

WESTERN AUSTRALIA 600 KM

27th & 28th August, 1988

BY ROD EVANS

RIDERS: JOHN MARTIN, DAVID MIDOLO, PETER STEER, KLEBER CLAUX, PETER BOMBADIERI, ROD EVANS and NEIL PORTEOUS

If you ever wanted a reason to tackle the rigours of a 600 km Audax ride then this years ride was it. The ride was blessed with perfect weather (warm sunshine and light winds : for Eastern States readers), a friendly group of riders always willing to help each other, beautiful scenery, and not a single puncture.

5.00 o'clock Saturday morning saw a bleary eyed group of riders, less Peter Bombardieri, heading off from Armadale to the first check point at Pinjarra, via Mandurah. Just before reaching Kwinana, John Meakin, who provided valuable back up support throughout the weekend, and who believes it is harder driving around the course than riding it, informed us that Peter had finally arrived at the start and was about twenty minutes behind. I rode back to meet Peter, finally re-catching the bunch 15 km before Mandurah.

Other than for a brief race with a rather slow truck, John Martin being the major perpetrator, the bunch kept up a steady even pace to Pinjarra (our first official control stop), and then to Harvey (our first non official control stop). Enjoying the warmth of the morning sun we resisted John Martin's efforts to get us moving again, and suggested he should take the opportunity to fix his front light while we rested.

The ride into Bunbury, the half way point for the first day, was assisted by a relatively strong tailwind with the bunch arriving just out of Bunbury at 12.15. Neil Porteous was inspiring everyone with his strong riding and continued to sit comfortably in the bunch. Neil had remained in his top gear for most of the morning, and although he had hardly used it before, he was not about to change down now. Warm sunshine and John Meakin's wife's cooking made for a very pleasant lunch break, and much laughter, gay abandon and tongue in cheek threats of cancelling the ride belied the fact that there was still 395 km to go. Arie Lemsem, who was assisting Jon Meakin with back up, arrived half way through the lunch break, apparently having been distracted by a spot of bird watching in the country towns along the way.

15 km out of Bunbury the bunch was greeted with a spray of broken glass and shattered plastic as David Midolo, who was putting in yet another strong turn at the front, dropped his headlight on the road whilst attempting an on-the-move adjustment. The groups arrival in Mandurah was significant for Kleber and Neil who both developed upset stomachs. As a result, for the first time in the day the group broke into two, with Kleber and Neil leaving Mandurah half an hour after the main bunch.

John Martin and Peter Steer were continuing to ride very strongly despite having ridden 280 km, which was just as well, as I was starting to feel the effects of the morning ride. Peter Bombardieri also hit the front for the first time and nearly left us standing in his wake. I only wish we had put him up front earlier. At 7.40 pm we arrived back in Armadale and quickly headed off home for a shower and sleep. At 9.00 pm Kleber and Neil, who were now feeling a little better, also rolled into Armadale with 360 km down and 240 km to go.

Sunday morning was what dreams are made of. Although fairly cool, there was a bright full moon and the prospects of yet another perfect day. Kleber and Neil headed off early in order to get over the hill to Bannister before the main bunch. The ride up Bedfordale hill was perfect, and certainly made up for the aches and pains brought on by the previous days ride. The wind was still, a full moon lit up the surrounding countryside, and the group settled into a smooth steady rhythm. Unfortunately for the second time, Peter Bombardieri had missed the start. On this day I wasn't so enthusiastic to go back for him, but fortunately any thoughts along these lines were dispelled when he caught us before the top of the main climb. The first hill also saw Peter Steer join David in that exclusive club of having things fall off his bike when his biden cage decided it was no longer happy with its position on his down tube. The reduction in weight must have helped however as Peter rode like ten men for the rest of the day.

On Sunday John and Anne Waters and Susan Midolo joined John Meakin as our support crew. John Waters rode out from the first control point at Bannister to meet us on his mountain bike. Not wishing to appear slow, when we caught John with only 3 km to go to Bannister we really put our heads down, only to be passed by John in the last 100 km. We still don't know how he did it.

The next stage from Bannister through Boddington was the highlight of the ride. On a sunny spring day this is God's country. Again there was little wind to speak of, all the riders bar Neil who had decided to ride at his own pace, were doing equal turns, the pace was steady and the scenery excellent. But a word of warning for those of you who haven't ridden this road. Just out of picturesque Boddington the hills start. The first is a beauty, and just when you get to the top and think you are about to die, there is a strategically positioned cemetery on the right. Unfortunately we didn't have time to stop and find out how many cyclists have found this their last resting place. If you do however successfully pass this cemetery then a few kilometres on you will come to a paddock full of blackboys. It is a sight to be seen and will make the hill climb worthwhile.

With 42 km to go to Dwellingup, Kleber found his second wind, so with the bunch being slowed by the constant hills, Kleber and myself decided to go on ahead into Dwellingup. A long break refreshed everyone and just before Neil arrived we headed off on the last 83 km leg to Armadale. Meeting Ron Masterman just out of Dwellingup the bunch really made hay while the sun shone. In fact speeds of around 30 kph only just saw the Waters family scramble into the secret check point at North Dandalup before the bunch arrived. Revived by yet another large bottle of coke, John Martin took the front running (yet again) after North Dandalup and stayed at the front for most of the way to Armadale.

Finally at 5.20pm six relatively tired but relieved riders made the finish. The seventh rider Neil Porteous, arrived a short time later after a magnificent solo ride. Well done fellows, if this is what Audax riding is all about you can count on my entry for next year.

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