

The Tortoise and the Hares

West Australian 200kms Audax ride – 25th March 2006 – a ride down the coastal plain from Perth with a minimum of hills by Ralph Morgan.

I (The Tortoise) looked at the start sheet and realized all my 22kph mates were obviously hiding under their blankets in bed. I was only too well aware that a ride in such illustrious company (The Hares) would be an exercise in humiliation and aversion therapy for me. Tortoise, on his knees, duly requested and was graciously granted leave to start half an hour ahead of the Hares.

The Hares as usual were 15 minutes late leaving (Tortoise 45mins ahead.) Hares have mechanical problems, and puncture, one of our best riders has a bike that is a rolling disaster. (Hare 1 hour ahead.) Tortoise has a 5-minute stop in Mandurah after rain (thank you very much God) to pick up a revolting sausage roll. Young saleslady could not believe that old tortoise could have ridden from Perth by 9 a.m. Tempted to tell her my life's story but must press on. The Hares stop here for half an hour. Traffic is very heavy going to the southwest for the weekend. Since the new railway construction Mandurah has changed from a sleepy seaside town where you went to eat crabs, to a haven for Perth commuters, the nouveau riche and retirement villages.

Continuing on the main road (has the next car behind me got my name on it's bumper?) and following the coastal ribbon developments I reach Lake Clifton. Future Shock! Where has the cosy road-house gone? Now just a deserted wreck.

At last, half way and off the main road to head back north with a raising tail wind, through delightful, quiet, country roads beside an irrigation system built by Italian PoWs in WWII. Suddenly there is a spectacular descent that would do "The Falcon" Savoldelli credit. But what is this? Half way up a long hard drag there's a man with a flag. If this is a surprise Audax check I am ready to berate him, but no, it's just a road team warning me of repairs ahead.

A slight detour to Coolup, a village of 4 houses where they still have a hitching post to park your horse outside the tiny store. (I have a 200kms ride to Coolup each year to celebrate our arrival in Western Australia.) On to Pinjarra Bakery where tortoise purchases their last excellent Cornish Pasty, which I consume on the move with a coke, which I usually prefer with rum. The hares get to Pinjarra one hour later to find the bakery closed (Oh dear, what a shame) but nonetheless they stop for half an hour anyway.

Next comes a 22 kms long flat straight road through very pleasant pastoral land known as The Dreaded Hopelands Road. It's a Mecca fro the local time-trial lads but a real trial if you get a headwind. I must be getting tired because I foolishly ride straight across in front of a speeding car.

As Mick Ayliffe's Dad used to say, I began to smell the stable door as I made my way as quickly as possible along roads that used to have paddocks of kangaroos, horses, emus and alpacas – alas no more, all seem to have become part of suburbia.

I arrive back 1 hour in front of the hares, some of whom are suspicious as to whether the tortoise actually did the ride or just hid in the bushes.

Bloody 225 kms, not 200kms, in 10 hours; the speed of light for a tortoise!

Ralph Morgan (now back in his shell.)