

Horizontal Hundred UAF March 16 2019

An organiser's perspective.

For the uninitiated, UAF stands for Union des Francais Audax, a long-standing organisation that promotes a different (the original?) style of randonneuring. Rather than riding at one's own pace, (allure libre) participants ride in a peloton at a speed determined by the designated "Ride Captain". This speed is traditionally 22.5 KM/H and is the actual moving, rather than overall, speed.

Controls are typically located at well regarded eateries, often licenced premises, and allow sufficient time to enjoy the break.

Audax Australia is affiliated with the UAF and, very occasionally, a UAF ride finds itself on the calendar. This year there are four in Australia, three of which take place in Queensland.

Not long after the Calendar Workshop last July it occurred to me that the Horizontal Hundred Permanent course lends itself to UAF style riding as it is relatively lightly trafficked for most of the route and is sufficiently flat to minimise the likelihood of the peloton disintegrating on hills.

Even better, the new cycle path associated with the Gateway Motorway North project would be open before Christmas so I would have time to plot an improved, even flatter, route by avoiding the "Col de Resource Recovery Centre" at Nudgee.

As often occurs, the counting of unhatched chickens can threaten to bring one undone and as late as the week prior to the ride date the cycle path was not yet officially open. A rumour began to circulate that the day before the ride would see the opening, but I was sceptical as I was expecting much fanfare, cutting of a ribbon by an appropriate luminary, and perhaps a speech or two. Nevertheless, Anne and I rode to the coffee shop at DFO on the appointed day to see whether the path was open and, as expected, it wasn't.

But... there was encouraging news from the ever-present traffic controllers at Boondall who told us that they were waiting for the word to open the temporary fencing and allow access. It appears that the official opening was performed by two men in a truck who drove the length of the path collecting the temporary fencing. The only announcement was an email from the Gateway North project team shortly afterwards while we were having coffee at DFO. We rode home on the new path and declared it suitable for conducting Audax events of both persuasions.

Revelling in the psychological boost of the availability of the new route, I was full of confidence for the ride's success until the rain started. The BOM map was a mass of yellow and red and stayed that way for hours. I received the first text messages and emails from riders before I went to bed and was wondering if the four starters necessary to constitute a UAF ride would materialise.

I was up at 5:00 AM after not very much sleep and was encouraged to see that it wasn't actually raining (much) although it certainly looked wet outside. A check of my mobile phone revealed that the first confirmed withdrawal due to inclement weather had been notified to me at 3:37(!) AM. Is that getting in early or what?

At the official starting time of 7:00AM there were eight out of a possible fourteen assembled and I had heard from all but two at that stage so we set off.

This was my seventh UAF brevet but the first as Ride Captain so I was a little apprehensive in regard to maintaining the required average speed. Those who noticed that I had not one, but two, GPS units on the handlebar would probably have said that I was more than a little apprehensive.

As it transpired, the actual ride was uneventful and the peloton stayed together remarkably well. This may have been because I was the only one who actually knew where we were going due to Ride With GPS and OSM not having caught up with the newly opened sections of path, and therefore, my inability to plot and distribute an accurate route. We only became separated at traffic lights once (to my knowledge) and arrived at the 60KM control six minutes early and with less than two minutes stopped time showing on the Garmin.

The control was in Scarborough at Sea Salt and Vine with sweeping views of the grey sea and grey sky but still no actual rain. We had even encountered dry sections of road on our way as we enjoyed telling Simon who had driven there to join us.

We enjoyed a leisurely brunch as advertised in the ride calendar before departing for the final leg.

The only minor hiccup regarding route finding occurred on this section as the path from Deagon to Boondall Railway Station hadn't been opened. This meant we were short by about 500 meters at the finish but this was easily remedied by a lap of the criterium circuit at Nundah.

Everyone enjoyed the ride (no-one complained, anyway) and we appreciated the almost ideal riding conditions; no headwinds, no glare, no sunburn, no choking dust, but more significantly, no rain.

I learned some valuable lessons from my first experience as Monsieur Le Capitan:

1. It is possible to contain one's instinct and to ride at a steady pace even with seven other riders hard on one's wheel.
2. A mirror is particularly useful to keep tabs on the peloton.
3. Recumbent riders can be difficult to see in a mirror.
4. Being the sole navigator is conducive to maintaining order in the peloton.
5. Having a bladder with at least the same capacity as the other riders is a handy attribute.

For those who have yet to experience their first UAF brevet (and for seasoned UAF randonneurs), the next one is a 200km version on September 7.

Why not give it a go?