

ESK AT NIGHT 100 K 2018 – My experience

By David Booth



I arrived at the Esk registration point later than I intended, because a weekend driver potted along the highway for kilometres, ignorant of the line of traffic patiently following. Still, I had sufficient time to assemble the bike and check that everything likely to be needed was either on the bike or on me. No need to worry about wet weather gear – I would be wearing it. Time for the lighting check but not to identify who was present for the ride(s). During last year's Esk 100 klm, I experienced problems with my front lights; they were not bright enough and wouldn't stay attached. Since then I have invested in new front and rear lights but have not yet had the chance to test them on the road.

I left Esk slightly behind the bunch but experience has shown that some would dash off immediately, whilst the group would split due to their fitness, the terrain or their disinclination to get even wetter. Anyway, I have ridden this route twice before and consequently I am familiar with it. Admittedly, I have made this assumption on other audax rides and, as a result, become lost. Not this time though! There are no hills worthy of the name but the descents are fast and enjoyable. However, on one such descent there was a semi-trailer coming towards me, the width of the strip of bitumen. It could not leave the bitumen without risking losing tyre tread so I was happy to dismount and get off the road. No hassle for me and hopefully a truck driver who will remember.

I could see the occasional rear lights and fluoro jackets in the distance, so my prediction was valid. It was possible to maintain a good pace despite the condition of the road, which invited punctures. Sure enough, the rear tyre deflated, although not because of tyre penetration, more likely over inflation for the conditions. It was rear wheel flat which ironically is now quicker to deal with since the front wheel quick releases were 'improved' for safety reasons and are no longer quick to release.

While I changed the tube, two farmers observing the no doubt welcome rain asked if I needed any help or a lift anywhere. I gratefully declined but was immediately offered assistance from a van

driver who stopped. It may be that I look vulnerable but, more likely, people out there are considerate like that. Anyway, I pressed on, checking occasionally to ensure I had indeed fixed the problem but safe in the knowledge that I had still had two spare tubes with me. Experience shows that rain means more chance of punctures and my only likelihood of company was if someone else deflated too.

I fully expected to see a stack of bikes outside the Toogoolawah refreshment spots but this is Audax, such temptations are to be resisted – and it's not that far to the Control and food. Left into Mount Beppo Road and, in the distance, fluoro. I reckoned that I must be fairly racing at the rate I am catching up, until I came across Peter and Pat, with bits of bike that I could only wonder at. Pat had punctured too! Puncture fixed, we set off together for the Control and food. Now, if I was last, that made the three of us the back markers. Those familiar with the route will know that the Control is along the Esk Kilroy road, near Somerset Dam. This means that riders must retrace along the road to get to Esk. We saw several individuals and therefore expected the majority to be at the Control. They were not there and presumably were lost in the 'Esk at Night Triangle'.

Not to worry, plenty of food in true Audax tradition, so suitably refreshed, off towards Esk. Not long after, a group heads towards us and the Control. We were now in front. Steven Bradbury, the Winter Olympic speed skater, would have been proud. The weather looks brighter now and Peter, Pat and I were making good progress. I thought I was going well but I started to hear strange sounds. Hallucinations on a long night ride I can understand, but during daylight on a 100 klm audax? It turned out that one of our audax colleagues was broadcasting music for his own and presumably our entertainment – so 'Strava' is short for 'Stradivarius'? I wondered.

Esk reached and so onto the turn at O'Grady Road and back to the finish (for me). Now last year, the hot one, this ride was held two weeks later, meaning that this time it will get dark later, maybe scuttling my lights test. Fortunately, I was riding slowly enough to get over this and after the turn I was able to give them a valid test. The front light was disappointing until I found a brighter setting which fully justified my purchase. I could not see the new rear light of course, but the box said it could be seen five miles away. Shortly before Esk the passenger of a passing car suggested I "turn that light off – it's blinding us". I appreciated the feedback and back at Esk I could see he had a point. There is no point in showing a driver that I am on the road if he is blind by the time he reaches me.

Changed wet gear, so only the drive back remaining. I will travel back at what I consider to be a safe speed, irrespective of what following drivers call me. There are cyclists on the road and it's dark.

Summarising, another great ride Kym, well catered and supported. Good to see so many riders, whoever you are.