

THE OPPERMAN 24 HOUR ALL DAY TRIAL

BY: JOHN MARTIN

This event is named in honour of The Patron of Audax, The Hon. Sir Hubert Opperman O.B.E. G.C.S.J., the world's greatest long distance cyclist.

The O.A.D.,T. is run according to the rules for the French classic "Fleche Velocio" and we were granted permission to conduct this event in Australia because of difficulty in attending the "Fleche Velocio".

In mid-October for the last five years the O.A.D.T. has been held at various localities throughout Australia. In 1985 eleven teams (41 riders) finished in Melbourne with the Port Fairy Cycling Club setting the longest distance with 570km's. In 1986 seven teams (36 riders) finished in Melbourne with a South Australian team setting a new distance record of 587. 1987 was extremely disappointing to say the least with only one team taking part and finishing in Parramatta after covering 545km's. The event was held in WA in 1988 with eight teams (30 riders) all from WA finished in Midland, the longest distance was 532km's. The highlight of this event was having Robert Lepertel, the Delegate of the Audax Club Parisien, visit WA especially for the O.A.D.T.

On October 14th and 15th this year the O.A.D.T. was for the first time held at two locations simultaneously, being Albury, NSW and Midland WA. The attendance was down to 5 teams (20 riders) for WA but NSW had 10 teams (43 riders), making a total for Australia of 15 teams (63 riders), which makes things look very good for the future of the event. The greatest distance was raised to a very commendable 636km's by a team of "Australian Time Trial Association" members from WA. The team was captained by Brian Hawes with Terry Allen and Rod Evans finishing. Tim Frodsham withdrew after a very gruelling head wind section and Peter Meyer, a very strong member of the team had to withdraw because of wind damage to his eyes after covering 578km's.

Next year the O.A.D.T. will not be held in WA but hopefully some West Australian riders will make the long journey east to help make the O.A.D.T. finishing in Albury NSW a truly national event that will make Oppy proud of Audax Australia.

THE WINNING TEAM

A LONG DAY

BY ROD EVANS

TEAM: Captain Brian Hawes, Peter Meyer, Tim Frodsham, Terry Allen and Rod Evans

Brian Hawes had mapped out a course of 664 kilometres, but as we lined up for the start rumours were spreading that an Eastern States team was also aiming to ride over 600 kilometres. We wanted to create a new Australian record for the event and thought of strong

competition from the East was placing even greater urgency on the need to top the '650' mark.

At 7.49am we all stood anxiously awaiting the 8.00am start signal. At 8.01am we were in disarray. Peter Meyer's front derailleur had broken from his frame. At 8.05 any hopes of fixing the problem was abandoned as helping hands now darted from every which way in a desperate effort to remove the offending mechanism.

For the rest of us, our problems started at 8.12am. For those who know Peter Meyer, he is a difficult wheel to stick to at the best of times, but when he is aggravated he can ride through walls!!

With 23 hours 48 minutes of riding ahead of us we took off at just under 50km/h, all of us a desperate clinging snake behind Peter's back wheel.

Now, I have ridden a few long distance rides in my time and I must admit that I had serious doubts that we could keep this pace up. If we could, we were well on target for a ride of well over 1100 kilometres!!

A few hills and a good amount of abuse soon slowed our speeding pace down somewhat, we nevertheless still managed to cover the first 99km's in 2½hrs. I have been in 'A' grade scratch races that were a lot slower, and a 3 month lay-off since returning from my Around Australia ride certainly didn't seem to be the best preparation for such an effort.

Fortunately the other riders were also feeling it and so the pace was considerably slower over the next 535km. Passing through Brookton, at the 132km mark, heavy rain and slippery road and an already tired team culminated in the inevitable result. A fall. Brian Hawes dragged himself up off the bitumen, but any mutterings of abandoning the ride fell on deaf ears as we continued on our way.

The ride to Crossman was also a nightmare. We battled virtual gale force winds. At Crossman (214km's) Tim Frodsham turned his last pedal. A 20yr old Australian representative cyclist, Tim was suffering from severe stomach cramps and his experience told him that another 440km's of suffering was just not worth it.

By 10 o'clock that night we were back at Brookton (399km) and looked well on target for a 650km ride. I was enjoying the night riding and finding the going fairly easy. Terry Allen and Brian Hawes had also ridden through their worst patches and we were now all confident of a strong finish.

But fate was about to deal yet another blow. Peter Meyer the powerhouse within our team, was finding it increasingly difficult to see. The wind and grit we had ridden through all day had burnt his eyes and he was slowly going blind.

By 5.00am he had virtually lost all his sight, our pace having dropped to a snail like crawl. At 'The Lakes' (578km's) we sadly had to make the decision to leave him behind, a rider that had dragged us through much of the preceding 21 hours.

With only three of us left in the team we rode on cautiously. We needed to finish with three riders and just one mistake would undo the last 22 hours of effort. At 8.00am on Sunday we rode into the finish at Midland. We had covered 636km's in 24 hours. I felt deep admiration and thanks not only for the efforts of my fellow team members, but also for the untiring effort

AUDAX 'OPPY' 24 HOURS BY KEVIN NORRIS

What! Me ride a bike for 438k's? You've got to be a head banger to do that!!

Around five weeks later I was nervously awaiting the start of the Audax Opperman 24 Hour event outside the Pickering Brook Deli.

ATTA 'F' troop consisted of (Big) Jim Mathews, John (One-Lung) Pim, Fred Cottier (ably assisted by his daughter, and daughter-in-law). Tony (X-Terminator) Reagan, and myself, Kevin (Egg-Whisker) Norris, and the support crew of George Garrett and Tony Ellis.

A wind assisted start to Brookton was disrupted by heavy rain. After stopping to don rain jackets, and for the application of plastic Cole's bags over Jim's feet, we continued. The group became fragmented over some of the bigger climbs, and we had to re-group. Where's Jim? Over the other side of the previous hill Jim cursed while fixing the first flat of the day.

After the control station at Brookton it was into heavy cross/head winds to Narrogin. Big Jim 'windmilled' his 54 chain-ring into the full brunt of the headwind while the rest of us fought for his draught. Faces showed the strain as legs ached with the effort. Mine went one step further and started to cramp. Only 300+ k's to go!

From Narrogin we turned out of the headwind and into Wickepin.

A cool breeze reminded us to get wrapped up for the cold night ahead. After fitting lights, we set off down

of our support crew, Jan and Jo Meyer, Neil and June Hart, Neil MacRea, and Olwyn and Samantha Hawes. But unfortunately I had no time for the celebration of a new record. A car was waiting at the finish line to take me 25km's across town so that I could lead out a 26km fun run that was scheduled to start at 9.00am.

It was a long but memorable day.

the back roads to Pingelly. Bang! Hiss. Hiss. Hiss. Jim punctures again. We don't complain, the rest was quite timely.

Pingelly. As usual the backup crew was waiting with a welcoming cuppa. A meal was soon heated on the stove, eaten, and we were on our way again.

As we rode deeper into the night conversation became 'thinner on the ground' as tiredness overlook our bodies. At times the ride seemed like a dream as our eyes scanned the dimly lit road ahead searching for a safe route over the bitumen.

York, then onto 'The Lakes'. Climbing out of York is not to be recommended at around 2am on a cold spring morning. The effort was sufficient to make big Jim change off the 54 ring for the first time on the ride! An extended stop at 'The Lakes' to put us back on schedule, allowed us to rest and refuel. Dawn broke, the early morning sun thawing out our cold and tired limbs ready for the last leg.

The top of Greenmount Hill has never been so welcoming. A swift descent down to Midland and onto the Town Hall where we were greeted by a number of enthusiasts and officials. Tiredness seemed to leave us for a while as the euphoria took over. Our achievement was shared with the support crews, whose unselfish and tireless efforts had carried us through the rigours of the ride.

Who knows? Next time maybe 500+?



OPPERMAN TIME TRIAL

BY BRETT RUTHERFORD

TEAM: Captain John Martin, Jack Iveson, Peter Bombardieri and Brett Rutherford

We set out from John Martin's home at 8am on a windy Saturday morning with rain clouds low in the sky. First stop was the local store to get our cards stamped.

Kleber Claux our multi-talented back up man, was left to complete repairs to the bus and catch us up later. Throughout the ride Kleber was unstinting in his efforts to make everything as comfortable as he possibly could for us.

After an easy ride to Brookton assisted by a strong tail wind, we headed off to Pingelly, Aldersyde and back to Brookton, encountering a variety of tail, head and crosswinds. Being a newcomer to cycling I was not too confident of making the distance, but riding alongside someone as positive as John Martin left little room for doubts. Our journey through the wheat-belt towns up to Northam went without incident, During our stop at Toodyay we were able to witness the efforts of a late night reveller trying to stay upright, this display of determination and refusal to quit gave me new heart for the ride to the Lakes Road House and a short rest.

After some cajoling from John we were back in the saddle, cold and stiff, but getting ever closer to the welcome sight of the Midland Town Hall.

Congratulations to all who took part and my thanks to John, Jack, Peter and Kleber.

OPPERMAN 24 HR TIME TRIAL

BY: RENE SMEETS

TEAM: Captain Peter Steer, David Midolo and Rene Smeets.

After riding the 300km Audax at York on the 15 of September, it seemed only logical to try myself at the Opperman 24hr ride at which event at least 360km had to be covered. As I did not ride a 200km event for two years, and never ever a 300km ride, it would be interesting to see whether I could do it. In a very subtle way I was coaxed into it by John Martin, who as he said himself, never wanted to talk me into anything I did not want to do.

Our team for the Opperman was the smallest with only three riders. This made the job harder, especially for-the weakest rider, me. Also we could not afford to lose a rider as at least three riders out of a team had to finish. Showers and strong W-winds were forecast for the Saturday. At ten past eight we started from Midland hoping for the best. We, that is apart from myself team leader Peter Steer and David Midolo, two strong riders, who however lately did not do much riding, even when David rode a thousand in September. Our support vehicle was manned, or should I say personned, by Susan Midolo and Janine Krause, who did a marvellous job at the checkpoints, providing us coffee, tea, soup, food in general and conversation.

The first check point was about 70km away where we arrived in about 3hrs, by this time it was already raining. Just as well we did not have to cope with rain for more than an hour. On average we spent about three quarters of an hour at the checkpoints, it was still raining, we were -on route- for

Guilderton, 50km away and right at the ocean. Turning off the main road, with 6km to go, we were met by an enormous strong headwind, which nearly shattered my confidence. Fortunately I settled in against the headwind which did not seem to affect my team-mates much. Guilderton is one of my favourite spots, a nice place with maybe 500 houses, most of them holiday houses. Further there is an attractive beach and a beautiful river flanked by green hilly embankments.

The headwind became a tailwind in the next leg to Gingin, 44km. A lovely place with a lovely name and some nice historical buildings, such as a little picturesque church, After Gingin we pushed on under good conditions enjoying the sight of the wildflowers. On top of the hill out of Bindoon we had another picnic. I was really surprised at the amount of food eaten in such an event. I found that I could have done with more food but survived thanks to the culinary assistance of the support team out of my companions' large reserves.

We had covered 190km and left Bindoon at ten to seven, and were cycling through the darkness of the night. Personally I do not find it very pleasant riding through the night. My companions did not seem to mind.

I was happy to see the moon break through the clouds and illuminate the landscape, this lifted my spirits. The temperature dropped steadily and before we reached Toodyay we felt the cold. In Toodyay our support crew was relieved by Michael Waters of Mount Cycles. From here onwards I started to feel the hills, probably the 240km covered had something to do with it, further I felt my age. At this stage you start asking yourself why am I doing this?

This reminds me of a little anecdote. When we rode the 300 my son Paul was asked to attend a party on the Saturday night. Paul regretted not being able to accept as he would be riding his bike. His workmates said it is not in the afternoon, it will be in the evening. Paul explained that he would still be riding in the evening. This led to the obvious question, why don't you ride in the morning. Paul had to explain that he was going to York to take part in a 300km event. Silence...

We made it to Midland, Michael had chairs standing ready for us on the footpath in the centre of town also the soup was ready. Certainly an unusual sight after 2 o'clock in the morning. I was not surprised that a policeman stopped his car to check up on us. One of the last checkpoints was the local police station where we happened to see members of other teams, some people looking really well, others the worse for wear.

Midland to Padbury I found tiring, I was happy to have the finish in sight. At 8 o'clock we finished. For me it was the longest ride of my life, which gave it some meaning. Thanks to teammates Peter and David and also to the support crew Susan, Janine and Michael.



OPPERMAN 24 HR TRIAL

By: COLIN FARMER

TEAM: Captain Colin Farmer, Noel Eddington, Robin Layton, Steve Parry and Lin Hambleton.

The concept of the Opperman ride is unique in that all responsibilities are delegated to the riders themselves, who must select their own teams, choose their own routes, arrange their own support crew and vehicle, organise signatures and stamping of brevets and sort out accommodation for a nap if they plan to have one. As a result, one certainly finishes up with a much better idea of all that is done by the organisers of the “normal” Audax rides!

My team decided to aim for a ride of 370km's, just a little in excess of the requirements of 360km's. After giving much thought to prevailing wind directions, road surface and traffic density, particularly after dark, we elected to start at Bullsbrook and ride through Muchea, Gingin, Mogumber, Moora, Walebing, New Norcia, Bindoon, Midland, Gosnells and back to Midland for the finish. Plenty of controls means plenty of hot cups of tea and so we opted for seven with a maximum of 62km between cuppas - very civilised!

The five starters pushed off at 9am from Bullsbrook with the wind quite strong, so the ride to Moora (141km) was quite fast and our arrival there was about 3.15pm. From Moora to New Norcia was hard and we were forced to plug into a strong head wind for much of the time. Single file echelon formation helped a lot and we restricted turns, finally reaching New Norcia for dinner at 6.15pm.

Our support crew of Barbara Farmer and sister Jenny did us proud with hot spaghetti bolognese.

Very cold by the time we reached Bindoon, so on with a few more layers and into the hot soup. Here we said goodbye to Barbara and Jenny who had supported us so ably all day, neither of them having ever been part of a support crew before. They both expressed surprise at how busy they were all day. They really seemed to enjoy themselves, hope so! There's always next year to think of!!

The ride from Bindoon to Midland was glorious - I do love night riding under these conditions. Bright moonlight, very few clouds and no wind. Cold though - very cold!

Now being without support we had our brevets signed at the Midland Police Station and pushed straight on to Gosnells, where Lin and wife Marilyn have a very lovely home. We were made very comfortable there and all had a hot showers two hours sleep and breakfast before moving out at 7am for the last 36km.

This last leg was one of the best parts of the ride with us all enjoying the leisurely pace, the sunny spring morning and an encounter with Neil Porteous at a secret control in Victoria Park. All five riders were very chipper on arrival at the finish in Midland, and well

satisfied with having earned an Opperman medal with a maximum of enjoyment and a minimum of pain.

Record in Rod's sights cont.

The heat combined with over 40 days of constant pedalling also started to make my feet swell. We cut the sides out of my shoes to relieve the pressure, but I still had to force my badly swollen feet into them. I found cycling painful and was often forced to walk to bring back the circulation.

Reducing my own sleep to only four hours a night I started to become mentally confused. I saw things that didn't exist. Road signs become parked cars and towns. Sticks became snakes which is fine as long as the stick isn't a snake, as I was to find out later.

The vast darkness with only the occasional road train thundering by and the inevitable cattle grids. Harmless to a vehicle but treacherous for a tired cyclist, desperately looking in the dark, for the three inch join which would mean crossing the grid without breaking a wheel or falling off.

The crew who were fighting their own exhaustion related difficulties, pulled every trick in the book to keep me riding.

Reaching Geraldton, an historic fishing and agricultural town 280 miles north of Perth, I stopped for a random drug test. A few days earlier I would have cursed the loss of time as I completed the drug testing requirements. But for the first time in a week and having covered 2000 miles since leaving Darwin I started to relax. A large number of off cyclists had travelled up from Perth to cheer me on. I felt I was home. A new surge of energy poured into my legs, and the miles started to glide by as I pedalled the final last short leg to Perth.

On Monday July 3rd as I rode into the outskirts of Perth I was met by a police escort. My Around Australia Record was only 10 miles away from being a reality. The last 10 miles seemed to go by in slow motion as I fought off the urge to burst into tears of relief.

As I was welcomed home to the cheer of hundreds of people. A life ambition had been fulfilled. The 8620 miles (14,062km) of pain and suffering had been worth it.

For the record, I had ridden around Australia in 49 days, 22 hours and 31 minutes, breaking the record by 30 days.