

Franks Ride 2018 – the short version

Franks Ride this year had us all returning to true Audax weather – a bit nippy, some wind and the pre-requisite rain. I selected the 110km option rather than the 200km mainly due to babysitting duties that afternoon and it was a bonus because of the weather and that blasted hill at the end.

Franks ride last year was a bit of an eye opener for me in regards to hill climbing. Yes I had ridden Mt Cootha but this was the first time at the end of a ride. Two successive rides and I had to walk part of the hill so I took it as a challenge (as did David Foster) to conquer the hill this year.

The start to the ride was the assembly at Winders Park with some familiar faces and a couple of new riders. My concession to the nippy weather was my winter gloves and riding jacket. These early winter mornings can be a bit of a challenge as you warm up on the ride but you do get some rewards like this at Currumbin:



This will be one of the few Audax where I will be a little more relaxed and take my time on the ride.

The foreshore was scenic but very uneventful and I soon headed inland towards Bilambil to start up the first of the little challenges this ride throws at you. Jeff caught up to me at the first part of the climb through Bilambil Heights looking in good form. Being the third time this way I knew what was coming and surprisingly found it to be shorter than my memory told me particularly the little pinch just before the descent into Bilambil itself.

I enjoyed the descent to the roundabout where I encountered our new riders and not long after David on the next climb up Hogans Road. The climb was long, solid and steady as I took my time as the new riders played yoyo around me. I let them know about the nice scenery at the bottom of the hill as a bit of encouragement.

Hill climbed and upwards through the little bit of rainforest at the bottom then back to the top of the ridge for the descent into Tweed Junction. No traffic lights this time, just a short narrow section with a give way sign.

As I headed back to the coast I was surprised that I couldn't remember this bit being so lumpy. Not a real issue, maybe just a sign that I had more on my mind the first time round (and I had only ridden this section once before). The run to the coast and the control was marked by an increasing wind and some light drizzle, not enough to worry about yet. I rocked up to the first control to find no stragglers but elected to get some food cooked and enjoyed the feed, departing at the control closing time.

The next section saw an increase in wind and rain – I stopped to put the rain jacket on and continued south to find a peleton of riders with vehicle escorts heading north. I did discover that the section of the Tweed Highway is a bit dangerous – not because of the drivers so much but more because of the way they have re-surfaced the road. I tend to ride more on the shoulder space until the gravel piles up and becomes treacherous to ride in so I am relatively comfortable with the few bumps and poor surface. What made it so bad was the lip as they laid down each layer of tarmac. On occasion, they had the second layer starting half way through the shoulder area and when wet had the potential to seriously unsettle the bike. If it wasn't for momentum, I suspect there may have been a spill.

Other than the intermittent rain, the ride to Clothiers Creek Road was also uneventful and I was soon on the second section of road where my mind forgot to tell me that the upcoming part of the route was somewhat lumpy. It was raining as I rode so I took my time on the descents making good time to the end of Clothiers Creek Road and made my way along Tweed Valley Way to the Cane Rd turnoff. Traffic was surprisingly busy so I elected to make a safety maneuver – waiting on the side of the road to cross to the turn lane and then wait to cross into Cane Rd. Murwillumbah was soon upon me and I couldn't remember where the bakery was so I did the block and found Ruth at a Café (expected as she was meeting a friend.) I had an excellent coffee and toasted sandwich and Ruth and I set off with (in my mind) just enough time to get back to the end without timing out.

I set off at a reasonable pace with a sound tail wind reaching good sustainable speed on the flats before Dungay and then the real work started. I have these bad memories of struggling up Tomewin Hill, getting to the steep bit, getting off, having a rest and a bite to eat then walking to the hairpin warning sign before re-mounting. This time round, Ruth was a bit behind me (over 500m on the flats but catching up on the climb) and I knuckled under and persisted through the climb. I was at the point where I was struggling, but I could still keep going. This and having Ruth a short distance behind kept me going up the hill. Whilst not at the top, the 35kmh hairpin sign is my happy point on the hill because that is the last of the steep climbing – I let Ruth know that the climb was nearly over. The rest is pretty easy (although my memory was telling me there was another pinch or two that didn't seem to appear) over the top.

Tomewin conquered I followed Ruth down the hill to the turn and just after I once again took advantage of my favourite riding conditions – downhill with a tail wind on the run back to Currumbin. This time the road was dry (last two rides were wet and torrential) and powered along the road reaching excellent speeds (for me)

Time wise we had a little to spare with Ruth surprised that she arrived within two minutes of me saying she couldn't keep up and also had a red light near the end.

All in all, I think I achieved what I set out to do – ride that blasted hill. Ruth and I debated whether she was pushing me or I was pulling her up the hill. The Umpire can decide that one.

I quite like Franks Ride (110) as it has some excellent scenery and apart from the couple of serious climbs it is an excellent day out.

Next ride down the coast is 6 Bumps – I want to achieve the same result on that ride too. Difference is Tomewin is 180km through that ride.