

Downs and Back - 5 May 2018

Downs and Back is my favourite 600 km ride in South East Queensland (although I did crash on this ride in 2012 doing some serious shoulder damage). The weather forecast was looking ok temperature and rain perspective but the wind can always be a problem on the Downs.

Seventeen riders registered for different ride distances but after a couple of Friday night withdrawals 15 riders were still keen and gathered for the start.



Riders at start - Photo courtesy Vaughan Kippers

Couple on new faces and one I recognised as a rider I helped whilst at Yamanto on another ride. Problems with a tubeless tyre beading and I gave him a gas canister to help. When he asked about getting a canister back to me I replied: **“don’t worry, come and do an Audax ride”**. First Audax ride, signed up member in Audax kit. Hope to see Peter on many more Audax rides.

An impressive field of nine riders for the 600 km option. Some experienced riders (Pat Lehane, Mark Riley, Jeff Franklin and Brian Hornby) and five riders that hadn’t attempted or completed an Audax 600 km ride (Tara Horner, Ral Dover, Mark “Harry” Harris, Scott McCarthy and Paul Witzerman).

Six riders had a nice day out doing the 200 km option (Peter Jenkins, John McMullan, David Booth, Peter Evans, Peter Watson and Thomas Matyja). All 200 km riders completed within time.



And we are off with smiles - Photo courtesy Susan Goodall

The 200 and 600 km rides follow the same route out to Ma Ma Creek so there was plenty of interaction between all the riders stopping at controls in Laidley and at Ma Ma Creek. Time to say goodbye to the 200 km riders as they headed back to Brisbane. The climb up the range from Ma Ma Creek is very pleasant. I was the last up to the top, but everyone was still at the control when I arrived. Vaughan had set up his new vehicle for the first time including Bat Wing Annex and Audax flag. Very impressive support vehicle.



Control at the top of the range - Photo courtesy Vaughan Kippers

The ride across to Clifton was uneventful except we lost Paul who was sitting beside a bridge tightening his handlebars when Vaughan went past. He soon reappeared looking for food.

The groups then set off towards Pittsworth. Nothing eventful happened and we arrived in time for a very early dinner. Some ate and others headed for Oakey for dinner. Night was approaching so everyone put vests and lights on for the trip to Oakey. Those that ate at Pittsworth decided to eat some more at Oakey.

100 km to the sleep control and everyone was keen to head for Cecil Plains where Vaughan was waiting on the side of the road in his Audax support vehicle. The road to Cecil Plains was flat and we got a bit of pace going and knocked over the 60 km to Cecil Plains in no time. The soil out that way is very reactive and there were many longitudinal cracks in the road surface. Scott had a tumble from his recumbent. Our theory was he got into one of these cracks. He lost some bark from his rump but no one had the privilege to check it out too closely. Rumour had it that Tara got a peak.



Riders in the night - Photo courtesy Tara Horner

The support vehicle that keeps surprising. The LED lights were another bonus when we arrived in Cecil Plains.



Ultimate Audax support vehicle - Photo courtesy Vaughan Kippers

The sleep control was a welcoming sight with everyone getting in before or around midnight. We agreed: Up at 5am out by 6am. Accommodation was cosy, Jeff snored and got a nudge from his roommate and decided he may as well get going. That was 3am. A couple of Garmins went for some night riding (See Mark Riley's report) but all riders were out before 6am ready to hit the road. Scott was not ready, off we went.

The group stayed together enjoying the flat roads in peaceful conditions and a good pace. After the sun rose so did the wind. Our primary direction back to Brisbane ESE. Where was the wind coming from? ESE. One of the toughest days I have encountered on the downs.

Goombungee was the breakfast target. Most saw Big Breakfast on the menu and didn't look any closer. Best breakfast and coffee. Scott arrived as we were leaving Goombungee. He apparently followed the line back towards Cecil Plains and ended up chasing us until after Gatton only to be seen at controls as we were leaving.



Riding into the sunrise, great time to be on the bike - Photo courtesy Tara Horner



Yours truly happy to be out on the bike early in the morning, calm before the wind - Photo courtesy Tara Horner

Leaving Goombungee heading towards the highway near Kingsthorpe was due south which meant strong cross winds. The only thing happily enjoying the day were the tumble weeds which were being blown across the road in drifts getting caught in wheels, brakes etc. Mark lost his bike in a pile of tumble weed at one stage.



Tumble weed rules in the wind – Photo courtesy Mark Riley



Mark's bike is in there somewhere - Photos courtesy Mark Riley

Along the highway into Toowoomba was heavy going climbing into the wind. I was the last to the Toowoomba control but first one out (experience) given the climb up Stenner St and I didn't want to be dropped before the roll down Flagstone Creek Road. Reprieve from the wind only because steep hills beat wind. No surprise we were still into the wind once down into the Lockyer Valley. Still blowing 25-38 km/h.

Food at Gatton McDonalds was fuel to get to the final control at Ipswich. We were worried by a couple of stragglers but they all arrived before we departed only to blow us away for a sprint home.

We headed for Laidley looking forward to the turn at Forrest Hill knowing we would get a tail wind for a few hundred metres and shelter in the hills behind Laidley. Somewhere between Grandchester Range and Rosewood the wind stopped. Scott and Tara re-joined the group only to ride off the front taking Mark Riley with them. Home seemed to be the target and the group of four I was riding with collectively thought "lets bring this baby home" and upped the pace. Perhaps the lack of wind spurred us on.

All Nine riders finished – Five completed their first 600 km Audax ride.

Great ride – Thanks Vaughan

Brian Hornby