

Audax BP: Sumner Series 100km – Saturday, 4th August 2018

With a 7:00am start time registered, I set an alarm for 5:30. Plenty of time to eat breakfast, get ready, and ride the 10km to the start point at Sumner. Of course, with the sense of anticipation, and a little trepidation, I was awake long before the alarm sounded.

Trepidation? I'd attempted this ride six months earlier. Before I was an Audax member, and perhaps before I was 'ready'. From memory, it was to be my second 100km+ ride, and my first solo century. But, with a dinner party the night before, a hot February day, stomach cramps along the way, and my first experience of saddle sores, it just wasn't meant to be, and I quit around 20km from home. So, although I was much more confident this time around – and much better prepared – that little psychological barrier was still looming.

It's August now, so even in the early morning, there's a faint sound of birds chirping in the crisp, slightly cool air. The forecast said the temperature would rise to the mid-20s, so I decide to go with summer kit and just put up with the cool for the first hour or so. I arrive at the start point after a 10km warm up and am already happy with that decision. It's looking like it's going to be a beautiful day.

Making my way through the outer suburbs towards Springfield, the first 18km or so feels like it's still part of the commute to the actual ride. Sure, there are things of note – the big, recently departed kangaroo lying in the road behind Wacol Station (“Do I take a photo? No, that'd be weird. Maybe on the way back through.”); the truck driver who decides to nudge forward into the intersection as I turn to cross Brisbane Terrace onto Old Logan Road; the mob of roos in the golden morning light on the golf course – but it feels like the ride doesn't really start until I pass through Springfield. And by now, I'm already a quarter of the way in. This is a good sign.

I really enjoy the section along the Centenary Highway. The wide shoulders, smooth surface and sparse traffic make for a pleasant 20km stretch. I've been nursing some knee pain for the last week or so, but the mid-week quad massage combined with a slight seat height adjustment seems to have done the trick. There's still a little pain, but I think it's just residual and not an indication of ongoing problems. That said, I do relish the chance to coast down the long sweeping descents, with a nod and finger wave to the triathletes tucked into their aero bars and grinding uphill on the opposite side. Weirdos.

The first time I rode along here, the shoulder was littered with scores of dead cane toads. This time, I see just one small kangaroo. And a pillow for some reason. But there's a strange smell of death for quite a way. Is there an abattoir out here somewhere? Or some more roadkill that's been launched over the railing into the bushes? I try not to think about it too much.

The turn onto Middle Road at Purga brings some more trepidation. This is where I really started to feel it on my previous attempt. I don't need a break yet today, but I stop soon after the turn to greet the Shetland Pony who I befriended last time. He's not feeling particularly sociable today, so keeps his distance and continues to graze away. Metaphors, hey?



Anti-social Ponies

So, back on the bike for the stretch to the checkpoint at Peak Crossing. Middle Road is essentially a long, straight series of short climbs and long gradual descents. It's only around 14km, but it feels like it goes on forever, especially on the 100km ride, when you know you have to turn around and do it all again the other way. I've made good time though, so I take a break with a chewy potato scallop and a can of lemonade at the checkpoint. The toilets aren't nearly as bad as I was lead to believe.



Middle Road. Relentless.

Even with the best part of half-an-hour at Peak Crossing, I'm still way ahead of time, so I decide to take it easy for the grind back along Middle Road. That is, until I see the cattle dog staring me down, front leg cocked and ready to run. As I pass, she shifts her weight to her hind legs, so I put the hammer down and don't look back. She either gives up quickly, or doesn't chase at all, but I've got some speed up now, and it isn't too much longer before I'm back to the highway with a good couple of minutes to rest while waiting for a gap in traffic for the right-hand turn.

Like on the way out, now that I'm back in the Ipswich suburbs, it feels like the ride's over and I'm now just riding home. As I climb up Creek Street at Bundamba, I feel a small sense of achievement. This is where I bailed last time. With everything conspiring against me back in February, the siren song of Bundamba train station was much too strong. So, although I've done harder and longer rides since, cresting that hill brings a nice moment when I realise how much easier I'm doing it this time around.

I arrive back at the finish point at Sumner with a couple of hours to spare. I'm feeling good, so I decide on a slightly longer commute home, taking in the climb over Seventeen Mile Rocks Road and the back streets through Corinda, Sherwood and Graceville. By the time I get home, the 109km Brevet has turned into a 135km day out. And what a glorious winter's day it was.