

An Extended Mid-week Ride

The Bay to Bathurst and return 4-6 March 2009

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A couple of times a year we organise an impromptu extended mid-week ride. A little while ago a few of us started to talk about a run to Bathurst and back. Initially we were thinking about just a two day run up and back. This developed into the three day run that we undertook. These rides tend to have very little structure and adapt (often in progress) to meet the wishes of individual ride members. So we started out with the only fixed agenda being to get to Bathurst, visit the National Motor Racing Museum (<http://www.nmrm.com.au/>) and do a couple of laps around Mount Panorama <http://www.mount-panorama.com/home>.

We departed from our usual meeting point at the Batemans Bay Tourist Information Centre at 8:30 AM on Wednesday, 4th March. There were three members lined up for the start, Cliff, Laurence and myself.



Cliff and his new Honda Deauville - nice one Cliff!

Our first stop was Braidwood; coffee at the Pie Shop. (As an aside: this ride report will probably sound like a grand tour of regional coffee shops!) Then on to Goulburn via the Kings Highway and the Braidwood Road.

Goulburn was our first stop for fuel. From Goulburn we headed north on the Taralga Road to Taralga for lunch.



Laurence and Cliff riding into Taralga



The Taralga Hotel - a great spot to break your journey.

We had a hearty pub meal at the Taralga Hotel. The food at this pub can be highly recommended. There was a steady stream of other two-wheeled travellers stopping or just passing through while we lunched; most on their return journeys from the World Superbikes at Philip Island. Not for the first time locals in the bar wanted to chat about motor bikes - "Ah! When I was a young bloke I used to ride a {here insert the brand name of a defunct British bike manufacturer}; they were really good. What're you'se blokes ride 'n then? A bloody Honda eh! Didn't have them in my day.". Well fed and watered we headed north again up the Taralga Road to Oberon. This is a great bike riding road, one of many we were going to encounter on this trip. The surface is mostly good with open corners and great scenery. The drop down into the Abercrombie River is quite steep and the corners are quite sharp (probably only an issue to whimps like me!). By the way, the road changes its name to Abercrombie Road after the river.

The Taralga/Abercrombie Roads are part of the Tablelands Way (which I didn't realise stretched from Canberra to Muswellbrook) and is said to be fully sealed - well that's not quite true; there is a kilometre or two still being worked on just before you reach the outskirts of Oberon. I include this bit of pedantic minutia just in case you want to avoid getting any dust and/or dirt on your two-wheeled charger. Slightly road-stained, we arrived at Oberon at about 4:00 PM - overall, a good day's riding.



The Royal Hotel, Oberon

Dear reader, I slightly misled you at the start of this report. The ride itinerary did have one additional bit of planning; we booked our first night's accommodation at the Royal Hotel in Oberon - why? I don't know but it seemed like a good idea. The Royal has single rooms for \$30 per night, including light breakfast. The Royal is also "motorcyclist friendly", they let you put your bike in their beer garden out the back which has a high wall and is locked at night. After unpacking we did a quick circuit of the main street on foot and had another coffee in the only cafe open at that relatively late hour (4:30 PM ?). Back to the Royal and for two of us at least there was a need to wash down the road dust that the coffee had missed. The Royal has a lively bar and a good restaurant serving hearty meals - I can recommend the veal schnitzel and chips. The rooms are adequate with relatively comfortable beds. I slept well. Some may see the shared toilet and shower facilities as a bit of an issue but they were clean and tidy and the shower was hot on Thursday morning.



Secure bike parking at the Royal Hotel, Oberon

Over breakfast of cereal and toast with instant coffee (well it was only \$30 per night) we discussed the route for the coming day. Given we were so close to Bathurst it was decided that we would have a ride up to Ilford and back to Bathurst via Sofala to fill in the morning. There were two roads we could choose: either stay on the Tablelands Way into Lithgow and come back along the Great Western Highway to the Mudgee Road or alternatively reach the Highway via Tarana. I had travelled the route from Oberon to Ilford via Tarana before and recommended it because it was a pretty run and was all sealed. There are two roads linking Oberon and Tarana: Lowes Mount Road and Hazel Grove Road. If you are at all concerned about travelling on dirt roads then you should be aware that Hazel Grove Road has about 15 km of dirt (not bad but quite rutted in some corners). Still it was rough enough to cause one of our number some concern. (Hint: Honda's travel this kind of road with no problems!) To compound the problem of choice of road I asked a Tarana local for directions (there is a four or five way junction at Tarana which is not well sign-posted). His directions turned out to be wrong - I would like to be charitable and say that his "mistake" had nothing to do with the way I pronounced his town's name (Me: "Tarana" as in Holden Torana - Him: "Tay-rana" as in who know what). The lesson is: even if your maps are buried in your pack or panniers, get them out and use them. We should have gone north-east on the Rydal-Sodwalls-Tarana Road but instead went north on the Tarana Road. Despite heading the wrong way, this was yet again a great riding road. It's sealed (at least I got that right) but is only one lane. Tarana Road winds along Diamond Swamp Creek with both creek and road lined with mature poplar trees - very good ride and great scenery. Mr "Tay-rana" had directed us "WEST" along the Highway until after the "correctional institution" where we would come to the intersection with the Mudgee Road. By the time I realised our mistake we were on the outskirts of Bathurst and it was too late to go back to the real Mudgee Road. So into Bathurst for coffee (yet again) at the Tourist Information Centre and devise a "Plan B".

The cafe in the Bathurst Tourist Information Centre is a real gem; the coffee is double shot and two of us found it difficult to get mounted-up again - so we had a second! Owing on caffeine we climbed back on our bikes and headed out to Mount Panorama. Our first stop was the National Motor Racing Museum. It is adjacent to Murray's Corner and has plenty

of parking. It costs \$8 (or \$5.50 for seniors - that card comes in handy!) to get in. The collection is quite extensive with a good selection of racing cars and motorbikes. My favourites were the Cortina (Mk 1) GT-500, the Honda CB1100R and a really cute little Honda Elsinore motorcrosser turned into a flat-tracker/road racer. The displays are well presented and there is a small theatre running a history of Mt Panorama film. The Museum is well worth a visit.



The Honda Racing Team preparing to tackle Mt. Panorama

At this point one of our number "headed south" leaving the two Hondas to tackle a few laps of the "Mountain". I've been round the circuit before but in a car; this was my first time on a bike. The circuit is a normal road for most of the year and has a 60 Kph speed limit. Well even with that speed limit my vivid recollections were: how steep it was going up through The Cutting and how much more steep it was going over Skyline and down through The Esses and The Dipper (I might have even used a bit of break down here). Certainly by the end of our second lap my times were beginning to tumble and I was nudging below 10 minutes! How do racers do it? Especially on a motorcycle!

The problems of the morning were further compounded by me filling the tank of Soichiro with ethanol based fuel at the United filling station in Bathurst. I saw no indication that the 95 octane pump was for ethanol based fuel until putting the nozzle back into the bowser there was a 3 cm square sticker telling you so! NEVER again will I use United fuel. Lunch was at Jacques Raveneau's (where the burgers ARE better - but the

fries are not). It was approximately 1:00 PM and we needed to decide where we were going to go next. Our original plan, tentatively, was to go down to Blayney or Cowra for the night, but it was too early and we would be in Cowra by mid-afternoon. Orange looked a good option; we could go to Cowra via Cargo and Canowindra. This became "Plan B2".

The Mitchell Highway from Bathurst to Orange is just plain boring, made even worse by a "tin-top" driver who wanted to set a world record for the slowest time between the two towns. Orange looks to be a very pretty place and has gone into the memory bank as a "place to re-visit and stay a while". A short stop in Orange to add a bit of fuel to try and dilute the Bathurst ethanol. While there we disgraced ourselves by asking about road conditions to "Can-o-win-dra" - "Your not from around here are you?" the filling station operator asked.

We took the Cargo Road through Orange East (which incidentally is south west of the CBD) and Cargo to Canowindra. I think we both agreed that this was the riding highlight of the trip. This is just a fabulous bit of road that seems to wind along ridge lines, occasionally dipping down through gullies. The corners are open and can be taken without even throttling-off. The scenery is open farm land that is suffering because of the drought. This is a very good bit of riding road. Canowindra Road to Cowra is another very good road; more open than Cargo Road and the countryside is flatter. We made good time along this stretch (you can read whatever you like into that statement) reaching Cowra by about 4:30 PM. At the end of day 2, we were tired and looking for somewhere to stop. A coffee was had while we try to decide where to stay for the night. The cafe owner recommended the Townhouse Hotel/Motel but it was well above our modest budget so we chose the Cowra Hotel at the bottom of Kendal Street.

The Cowra Hotel has quite good single rooms for \$25 per night plus breakfast. Once again, facilities are shared but were clean and close by. Like the Royal in Oberon, the Cowra lets you park your bike in their beer garden which is locked at night. Also like the Royal, the locals were very friendly, in particular Ziggy whose daughter runs the pub. Ziggy has a BMW K1100 which he also leaves parked in the beer garden. Ziggy bought

his BMW for \$700 and has "patched-up" the fairing with a bit of wood and fibre glass. He has also built his own rack which looks like it could take the weight of a Mack truck. I think he was just so pleased to have a couple of fellow bike riders to chat with and he was genuinely a nice guy. Yet another good hearty pub meal for dinner - I had bangers and mash with mushroom gravy, yum I can still taste it as I type this. However, not all was well with the Cowra Hotel; Kendal Street is also known as the Mid-Western Highway and I reckon that all the trucks that are not on the Hume Highway of a night are travelling up or down Kendal Street checking their air brakes as they do so. Then there was the local council's street sweeper that must have passed my open window four times during the night; as if the noise was not bad enough, the room was flooded with blinking orange light. Though the bed was comfortable, I did not sleep well at the Cowra Hotel. Breakfast was \$5 and consisted of as much toast as you wanted with Vegemite and sliced tomato (now there's an old fashioned combination) and instant coffee or tea bags. Ziggy however made us a brewed coffee - did I say what a nice bloke he was?

Cowra has many places of interest to see including the Japanese gardens; however, we had both been to the town several times previously so we left just after 8:00 AM and headed for Boorowa along the Lachlan Valley Highway. I lived in Canberra for thirty years and have travelled this road on many occasions, but this was the first by bike. Cowra to Boorowa seemed to pass quite quickly. The countryside is very dry. We stopped at the Boorowa Bakery for yet another coffee (I was very tempted by the apple turnovers with fresh cream but my heart thanked me for my resistance). The decision was "which way to go next"; the road to Crookwell has recently been paved so that looked interesting, the Lachlan Valley Highway to the Hume Highway is very boring and Cliff had never been to Harden-Murrumburrah and particularly wanted to go to Binalong - decision made!

The road across from Boorowa to Harden is quite good, sealed all the way, but is very rough in parts from constant patching. It's probably true to say that Cliff was not overwhelmed by Harden-Murrumburrah but I was able to show him a few points of interest: firstly, the old garage at the top of the hill heading west out of Murrumburrah, for years it has

held a collection of interesting old cars including a couple of Jaguar MK VII's (if you are passing through its worth a stop to peer through the dirty window glass at this treasure trove), and secondly, the old Council Chambers building that is still for sale and which my wife won't let me buy. We back-tracked along Route 94 and on to Binalong stopping just west of the town to visit the grave of the bush ranger John Gilbert.



John Gilbert's grave with his No. 1 fan

From here the trip was really on its homeward leg. We droned up the Hume Highway to the Yass Service Centre for a nourishing lunch of burgers and fries although the McCafe coffee is really quite good. After lunch it was onto familiar roads through Murrumbateman, Gunderoo, Bungendore to Braidwood for our last coffee of the trip and then down the Clyde Mountain to Batemans Bay.

Highlights of the trip were:

- *The best ride of the trip was Cargo and Canowindra Roads from Orange to Cowra.*
- *The best coffee of the trip was at the Bathurst Tourist Information Centre.*
- *The best point of interest was the people we met in the pubs each night.*

By the way, we travelled approximately 920 Km and Soichiro averaged 5.37 l/100 km.

Thanks to my riding companions for a great ride.

Peter