

Ride Report “Holiday the Audax Way” by Phil Bellette & Sue Taylor

The Audax Club of Australia Journal March 1991

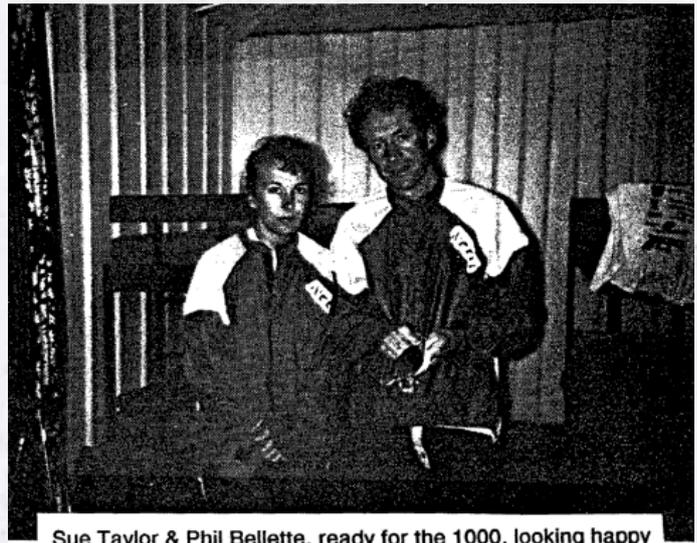
TASK: To ride an Audax 1,000kms in under 75 hours.

VENUE: York, Western Australia

MYTH: Psychological; Tell as many people as possible about the ride, so that you would be too embarrassed to finish.

STRATEGIES: Financial: Travel as far as possible, as expensively as possible to do the ride.

We were really prepared (this time)! We had done an Audax 300km ride in Geelong on the previous Saturday and finished in fine style in our accustomed position - last! We flew out of rainy Melbourne and landed in Perth in 27C. Myth confirmed. We acclimatised ourselves by riding to York. Our first experience of carrying full panniers and although it was hot we made the devastating discovery that WA does have hills. Base camp reached, we stocked up on sleep and groceries, ready for our epic adventure - the big one - the 1000km!



Sue Taylor & Phil Bellette, ready for the 1000, looking happy

At 5:00am on September 7, life as we knew it ceased! We joined 12 other intrepid cyclist's, their spouses and support crew in a breakfast reminiscent of the last supper. This proved to be the only time we saw the group together as we assumed our rightful position to the rear of the ride.

John Martin offered a speech which reminded us of the talks “Generals” give as they send the battalions to the front line. We then departed into a fine mist and darkness at 6:00am. By 7:00am it was pouring with rain and by 7:15am we had lost sight of all tail lights as Phil fixed the first puncture of the event. We knew we were where we should be - last!

Phil's bike performed like a “stump jump” plough over the next 50km due to a mis-mounted tyre. Phil Gibbons and Brian Howes periodically played shepherd and slowed to check on our progress or lack thereof. We arrived in Pingelly and waved the others off, but joined up with Ken Ward who was doing his first 400km. The rest of the day actually passed reasonably pleasantly. We gossiped with Ken about Audax personalities, spills and hills and about future plans of our imminent tour of the south west of WA. Ken said it was the coldest, wettest place he had ever been to (he was right). We briefly lost Ken due to another puncture but Phil applied the philosophies of his recent reading in “Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance” and covered the offending protruding spoke (after I suggested where to look)!

We observed that there are a lot of empty spaces and a distinct lack of female toilets in WA. Leaving Kulin, (pop. 346, 2000 sheep, 2 wheat silos) we displayed our true Audax talents. We were lost! A bewildered youth on a BMX bike steered us back to a big sign which read “Corrigin 54km”. We travelled 90km in the dark, seeing one fox, one rabbit and the rural watch, who rarely saw bicycles at night. (They didn't see the sheep strapped to our pannier racks). Just when we thought we had wandered off our course at Quairading, fondly known as Q-town because we were all too tired to pronounce it, Shane appeared merrily from the darkness. He was on Barry's bike and guided us to the well-disguised control point. My less than subtle hints had obviously struck home and we dined outside the service station amenities block.

We snoozed and wandered all over the road back to York, while Ken peddled steadily and unwaveringly beside us. Conversation sunk to “how far”, “time” and “how are your fingers/toes” as the temperature sank. If it had not been for the quantity of clothes we were wearing, we would have beaten Lin Hambelton's 2 minute record into bed!

At 6:45am we leapt enthusiastically into the shower after a 3 hour mixture of sleep and discussion of the CTC riders' 11 hour (300kms) strategies. They could have it! As we struggled through our 'good cycling food' i.e. breakfast, Ken bustled around looking bright eyed and refreshed.

We sat in a pack retracing the previous night's route. It was interesting to recognise how distorted our night time dozing perceptions of the road were.

John blew his tyre and we had a rare burst of elation as we went to the front (but don't worry, it didn't last). We talked of bikes and builders, civilised Audax 200km rides, tandems with the Canberra contingent and watched Nick Payne performing photographic feats whilst pedalling. The highlight of the ride was a stop for cake and juice at a local store, and then the official stop within 10kms for muffins. We could almost pretend we were touring.

It was sad to see Greg Turner pull out due to knee injuries at Badjaling. He had cycled most of the way across Europe, Asia Minor and India but arrived at York in the back of a refrigerated van! Personally though, I wouldn't be surprised if the local killer mosquitoes had not dehydrated him.

By the time we reached Corrigin, the support crews had discovered the art of locating female toilets at each control. Silicon was well established as the "cure-all" of the endurance cyclist's and tubes frequently changed 'hands' as people dived behind cars and trees to anoint themselves. Up and down, coats on - off - on, on the trip to Aldersyde. It was an unusual but pleasant experience for us to be riding with a group. We discussed the various merits of Melbourne rides versus Perth rides. Wilderness and Netti coats, jobs, bikes, wildflowers and the meaning of life.

Local knowledge steered us onto well camouflaged tracks, and after a quick change we set off into our second night. We stopped, started and stopped as Lin battled with his cleat. He eventually resorted to locking the shoe in and removing his foot at each checkpoint (rescued in the nick of time from John's threats of death). Actually over dressed, Phil stopped to remove his coat, and the group disappeared in a wiggle of tail lights into a big black hole. We hung on bravely to the brakes and headed down, periodically finding the edge of the road when we had not really intended to. As Phil made a move toward the Brookton cemetery, John materialised and guided us toward a purveyor of the perennial cyclist's emergency rations. Mars bars and coke! Back on the highway! We were terrorised by cars of Beverley Football Club premiers and police asking 'who', 'what' and 'where', but curiously enough not 'why'! Constable Dibble escorted us into Beverley after headlights on our back wheels had sent us into cardiac failure when a voice from under the grill called "don't worry guys, it's the police!" It is amazing how slowly 5 kilometres can pass when you are waiting to see the sign that signifies a rear end rest. With York in sight, who cared about dinner, showers or brevets? I hit the bed whilst Phil and Nick had a very LOUD conversation in the showers and then popped next door for a spot of supper.

At reveille we dragged ourselves off to the shower knowing that the day was full of significant events. We were going to make it and York 1 was playing York 2 in the hockey grand final (Who did win?).

We packed every remaining morsel and trailed off behind the blistering pace of the 200kms riders in the rain. Phil stopped to adjust his bum-bag and the group disappeared over the hill. About 10kms out of Northam we passed the group in various stages of disrobing facing away from the road. Given our much slower pace, we elected to keep going and entered Northam in a flood.

We asked directions from two fellows riding around Australia on a tandem for a good cause (isn't everyone?) and headed onwards and upwards to Toodyay, with Phil Gibbons appearing and disappearing on the hills behind us. This was our dream come true. We arrived first at the checkpoint and sent Shane into shock as we basked in our brief moment of glory.

We liberally applied silicon and sunblock and headed out. We were soon overtaken and left standing as my rear tyre sank swiftly. Sunlit repairs gave way to torrential climbs and we squelched into Calingiri where we stood and looked at the trailer rather than get even wetter in the search for food. There were no hills at Wongan Hills, but who was complaining.

We had a genuine tailwind and tried oh so hard to keep up with a fellow doing his daily 20kms training sprint, I was surprised to realise that I could still appreciate the pretty countryside, until the rain resumed and darkness fell. We played guessing games about which horizon glow we were heading for and Phil lost his pump, which proved difficult to find. His lights were flickering, as was my radio. Was this Goomalling's first portable disco?

We dined under a tree in the rain, chatting to the locals about their grand final victory and were 'escorted' out of town by very happy youths in very fast cars as Shane resumed his conversation with a cockatoo behind the garage. Phil only moved off because of the promise of hot chips a Meckering. We blitzed out at 16km/h and successfully negotiated several turnoffs although Phil was convinced that I was leading him astray and that he would miss out on his hot chips! It was another of those nothing rides - no stars, no signs, no lights, no houses. Just two little red and white dots wandering through the darkness. But wait, we had to be on the right track! I spotted a tell-tale sign. A muesli bar wrapper, then another, then an orange peel quarter, then disaster. In an intricate manoeuvre of 'fruit drop' passing, whilst pedalling. Phil retained the wrapper but lost the sweet. Our progress was abruptly halted as he removed his headlight and began his search, success, and our journey resumed.

Spirited discussion was alive at when we struck at an unsigned 'V' in the road and we opted for the left fork. We eventually ambled into Meckering, but not quite from the direction that Shane expected us. The hot chips were great. At last the final turnoff to what I had remembered from the morning as a 10 km downhill run to the lodge door. Memory is a funny thing! There was probably no more than 2kms of downhill, but an end in sight nonetheless.



We rolled in and divested ourselves; of our brevets, those precious pieces of cardboard we had treasured and guarded from the elements over 1003kms. Clapping, hand shaking, medals, victory, mineral water!!! Then a warm, soft somewhat smelly bed. One thousand and three kilometres, 69 hours, 3 tubes of silicon, 6 packets of chewing gum, multiple muesli bars, rice cakes, custard, fruit, sandwiches. Mars bars, lollies, cake and 1 bucket of hot chips later, we finally had finished. On reflection, we agree that conversation would be limited to the weather and food, not respective personal characteristics. We also

agree that when we are reincarnated we want to come back as locals as surprise 'V' intersections really throw us off. On a serious note, the facilities and backup were well organised, the road surfaces were first class and the support crews excellent (particularly when they discovered that women use toilets too!). We rode "off the rack" bikes and we are very average riders. It is not an experience we want to repeat but we survived! And yes, there is life after Paris but it does not involve riding further than 300 kilometres!