



Ben Warden

Honda CBR1000

Cliff Peters

Kawasaki ZX10

Paul Southwell

Honda CBR1000

Jason Wilson

Kawasaki ZX9

Misho Zrakic/Pina Garasi

Honda CBR1000

Ed Simonis

BMW K1200S

Ian Payne

Honda CBR1000

Rod Silver

KTM RC8

The forecast was clearing showers to the east as the day progressed. It rained all day except from Yarra Glen to Healesville (wet roads) and the last couple of kilometres before breakup at Bulla under the planes. The lady in the wool shop at Heathcote said it had been raining continuously for two days. At least the centre sluice gates at Goulburn Weir were in operation, releasing water downstream impressively. But I am getting ahead.

Saturday afternoon, Julie at the theatre, I decided to wash the air filter element with purpose-supplied detergent (thanks Peter Hill) that the truckies use. I figured that if anyone was going to know what was effective and economical, they would. I first blew out as much dust and insects with compressed air – and usually this would be about as far as I would go. This time I doused the filter with pink detergent and then flooded it with hot water in the laundry tub. The water turned an impressive black. Being in a hurry, I vigorously agitated the filter under the water and then flushed it with hot clean water before blowing it dry with compressed air again. I could have let it sit for an hour or two and see what else dissolved out but the filter was now a bright yellow – good enough. Checked the tyres and oil - consumption has calmed down in the cooler winter months – less revs!

That evening I checked the Sunday ride route and looked at options with the predicted rain. Julie sorted out the cards for the Poker Run – a short deck (eights and up) - to make it more exciting. Julie also drew up the sheet wanting to know how many lines ie riders - to allow for. I figured 12 would be optimistic with the rain shushing gently on our tin roof – and would do so all night. The day finished with a movie and a feast of sport – the Blues finally won a game against St Kilda; the

First Test against the Poms is drawing to a conclusion – and probably not a good one unless Agar produces another miracle after his 98 at Number 11 in his first Test match a couple of days ago; the Tour de France live telecast; and of course, MotoGP Qualifying – or skittles as it appeared. Lorenzo out with a bent collarbone titanium plate courtesy of a big highside in qualifying.

Next morning Julie's already bolted off, kayaking on the Maribyrnong, by the time I emerge, but the homemade vegetable soup is ready to be heated and transferred to the thermos so lunch is fast and tasty. But getting all the waterproof gear on – thermals, leathers, waterproof pants and over jacket, spare gloves – takes a lot of time, even if I have done it a million times before. Then catching every light in Diamond Creek and riding with eyes wide open everywhere saw me two minutes early at Yarra Glen but 10 minutes later than I wanted to be. Nine litres remaining should see out the first leg to Broadford at 110 km, so no top-up required.

The hard cases were mostly there, but no Cliff? Jason - only rides on the hardest, most demanding rides – was causing a stir – as usual. He reckons last March was his last ride but it seems longer!

At the briefing I mentioned Marty Thompson had phoned the night before. He's living at a farm in Snobs Creek and hopes to catch up with us next Sunday at Eildon.

As the mist was starting to settle in, I figured the St Andrews Road and the Kinglake to Glenburn slippery track may be full of Tour de France would-be racers – and would not be much fun in the cold and wet. Better to head to Healesville and Chum Creek Road and the relatively open swervery.

Rod and Ian volunteered for rear riding but Rod is a better fit. Rod thought he was back in Tasmania with much of the same crew in attendance, him at the back, the hills beckoning.

In Healesville I squeezed in front of another oncoming bike club – maybe 10 riders, all on big road/trail bikes, lead by a couple on an R1200 GS with lights that burnt holes in my retina – just by looking in my mirrors. I slipped past the maroon car and was gone. Misho, arriving later worked his way through the foreign group and then overlook said BMW and had quite a derby, both two up, on the wet and slippery roads, to the muddy corner half way up. It sounded like Misho had to push pretty hard to give him the slip - or that the other rider was cross that he was overtaken in the first place...

Glenburn Road is pretty average at the moment with a lot of gravelly road works – though it does appear to be finished. They've removed the widow-maker bumps and potholes – and left the gravel.

On through Flowerdale and Strath Creek where I came up behind a group of large, all black, 4WDs following a black ute. I trundled along behind them up the steep twisties, misty soaking rain starting to cool my extremities. Once at the top I squeezed by each of the vehicles in turn, the second last one flashing a pair of blue lights pushing my heart rate through the roof and causing the front black ute to slow 15 km/h. I considered the situation, figured it wasn't you know who, and then took off past the black ute for a smooth, uninterrupted run into Broadford for fuel.

We regrouped in town outside the bakery for coffees and cards two and three of the poker hand. Just as we were leaving Pina yelled at all of us for admiring a young female show stopper, barely dressed in summer attire. Paul noted chickens fed on growth hormones ain't all bad.

On to Seymour and Nagambie before negotiating the long curving wooden bridge at Kirwan. We regrouped at the completely unsignposted and well disguised Goulburn Weir for a walk out to the sluice gates, a quick photo in the rain, helmets still on. If the bikes weren't already filthy, they were about to be – but not before Paul did a merry jig dodging the clay potholes with both legs flapping left and right as the bike did its darndest to dislodge him.

The map says the road is bitumen – and for 3 km it's not, though it is dead straight and Jason managed to see an unprintable number on his speedo, but not before showering Misho and Pina with sand and mud and rocks as he gassed it up in the dirt. At the T-junction I went right and should have gone left, so when it turned to dirt I remembered making the same mistake last time. A quick U-turn and we were back on track for the last 50 km to Heathcote for lunch. I was worried (as much as you can be when riding a motorcycle in miserable wet rain at insane speeds on unfamiliar roads with a bunch of other lunatics, all battling fogging visors) – about kangaroos. Too wet, I hoped.

Heathcote, undercover, outside the wool shop, opposite our normal rest point. Lunch and another couple of cards to complete the Poker Hand formalities, Pina winning a Membership with three eights. Paul headed off for fuel, and then so did Ian. Ed bailed, choosing to head home directly down the highway. When Ian returned a Le Mans start ensued as we raced for the bikes and headed south to Tooborac (passing a horrible bunch of cars in a cloud of blinding spray) before turning off and heading for Emu Flat. As the conditions were not improving, and most people were in various states of wet and cold, I headed directly for Lancefield, Romsey and then the usual back roads to finish at Bulla under the flight path around 3.30 pm after 323 km. It wasn't long before we bade our farewells and headed home – now on dry roads!

I arrived home a smidge after 4 pm and Julie noted it had not rained at all during the day. Amazing. A quick hose and scrub of the bike, a lube of the chain – which needed tightening as well, the second time in a couple of weeks – the end is nigh I fear – and inside for a hot thawing shower.

Two hours later and my fingers are still sore – but that could just be bashing the keys on the computer. Till next time.

**Ben Warden**