

Perth - Albany - Perth

By Don Briggs

The Perth-Albany-Perth Inaugural 1200km Randonnée 1997 first came about when, as the Perth Region's programme Coordinator I suggested to the committee that we should go for an international event to be run on similar lines as the Paris-Brest-Paris (PBP) & the Boston-Montreal-Boston (BMB). In February 1997 a special sub committee was formed and we worked together through some 60 points for possible action. Decisions were made on each point whether or not to adopt and those requiring action were placed on a priority listing.

We then set about to expose the rest of Australia through the National Programme and the World Audax body through the Internet. A flyer was made and circulated to bicycle clubs and shops. This was followed up with an information sheet and application form and sent or given to interested people. From this action we thought we would have about 30 riders which had some logistical problems but fortunately only 12 applied. This lower number gave us the opportunity to easily fine-tune the operation.

Entries were received from Kevin Aitken UK (Lower Pennines Club), Peter Moore Victoria (Audax Melbourne), Lindsay Green Queensland (Audax Brisbane), and Matthew Rawnsley (Audax Adelaide). From the Audax Perth Region we had Nicky Armstrong, Brian Hawes, Brian Hughes, Paul Dransfield, Malcolm Moyses, Duncan Faux, David Scott and Colin Farmer. At the bike inspection we gave each rider a coffee mug, a polo shirt and two bidons. We also welcomed Stewart Escort Senior Constable WA Police who gave us a talk on bicycle safety and lighting requirements and Ken Ward was the official bike inspector. The same requirements as the PBP were enforced; a road worthy bicycle, two working separate lighting systems and spare globes had to be shown, before they could get their brevet cards. The brevet cards were similar to the PBP with a passport photo, signature and insurance details required. The route was from Kelmscott, Armadale, Pinjarra, Yarloop, Wokalup, Burekup, Dardanup, Boyanup, Capel, Busselton, Nannup, Karri Valley, Shannon, Walpole, Denmark, Albany, Denmark, Walpole, Shannon, Karri Valley, Nannup, Balingup, Donnybrook, Boyanup, back to the finish at Kelmscott over the same route as the outward leg. David withdrew at Yarloop (111kms) and Nicky's rear axle seemed to be the only casualties for the distance.

All riders cleared the turn at Albany by 1800 hours on the second day, well within the 40-hour time limit for the 600kms distance. Peter Moore was the first to turn and the tailenders were Brian Hughes and Paul Dransfield. They were able to catch up and overtake five other riders at the Donnybrook sleepover point and rode on strongly to

maintain their lead to the finish ahead of those five. Although it wasn't treated as a race, it did give Brian and Paul something to feel good about as they had struggled throughout the earlier hilly sections.

Finishing times were:

Duncan Faux 72 hours 29 minutes (72:29),

Peter Moore 76:50,

Lindsay Green 80:57

Colin Farmer 80:57,

Brian Hughes 86:12,

Paul Dransfield 86:13,

Kevin Aitken 86:32,

Matthew Rawnsley 86:32,

Nicky Armstrong 86:32,

Brian Hawes 86:32,

Malcolm Moyses 86:32.

Peter Moore maintained a record of the altitude over the distance and he worked it out to be 7,188 metres. Most of the climbing is between Busselton to Denmark on the way out and Denmark to Donnybrook on the way back. Back up was provided over the complete ride thanks to a very capable crew. Ross Cussons drove his small truck and towed the Audax trailer to Yarloop (David Scott withdrew here) and was assisted by Neil McRae, Barry Evans (Nicky's personal backup driver) and Brenda Faux (Duncan's personal backup driver). They then went on to Busselton the first Control checkpoint. We had two types of stops; a checkpoint where each rider could get outside assistance and a Control checkpoint where access to outside assistance was permitted and also a place to get their card stamped and signed. As the riders spread out along the road Neil and Ross transferred food bags and boxes in each vehicle and leap-frogged at each checkpoint to Shannon. I travelled with my caravan, filled with sleeping gear and clothes to Shannon and set up the bunkhouse. Fires had to be lit in the stove and hot water system and the gas fridge started. Shannon was at the 419km point and I had a busy day making beds, fires, setting up the satellite mobile phone and the power generator. The caravan provided two extra beds and the rest were spread throughout the bunkhouse. I still hadn't slept when the first of the backup cars started arriving. As each rider came in, their cards were stamped, shown where to sleep and given some pea and ham soup made by my wife Ronice the night before the start. We finally shut the generator off and put our heads down about 2.00am.

Each rider was sent on his or her way to Albany with a bowl of Neil McRae's specially cooked oatmeal. Steve Blackburn who arrived with the first support cars the night before and I set out on the second day to provide backup to and from Albany. Steve remained at Denmark while I went on alone to Albany where Jane Nields and Harry Pride were there to greet us and put on an Audax rider's feast. We had sent on a polo shirt, two water bottles (bidons) and a coffee mug for her assistance at the Control Checkpoint and we were not disappointed. Jane

and Harry were Audax riders when they lived in Perth and with the growing number of interested cyclists in the Albany Region I will be helping set up a new separate region.

When I returned to Denmark, Steve was still serving coffee so I went on to greet the faster riders at Walpole. Steve followed on later and handed over everything to me and left for Perth, as he had to go to work early on Monday morning. On the road back to Shannon I came across Nicky's broken down support van and Kevin Aitken was up to his waist in the engine compartment trying to repair a damaged water cooling system. We eventually had Ross come out from Shannon to tow the disabled van back to base. At Shannon Neil greeted us all with some pumpkin soup and bread and I eventually went to bed about 3.30am and was up again at 6.30am on Monday morning. I left Shannon after most of the clean-up was finished and travelled through to Collie, my old hometown where I dropped off the generator and left the caravan at my parent's house. I then drove back to Donnybrook, the next sleepover Control Checkpoint and waited for all riders to come in. Four riders had already gone on toward the finish by midnight, while the other seven slept until dawn and a bit after. I took over the Audax support trailer from Ross who left to return to Perth. Barry Evans joined the general support crew, getting lower in numbers, as the van had broken down yet again near Balingup.

I collected as much gear as I could carry in the Pajero four wheel drive and trailer and headed off to catch Duncan, Peter, Lindsay and Colin. I pulled in to Kelmscott at 2.00am and waited for Duncan who came in at 4.30am. His wife had not been seen and we feared for her safety but we learnt later that she had gone home to sleep. Peter was in some 4 hours later plus a few minutes. Big gaps had formed between the groups and it was a long day before the final riders came in, all within the time limit. Ken Ward and his wife Joyce kept me company as we tried to get some sleep during the warm day.

It had been decided at the bike inspection on Thursday night before the ride, to have lunch together at a local hotel the day after the finish. All riders were there and most of the support crews. David Scott and Steve Blackburn couldn't make it and Kevin Aitken was awarded the mechanics award and Neil deserved his special English T-shirt given to him by Kevin.

We have learnt so much from this ride and it was agreed that any more than 12 riders would have been difficult for this inaugural event. We changed our plans as the ride unfolded and we will be documenting the actions for future events. We look like conducting the 2nd P.A.P. in the year 2000 and if what we have heard from our visiting and local riders with our efforts, then there will be larger numbers next time, which will pose different problems for the Organisers.

I hope I can be part of it - Don Briggs.