

RIDE REPORT

Audax WA York weekend All distances up to one megametre

Riders:— 1000km: Phil Bellette, Don Briggs, Colin Farmer, Phil Giddins, Lin Hambleton, Brian Hawes, Barry Jones, John Martin, Nick Payne, Brett Rutherford, Sue Taylor, Greg Turner

400km: Andrew Oakeley, Ken Ward

300km: Ann Armstrong, Tom Freeman, Phil Meads

(There were no takers for six hundred kilometres, the 200 kilometre riders followed a different course from the rest of us, so I'll leave the description of that ride to somebody else.)

Support crew:— Shane Ritchie, John Walker, Aileen Martin

by Nick Payne

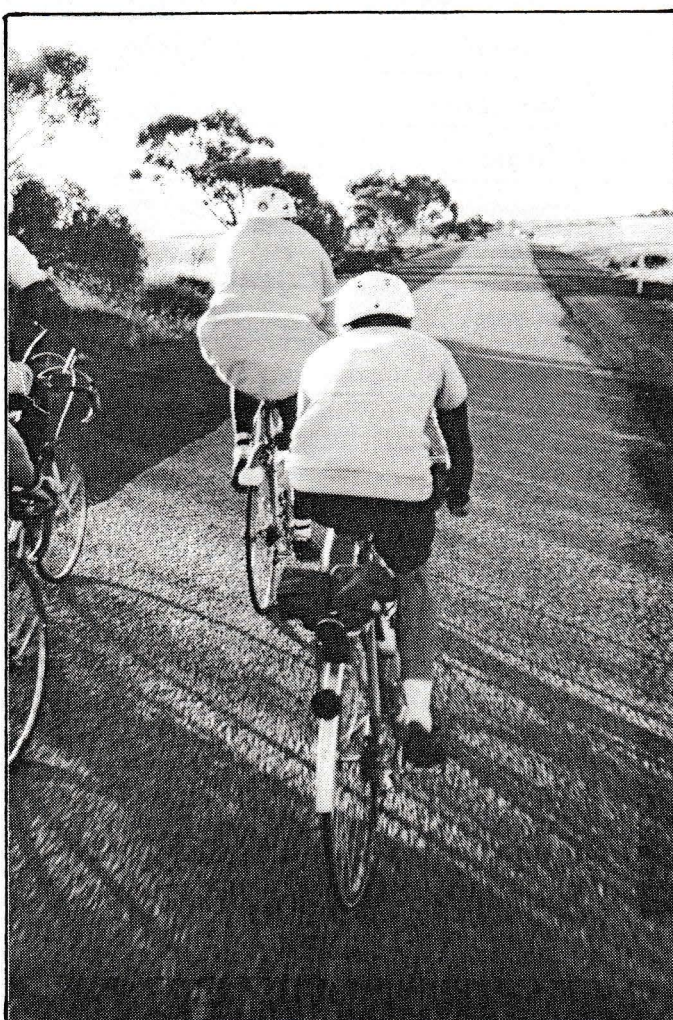
Sunday morning, 6.30am, 700 kilometres down, 300 still to go. "This must be how Barlow and Chambers felt on the morning of their execution," Lin announced as he ambled into the kitchen for his breakfast.

We were based, most appropriately, at the old York hospital, which we were sharing with the Cycle Touring Association who were also there for the weekend. The Audax riders were housed in a separate maternity wing, well away from any noise (not that it would have made much difference, we were always the last to get to bed and the first to rise, and a bomb wouldn't have woken me while I was sleeping.) We rode a 400 kilometre loop on the Friday, a 300 kilometre loop on the Saturday, and another 300 kilometre loop on the Sunday.

We set out with the 400 kilometre riders at 6am on Friday in a light drizzle. More importantly, the forecast was for light winds rather than the normal strong Spring breezes.

The faster riders' tail-lights soon vanished up ahead, the rest of us forming a bunch which stayed together on the way to Beverley until Phil Bellette scored the first of several punctures. Sue and a couple of the stronger riders waited for him while the rest of us pressed on to Pingelly. Ken Ward decided to wait at the Pingelly control for Phil and Sue and keep them company around the course.

With the aid of a moderate Westerly we romped along to Kulin, from where we turned North-West towards Corrigin,



Colin Farmer (nearest camera) and Don Briggs somewhere between Kulin and Corrigin on a typical quiet wheatbelt road

Quairading, and York. At Corrigin we finally saw the front markers again – they were getting ready to leave as we arrived. The Sun was setting and it was lights, long sleeves, and longs for the rest of the night. Brett Rutherford towed young Andrew Oakeley and myself into the remains of the wind as we headed towards Quairading. With no moon yet up and no distance markers by which to measure our progress the road seemed an unending treadmill. When Brain Hawes and Phil Giddins overhauled us the pace went up and the treadmill

effect increased – I was relieved when the lights of Quairading appeared in the distance just before 9pm.

Barry Jones, who had been setting the pace way out the front all day, was sitting disconsolately at the control. He hadn't brought enough warm clothing for the night-time riding, or enough food, and retired here. Shane Ritchie had hot soup ready for us on the Primus, and after having some I set out with Andrew at what we hoped would be a more reasonable speed for the night's final leg back to York. When the others came past us a few kilometres later Andrew went with them – I declined and arrived at York around 12.30am, about half an hour behind. With his 400 kilometres Andrew Oakeley completed his Super Randonneur series: at only 15 he must be one of the youngest Australians to achieve this.

On Saturday we started the second loop at 8am in company with the riders doing 300 kilometres. The first two legs of

the course retraced the previous night's route, along with a replay of the previous day's wind. Sue Taylor and Phil Bellette, not having got in until shortly before 4am, looked remarkably fresh for people with less than a couple of hours of sleep. We were only a few kilometres along the road before the bunch split up again, Tom Freeman and Phil Meads, doing 300 kilometres, pulled away, and Phil Giddins, Brian Hawes, and Brett Rutherford went with them. The rest of us, accompanied by Ann Armstrong, stayed together for most of the day.

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Greg Turner made it as far as the first control for the day at Badjaling, but had to retire here as one of his knees was seizing up on him.

I experienced more of the treadmill effect on the leg from Corrigin to Aldersyde. The fairly flat and monotonous farming landscape gave the mind nothing to dwell on other than the distance and the wind. We finally reached Aldersyde just after sunset but before it was dark enough to require lights. The next section to Brookton I found fairly creepy: with no marker posts, no lane markings, and no moon it was difficult to determine where the road ended and the gravel shoulder began – even with good lights. No one actually came to grief but we had a few

close calls. Once back on the Southern Highway it was plain sailing for the last leg back to York. We arrived at midnight and by a majority vote decided on making a 7am rather than 6am start the next morning.

The last day dawned to more drizzle. The 200 kilometre riders left a couple of minutes before us and were soon out of sight up the road. Luckily, so was the rain. We faced a headwind and some rolling hill country for the first 120 kilometres through Toodyay to Calingiri, then turned downwind to Wongan Hills, our most Northerly point for the weekend. From here we felt as though we were almost home, with less than 150 kilometres to go.

The last two legs were on more unmarked backroads, pleasant for the lack of traffic but needing concentration to ride on in the dark. A shower for an hour or so didn't help things. Rain spotted my glasses and it became harder than ever to find the road – I hung back and followed the other's tail-lights.

We reached Meckering to find that Phil Giddins and Brian Hawes were still there, having been delayed by a puncture. We left about 20 minutes behind them at 10.30pm for the last 44 kilometres to the finish. There were several junctions on this road, and twice we took the wrong turn in the dark, but realised our mistake each time within 100 metres or so. I got back to York just before 1am to find that Brian and



Relaxing at the control at Wickiepin. From left to right, John Martin, Don Briggs, Phil Giddins, Brett Rutherford, Andrew Oakeley, and Lin Hambleton.

Phil hadn't arrived. They showed up an hour later, rather wet and cold, having taken a wrong turn but not realising it until the road turned to gravel a dozen kilometres later. To find you've gone 12 kilometres the wrong way when you thought you were within sight of finishing a 1000 kilometre ride must be one of the nastier experiences a cyclist can have. Phil Bellette and Sue Taylor finished about 3am, having done most of the 1000 kilometres with less sleep and less company than anyone else.

All our riding was on well surfaced quiet roads, a pleasant change from the car infested third world New South Wales road system to which I have become accustomed. At one stage I covered over 60 kilometres without seeing a car or truck, and even the one highway we rode on was very quiet. The one thing I don't like about backroads is riding them at night. Without a centre line to follow you really have to concentrate to avoid running off the road, which gets rather wearing after a couple of hours.

My big discovery for the ride was Power Bars (triathletes have some good ideas after all.) I took a dozen along to supplement my normal Audax diet of sandwiches and muesli bars, and nibbled on them consistently. For almost the first time on a long ride I didn't have a single hunger flat. They weren't the only food I ate while riding, but they certainly made a difference. Silcon and Silic cream for the backside also prolonged

the pleasure of sitting on a saddle for sixteen plus hours per day.

The good conditions (not much wind, not much rain, and not much temperature) were reflected in the high success rate. All riders doing the 300 and 400 kilometres finished, and ten of the twelve starters completed the 1000 kilometres.

The support crew of Shane Ritchie (on Friday and Sunday) and John Walker (on Saturday) in the support vehicle, and Aileen Martin back at base, really did a lot to make the whole weekend as pleasant as possible. Hot drinks were served at every control, plus hot soup when night fell, and sometimes my waterbottles were filled without my having to lift a finger. We should acknowledge the efforts of the support crews more often. They're out there as long as the riders, without the pleasure or achievement of riding.

For a final comment on how to ride 1000 kilometres, I'll return to Lin Hambleton. While on the home stretch on day three we were discussing the preparation needed to successfully complete such a distance. "It's like sex," he said, "there's a lot of foreplay involved. The actual event goes on for longer than five minutes though."

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