

A Ride(er) Organisers report on Esk at Night

By John McMullan

I have assisted Kym with support on Esk at night in the last two years and this year while Kym is holidaying I stepped up to the plate to run the ride this year. I would like to thank Kym for his mentorship in running a supported ride and David Foster for helping support this year.

There are a couple of complexities with any supported ride and an increased level of difficulty with Esk at Night because, you guessed – it is at night. This year we had an added planning difficulty with Cyclone Oma sitting off the coast and threatening to make landfall but even Oma didn't know when.

Of those that signed up, an interstate cyclist withdrew due to the uncertainty of the weather. It was possible that his flight may have been cancelled if the predicted landfall happened. Five of our regular riders were away on the Tour de Tassie and the other prospective riders were watching the weather closely to see if they wanted to ride.

Supported rides of this nature involve food – a lot of food to feed a hungry group of cyclists who seem to appear out of no-where at the controls at random intervals and typically have a short stay. It is for this reason we close the registrations a day earlier to allow the RO to go shopping and procure the required food and drink. Trying to predict what people will eat and drink on the day is a challenge but I decided to do a Peter Jackson and pretty much get what I like to eat (without the pies) but looking after those with additional food requirements. On the good side, I dropped the non-perishable leftovers to Vaughan for the Berry Good 200.

I also looked at the registration list and course to develop a support strategy. In the two years prior, it was a bit like leap-frog swapping the controls so Kym could collect the Brevets at Esk for the 200 and 300km riders. I went to the trouble of putting together a spreadsheet of potential arrival times at controls for the various riding paces.

With the shopping over I headed to Esk for a 1pm arrival so David and I could finalise our strategy.

David did an excellent job of putting up the Audax banner by the roadside. When Vaughan asked how it went in the wind I informed him that they stay upright when you nail them to the ground.

Riders soon arrived and I commenced distributing brevets and David assisted with some details of the route when I gave the ride briefing then saw the group off as 2pm arrived. With an expected arrival time at Somerset near 4pm for the riders, David and I relaxed and looked at our strategy a little closer and when looking at the vittles for the riders we decided that I should go and get some more bread rolls. (I did find Anzac and gluten free biscuits as well)

David headed to The Spit at Somerset dam to claim the barbecue area and put the banner up on the traffic island. I checked into the motel before heading there too.

Once I arrived we set up the selection of packaged food on one long table and David was quickly preparing ingredients for rolls. A tough decision was how many rolls should have butter and how

many not. Just before the control opened, Nik and Frederik arrived for a speedy turn-around of 6 minutes. This was the start of David and my 'on the fly' logistical decisions as to who needs to be where and when.

With 7 controls for the event (3 distances) and Frederik and Nik powering I kept a close eye on the clock to ensure that one of us was at the controls to meet riders. I left David at Somerset and headed back to Esk for control #2 and had only just set up when Frederik arrived at 5:30. Nik had a little further to travel but wasn't far behind. With Fred due to arrive at Lowood at 7:30 and Duncan just arriving at Somerset I knew the game plan was going to change. Dave and I chatted about the change of plan and once he arrived back at Esk we re-arranged the food and drink and I headed to Lowood just in time to set up as Fred arrived whilst David remained at Esk to receive the finishing 100km riders, then the 200km riders. The 200km riders came and went at Lowood as did those continuing on the 300km ride. I left Lowood after midnight and headed back to Esk to find Hugh keeping David company and most of the 200km riders there. Surprisingly, I also discovered that Nik had finished the 300 as well.

With only one rider left to finish, the few that were at Esk wound down before heading off and leaving helmets behind. David and I packed up, David headed home and I went to the motel to sleep. I caught up with the helmet owner in the morning before leaving Esk and made my way home for a bit more rest.

But wait – there's more!

With the Supporters rule for rides, the nominated supporters are permitted to ride the event up to 28 days beforehand or 7 days after. I decided to ride on the following Saturday as I wasn't riding the 400 on the day. I elected to ride the 100km course and started at 4:15 in the morning to avoid any potential afternoon heat.

Kym and I had driven the section to Somerset Dam the first year (when Keith blew out a tire) and it was a stinking hot day. Riding the first part in the dark seemed a little strange but was very quiet and Curly was performing very well. The only tricky thing and lesson for future riders was that when I turned off the Esk-Crows Nest road towards Toogoolawah I encountered a chap madly waving his arms at me and when close enough he let me know there were cows on the road – milking time of course! I soon turned at Toogoolawah and onto Mt Beppo road which as I expected was straight. As it was sunrise, a morning chill set in so I stopped at Mt Beppo hall to put the knee warmers on, just after kicking on, the rain started – on with the jacket.

I was a little nervous about the Somerset – Spit section of road but found it to be easily ridden and very quiet. I found more boats leaving the dam than heading to it most likely due to the weather. It rained as I left the Spit and headed to the village for a bit of breakfast, stopping to take a couple of photos on the way.

The ride back to Esk alternated between humid and rain but once again, I found myself riding well on the return despite the headwind (not as strong as the week before) and once at Esk made a short pit stop before completing the turn around on Esk-Hampton Road and returning.

I was glad I rode the 100, being my first Esk at Night but I will admit I also rode the worst section of bitumen ever on Esk-Hampton Road.

Once my ride was completed, I finished the Ride Organisers Report and submitted it before heading Vaughans to drop off the Brevets for Homologation.

All in all, We had a couple of little lessons – make sure both supporters have coffee and make sure all the bags are in the car that is arriving at the control first.

Once again thanks to David for his help not only on the day but collecting and dropping off bits from Vaughan.