The Queen Stage

300km Audax Ride

Saturday 14th of April 2012
When I first designed this course, I set out to try and make the most challenging 300km course that I could come up with. It certainly didn’t disappoint. My quads are still sore as I write this more than 48 hours after completing the ride.

A small group of 5 (Howard, Bec, Paul, Pete and Myself) set out at 6:00am from Gordon Station bound for 11 categorized climbs. The start was a nice downward run to Boundary Rd before the first climb of the day, Roseville Bridge East. From here the climbs came thick and fast for the next 30kms or so with Powderworks Rd, McCarrs Ck Rd & Akuna Bay West. Once cresting Akuna Bay we had our first small bit of respite. Next up was Bobbin Head West and then the undulating run up to Pie in the Sky for the first Checkpoint. Paul was in good form and continued to gap us on the climbs. 100km down with 200km to go.

After a 30 minute break we continued down the hill and north towards Mount White. Paul and Pete increased the pace and went up the road. Howard and I settled into a steady rhythm knowing that there was still a long way and a lot of climbing left to do. During the climb Howard received two updates from Bec, letting us know that she had reached the Checkpoint. She was far more efficient than us and only spent 10 mins at Pie in the Sky. We continued North towards Gosford via Mooney Mooney Ck and then prepared ourselves for the first of the three nastiest climbs of the day. Mangrove Rd (or Mangrove Monstrosity as I like to call it) is a really nasty climb, not much longer than a kilometre in length but brutally steep. The Garmin clocked up 23% at one stage as we ground up it at 5km/h. It was an absolute relief to reach the summit. We descended down towards Wyong and then caught up to Pete and Paul who had decided to wait. We really enjoyed the first of only three flat sections of the course through the Yarramalong Valley to the next Checkpoint (Yarramalong at 180km covered).
Straight after the lunch stop it was onto the second of the three really nasty climbs, Bumble Hill. It’s not as steep as Mangrove Monstrosity but it is three times longer, gaining over 300m in just over 4km. After the climb it’s a short run across the ridge line to Mangrove Mountain before yet again plunging back down to sea-level. Once again we enjoyed the second of three flat(ish) sections and charged along the river to the final Checkpoint at Wisemans Ferry. About two kilometres out from the ferry Pete got the only flat of the day. Luckily it was a slow leak and he was able to just pump it up and fix it while we waited for the ferry. On the ferry, Howard received another update from Bec. She was up and over Bumble hill and about to make the descent down to the Hawkesbury.

We made a (slightly) quicker stop than the previous Checkpoints. We chowed down some chips and Howard bravely tried the combination of Coke and Chocolate Milk. We put on our vests and then it was onto the climb. It was pretty clear that Pete’s comments earlier in the day that his legs were “mediocre” and “always in trouble” were questionable. He dropped the hammer and he and Paul were not seen again until the finish. We crested the climb in darkness and then cruised along the ridge, enjoying the run in towards the finish. After passing through Galston it was down into the Gorge for climb eleven of eleven, one that we have all come to know and love as the finishing climb to many Audax rides. What a sense of satisfaction to crest the climb knowing that it was a downhill run to the finish. Howard and I finished at 8:20pm approximately 20 minutes after Paul and Pete. Bec continued to ride through the night. I was pumped when I received an SMS from her letting me know that she had finished right on 11pm.

It was a brutal course with just under 4000 metres of vertical ascent. The climbs just continue to wear you down throughout the day as you hit them back to back with little chance to recover in-between. By the time you actually get some respite, your legs are already shattered from the first 8 climbs.

In My mind, I think the ride of the day was Bec’s. After losing sight of us on the first big climb, she continued to ride the final 290 kilometres solo. The ride was hard enough in a group with people to talk to and the option to take a break out of the wind on the flatter sections. To ride the entire course solo was certainly physically straining but would have been a huge mental challenge as well. Well done Bec, you’re an absolute Trooper.
I would like to thank Howard & Bec for helping me organise the finer points of the ride. I would also like to thank them as well as Paul and Pete for taking part in my first Audax Ride. The Queen Stage will be back again next year hopefully with a 200km option as well.

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