

Australia's first 600 km UAF brevet

Nick Dale

Dawn on 15 May 2010 heralded a beautiful day. The sky cloudless and the air cool and crisp. Mist over the Canning River being added to by each breath of the ten brave riders gathered by the old Shelley Bridge, about to embark on Australia's inaugural 600 km Audax Français brevet.

The peloton was evenly split between five old hands and five riders who had never before ridden a 600 km brevet. Those new to this distance were Aaron Hoette, John Eden, Steve Dillon, Tony Gillespie and Caroline Williams, with the experienced riders being Richard Scheer (who had flown over from South Australia for the brevet), Perry Raison, Wayne Hickman, Rob Godkin and myself, who would captain the ride. Also present to see us off on the first 10 km was Grant Crowe, who had planned to do the ride but had been called in to work that day.

The chilly start followed the Canning and Swan rivers along a convoluted and slow but very picturesque route out of the city to reach the base of the Perth hills. The peloton was allowed to fragment for the 6 km ascent, re-grouping at the top of the climb for the last 7 km into the first control at the Mundaring Bakery (60), where a variety of tasty morsels were eagerly consumed. The day was becoming glorious and we could have sat around for much longer enjoying it. As it was we considerably overstayed our planned stop.

The route east from Mundaring was undulating, but with no hills too long or steep to cause stress to the peloton. However Wayne was not feeling well and being on a recumbent found the going increasingly hard. As such, on reaching the 2nd control at Bakers Hill (105) and with 500 km more to go to complete the brevet, he decided that it would be best for both him and the group to call it a day. With



John Eden and Nick Dale at the leisurely lunch in York

the route back down hill much easier than the route up, he bade farewell and headed back towards Perth. The rest of us, needing to continue fuelling, tucked into merchandise from the local pie shop. Not quite a French boulangerie, but good enough to keep a hungry cyclist going.

The next leg was flat and into a headwind, making for a very tight peloton as we headed down to the historic town of York (not the one the Vikings founded) for the lunch control

(155). An enjoyable, filling and quite long lunch ensued. Fuelled up again and ready to go, eight of us then waited some time for one to finish fluffing around, putting us a little behind schedule and necessitating an increase in the tempo. However the wind had settled and we had perfect riding conditions as our peloton continued south on the very lightly trafficked Great Southern Highway. As we entered Beverley (190), the setting sun prompted a brief stop to don reflective our gear and flick the light switches. Various other necessities were attended to and, a little lighter, we continued south into the night.

Riding into Brookton (220) it had started to chill up and I at least was getting pretty hungry again. We were also unsure what food was going to be available 30 km down the road in Pingelly now that we were behind schedule and it was getting late. As such we decided to adjust the plan and have our dinner meal then. Several rounds of hot chips were ordered and eagerly consumed by everyone. Burgers were also requested by those of us with less discerning stomachs.

With just over 100 km still to go for the day and getting late, it was going to be heads down, bums up for the mostly straight and mostly flat run down to Narrogin (290). After not too long the tedium set in and so John, Aaron and I proceeded to pass the remainder of the leg playing Animal, Vegetable and Mineral. The winner was going to be the person who the others had to ask the most questions of, in an otherwise rather rule-less game, apart from honesty, of course. The other six riders were either bemused or annoyed or both at our increasing excitement, and the unequivocal winner (at over 80 questions) was my 'The clock inside the crocodile who terrified Captain Hook'—a well known Mineral!

Narrogin was closed when we got there and with another 90 minutes of riding before bed, we continued straight through the town. The undulations, tiredness and our inexperience at this riding format caused the group to fragment as we headed west to Williams (325) and arriving just on midnight. As we were splitting into two groups to bunk up in two cosy locations, I sent the faster riders off to the Munthoola Farm Stay. With a 1 km dirt driveway, I decided that it was OK to wave them a not so tearful goodnight as they made their own way up to the nights digs. Unbeknownst to me at the time, but recounted with increasing incredulity the next day, were tales of a surprising encounter on their trip up that dirt road. The three cyclists came across a herd of cattle and, not knowing if the cows or the cyclists were more terrified, the whole lot of them stampeded up towards the farm house. Luckily no cows, riders or bikes were injured and the story then gets a bit vague. Who knows what Perry, Steve and Aaron got up to that night. Meanwhile, the other six of us holed-up in three double rooms in the local motel. Not quite as exciting, but a very comfortable bed.

Sunday started at 6.30 am. A little bit of a sleep in, but timed so that the 90 minute ride to Quindanning (360) would have us there at the 8 am opening time of Ye Old Quindanning Inne for breakfast. The journey mostly followed the Williams valley through picturesque Australian farmland—a route shared with journey home on the Perth–Albany–Perth randonnee. In high spirits, we arrived at the rustic old hotel for breakfast just before our booking at 8 am. To our surprise and annoyance, the hotel manager



The peloton at Ye Olde Quindanning Inne

had seen fit to let in an unbooked horde of fat old Ulysses clubbies before us. The clubbies made their disdain for us clear and I was told that it was going to be an hour before we got breakfast, leading to a very tense stand off. The result was very satisfactory, as a beautiful old colonial room out the back was set up privately for us. Despite having only a little round table, the nine of us managed to just squeeze in and much revelry ensued as we proceeded to engorge ourselves on the scrumptious and very unhealthy fare. Clearly the highlight of the ride for all.

After hustling everyone out to get ready I went to settle the bill. That done, I was surprised to see that the peloton had set off without me. Clearly these randonneurs had a lot to learn. Nevertheless the route remained beautiful and I eventually caught them at the top of the climb into the

Hotham Valley, where we had scheduled a regrouping if required. The weather had now closed in a little and fine misting rain ensued. It was not heavy enough to really wet us, but rather kept us cool as we laboured up the hills of the Dwellingup State Forest. It made for really pleasant riding on what can be a tough undulating leg with a number of climbs en route to Dwellingup (435). The distance and climbing took its toll on Caroline. Dispirited, but no longer able to maintain the pace required, she elected to abandon the ride at that stage and headed off downhill to Pinjarra and the freeway where she was picked up by her sister.

The rest of us were now under the pump to get the brevet completed in time and so picked up the pace through the even more picturesque but hilly Nanga region before heading downhill to Waroona (475). No doubt we were aided by the cooler weather on that leg, but down on the coastal plain the slightly warmer weather made for beautiful cycling conditions. With no time to spare the group continued the dash across to the Peel inlet then north across the Dawesville Cut. Night fell as we got to Falcon (530), but having made up time and with just under three hours of riding left, we made the unanimous decision to stop at the junk food strip for our last meal. Lying on the 'golf green' like lawn in front of the shops a variety of Wok-in-a-Box, Subway, Chicken Treat and McDonalds were enjoyed. Company, laughter and the southern stars were enjoyed as a sense of satisfaction was starting to set in.

From there it was home via Mandurah and the bike path alongside the Kwinana Freeway. Despite it being flat tiredness was setting in for everyone (apart from Richard) and for the third time on this brevet the group struggled to maintain its cohesion. John was clearly on his last legs (his last two, I am pretty sure) and was dropping off the back. A couple of the guys dropped back to help him and the group reformed as we left the path with 12 km left to go. Once again a solid peloton the eight of us surged together for the finish line and we arrived back at Shelley Bridge (600) with only 35 minutes to spare. A time of 39 hours 25 minutes. Tony, Aaron, Steve and a nearly lame John all completing their first ever 600. *Chapeau.*



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