

Ride the range 2 by John McMullan

In 2018 I elected to try something different and RO and captain the Out and Back 200km UAF which would test me to my limits – needing to average as a group 22.5kmh for the entire ride – this was 2.5kmh faster than my solo average. On that day, I had a great team that helped me achieve a perfect UAF – 22.5kmh and a completion time of 12 hours where we had some pretty significant head winds. I made the decision that I would not ride the 200km UAF this year as I was significantly worn out after that ride.

In 2019, the Toowoomba bypass was nearing completion and the RTR crew had negotiated a second Ride the Range – this time as a once off on the new crossing, starting at the top of the crossing and for the 73km riders heading west for 22km then returning to head down the new crossing to Postmans Ridge with a return climb to the finish.

I was a little nervous about the ride as the promotional blurb spoke of a 6 degree climb on the range – this is 10% for the 5km climb. That is far more than I have attempted for such a long distance and at the moment I am a little unfit. Needless to say, I signed up for the ride and joined the other 1496 riders in the cutting under the Arches at the top with the wind blowing very strongly from the west, making the 12 degree temperature ‘feel like zero’ degrees. Certainly, there were a lot of shivering riders around me whereas I had prepared in my usual Audax garb including base layer, knee warmers, neoprene gloves and a wind jacket.



As with most fun rides, the start is very slow as riders navigate the start, made a little more difficult in this ride with the stalls downhill from the start line. Taking my time to make my way to the bottom near Mort St, I soon found some free space and started to pick up the pace. The road surface was new and smooth and inclines in this area were designed to allow trucks to maintain 100kmh so the going was pretty good.

I passed some amazing transportations: A tandem that looked like it had come out of the Moulton factory, a chap with a scooter with 700c wheels and of all things, a large dinosaur on a bicycle.



After a while I encountered a recumbent which had Duncan at the helm and we chatted about George and Dave's completion of PBP and then I amazed him with Nik's completion time. The road surface at this point was clearly not designed for bicycles and was as rough as it gets. Duncan was feeling the rough surface a lot more than I was.



The turn around point was soon upon us and I stopped briefly to fuel up on a museli bar before heading back towards Toowoomba with a very strong tail wind that helped offset the gentle overall climb. I powered back in good time, relishing the smooth surface the closer I got to Toowoomba. With the morning warming up not only due to the rising sun but the tailwind I shed a layer before continuing on. I recall seeing a 5 hour time limit for the ride and mention of SAG wagons and as I neared Toowoomba I saw a large collection of vehicle roofs on the other side of the road thinking wow, these guys are prepared early but actually turned out to be a collection of vintage automobiles waiting for their adventure along the route.



The descent down the range was nothing short of spectacular – a smooth, new and well laid asphalt surface marred only by the carpet laid over the expansion joints on the viaduct (to stop bicycle tyres from being shredded). Add to this only 3 bicycles within the 500m in front of me, a

bicycle that was truly stable and a top recorded speed of just over 90kmh. I will put this one in the same class as the Gillies descent in Far North Queensland.



The range takes a couple of little inclines before the ride turned around at Postman's creek. On one of these I thought I saw a FNQ six pack jersey – these are quite distinctive but I was heading downhill again and had no safe opportunity to check.

The turn was as expected – a mess of riders and support staff scattered over the road. I topped up the water, ate another museli bar and then started the triple slog back to the Arches. The ascent wasn't as difficult as led to believe – yes there was a lot of it scattered with two descents on the way but nothing like the 10% indicated. On my first ascent, the classic cars were doing their run and very appropriately, the road was being shared:



Not far from this location I heard a slightly familiar voice ask if I was up from Brisbane – it was Pat who was powering up the range.

All three ascents were made a little more difficult due to the head wind, particularly the final ascent as it was significantly more open. I did find a lady struggling but persisting with riding. We had a brief chat but I accompanied her for much of the steeper part as encouragement and we only parted company when I encountered a conveniently placed and much needed portaloos just before the viaduct. The last bit of the climb provided a few photo opportunities of the viaduct and the arches.



Above – the view ‘down’ the range and below – the Arches.



This ride was one of those ‘once in a lifetime, never to be repeated’ offers as bicycles are not permitted on the road since it opened. It was well planned and nicely run and it is a memorable ride.