted chuckle while maintaining his sideways, but guarded glance.

Rather coincidentally, as we sat down to eat the heavens opened up and rained heavily for about 20 minutes. Not that it worried us any, we were under cover enjoying our much awaited

meals of "Croustilles de Pommes et les Poissons" (ahh, le fish and chip). The rain eventually eased and the sun began to filter through the clouds once again. What a way to see in the afternoon sunset by the bay, but with good food, equally good company and getting wet on the inside, but not the outside.

With the sun quickly setting, this was our cue to get our bodies and wares gathered up for the short trek back home. The rain had stopped ten minutes earlier and had cooled the early evening air to the right temperature for riding. So off we toddled without incident through the environs of Wynnum, Carina, Coorparoo and back to Moorooka and the "Chalet on Delville".

Arrivé! With the first day complete it was time to get showered and refreshed, and tuck into a little evening delight. With the whir of the washing machine and clothes dryer for some background ambience, we sat down for a night cap of Suzette's French rice pudding, along with chocolate assortments and a special super caffeinated coffee, compliments of the "Chalet on Delville".

For about an hour or so we recounted the day's events, mostly humorous, and planned our movements for the next morning. Georges kept us all enthralled and amused on many subjects as diverse as architecture, how to improve gear cable runs on space frame Moultons, and the pitfalls of belonging to any organisation with a head office in Melbourne. What a great way to finish off the day's ride.



Living it up at the Chalet on Delville

With daylight not yet broken we were up and at it by 5.00am. Breakfast was served and being devoured in readiness for the morning's ride to Ipswich. During breakfast, Suzette recounted the adventures of her night's sleep.

She explained that was the first "real" coffee she ever had straight from the tree – that's one for the scrap book my sweet Suzette. She then told us that she hallucinated so much from the strong coffee she felt she was flying round the ceiling on her bike till 2.00am, riding through rivers, up and over hills while sitting back-to-front on the Brommie. Sacrebleu! Thank goodness our sweet Suzette only had one cup and no more. Who knows what she may have got up to! We all had a good giggle – at Suzette's expense of course.

With breakfast over, we had a quick clean up of the breakfast area and packed our bikes for the Day 2 stage to the finish at Brothers Leagues

club, Ipswich. During these ministrations, we discussed ways of getting back to the chalet after the ride was completed. We decided we wouldn't hang around at the finish too long because there was: a) no car to transport us back and, b) we didn't want to carry extra clothing to change into to get into the Brothers Leagues Club. So we all agreed the train would be the most viable option, plus it was only a short distance from the club.

A quick photo opportunity briefly interrupted our departure from the "Chalet on Delville", and then we were off. The cool early morning was infused with a muted light show from the slow morning sun rise as we made our way along Ipswich Road to our destination 30km away.



Suzette, Pepe, Georges, Pierre - ready for Day Two

About half way through this stage, while we were crawling our way up some slopes in back streets of Redbank, Suzette called out "Cramp!" In a flash, Pierre had jumped off his bike and within a heartbeat said to Suzette "Madame, lie down on zee grass and loosen your clothings." "What?!" said Suzette in astonishment. Pierre replied "Please do not worry, for I have done zee first aid course and I am wanting to have reason to use my new talent." What a crack-up to see this charade unfold - you had to be there to appreciate the timing of it all.

However, soon after we resumed it turned very dark for poor Suzette. It seems she had not eaten enough food at breakfast and was now struggling with energy. I had calmly sidled over to her as we crept up the hill, suggesting she should eat something. I was about to offer her some food when she near bit me hand off. Ok, note to self and others - "To avoid potential conflict and bodily damage, always ensure chickie-babe is properly fed before going out to play".

Anyhow, with the mini daytime soap operas behind us we pushed on to our final destination at Ipswich, all the while convincing Suzette there was only a few more kilometers to go. Well, yes, of course we were lying, but with good reason. Without cutting things too fine, we did arrive at the club with about five minutes to spare - phew!

Arrivé! We were met and congratulated on our arrival by our Queensland team mates that had already finished, and then bathed in the luxury of yet another photo opportunity - "Oh oui, je vous remercie beaucoup. Il a été un tour atrocement difficile pour nous tous!" (Oh yes, thank you very much. It was an excruciatingly tough ride for all of us!).

We stood around for another 30 minutes and briefly swapped stories about each team's ride. Because we had planned to head back home straight away, we said our goodbyes and headed off to the train station for a more relaxed and less adventurous ride home.



Eh, did someone say fromage? Suzette, was that you?

When we arrived at the train station it appeared a little desolate, but at 9.00am on a Sunday morning in Ipswich I guess this could be expected. However, our worst fears were realised when we spotted signs on the platforms advising the trains were not operating due to scheduled line work. Doh! - that was not in the script?

Ok, what do we do now? The day was warming up nicely, we were anxious to get back home, and worst still I had little Suzette gnawing away at my arm because she needed food. Crikey, can it really get any better than this! I'm having a hoot of a time - Georges, do you have any food? Some locals told us that express buses were being used to ferry people to either Ipswich Central, or to Corinda which would suit us, and they were operating every half hour. Ok, no sweat, then we shall wait.

Five minutes later a bus came along, but it was to Ipswich Central - okey dokey we shall wait another half hour for our bus. All the while the sun was becoming a little more intense. The next bus came along and it was to Ipswich Central - *Again!* What is going on here? And, there were more customers than just four tired cyclists desperately wanting to get this elusive bus to Corinda. We questioned the bus driver and he said the next bus should be to Corinda. Another half hour - well guess what - another bloody bus to Ipswich Central.

Ok guys, that's 1½ hours waiting in the sun, we need to make tracks back home. Taxis were going to be an expensive option, and there was always the 30k ride back home. About 15 minutes had passed by while we discussed our escape, when we could see another bus turning up - you beauty! Hang on, it was without destination signs, it did a loop in the car park and left. Ok peoples, we're outta here. We saddled up and headed for home. Just as we had turned left onto Brisbane Rd, I heard a bus turn down Station Rd behind us but did not catch the sign. Surely not, our luck cannot be that bad, can it? Should we go back and try our luck? Nah, it will only be more disappointment. We shall push on!

We pulled into the first servo at the top of the hill so we could restock and feed a very hungry and ravenous petit Suzette. Just as we were getting off the bikes, what should go past - an express bus to Corinda. I don't know if the rest of

the team saw it go by, but I can't put my exact words to print other than to say "Sacrebleu!" Anyhow, we collected our rations, reset our thoughts and set for home.

We did our best to get the team back home the shortest way possible without getting on the Ipswich Motorway. While limping our way through Darra we had a chance meeting with a "go-faster racer". Poor guy had made an absolute mess of his rear derailleur. One can only surmise he was in the customary big chain ring and decided to change gears under load going up the hill. Lucky bastard though, then proceeded to get a lift from the kind resident whose house he had stopped outside of - damn it, not fair!

We eventually made it home, but it was a down-beat end to what was mostly an enjoyable, eventful and sometimes near-calamitous adventure. Nonetheless, we all had a great time together and were wondering what next year may hold.

On Suzette's advice, I told my Dad she thought his coffee was the best she had ever had - ahh, that is despite the minor after effects. Also on Suzette's advice, I will ensure that she is adequately replenished, and also remind myself to keep all appendages some distance away from her mouth.

To my Les Petits Cane Toads, it was a delightful honour to have been coerced and blackmailed into becoming the Capitaine de L'équipe for 2010. I guess I was a little hesitant to start with when first asked about doing the Petit Oppy. But one idea led to another, and before we knew it there were French toads and Aussie-middle-aged cyclists on small-wheeled English bikes going all which-ways. I also think we had a good blend of team members that got on well and had a darn good time.

The 180km was a good distance, along with short distances to control points, to maintain a themed ride like ours. Any longer and I think the energy and gloss would have worn off this charade - and it almost did. And let's not forget our well versed pigeon-French language as well.

So a big SHHHHHHHHH! We will have to keep all this fun very quiet, otherwise everybody will want to join in. We will let them all go for the grown-up version of the Opperman next year.

Ahhh, oui, oui. *Quatre personnes d'âge mûr cyclistes Australiens bien être Français circonscription Anglaise fabriqué bicyclettes.*

What's that? You don't understand! Ok, alright! For the French-challenged, please refer to the story lead-in for translation. No more hints.

La Fin.

ps : To Sue May, the scars on my left arm have now healed up a treat.

pps : To Sue Barlow, thank you for lending and entrusting me with your most prized possession.

pps: And finally to Dave Minter, a big thank you for sowing the seed of the Petit Oppy to get this adventure started.