

Race Report 2006

It was a depleted group that gathered at Purni Bore for the start of the 2006 Cycle Challenge. Many had failed to make the start line, including the Army contingent (sent off to Afghanistan) and the Air Force (sent off to Malaysia). Another no-show was 'Jack of the Desert', who turned tail when his Oka balked at the fourth dune in from the Queensland side and blew the gearbox. Of course he didn't know that the four dunes he tackled were the only really big ones - he must have thought it was going to be a bugger of a year at that point. Jack - please contact the substitute Fines Mistress Donna and she will provide you with an invoice of your accumulated fines for your non-appearance and pathetic excuses. Lastly, the Tasmanian contingent didn't bother to show up at Purni Bore until after dark, but did at least provide the evening's entertainment as they ran around trying to erect a tent of roughly the dimensions required for a three ring circus.

Those riders who did front up were treated to excellent track conditions, with little sand across the track, only the faintest smell of rain and generally mild temperatures. Fortunately they were saved from having it all just too easy by some mighty strong head winds and nasty bum bashing corrugations.

Day One - We were treated to three rousing blasts from Bean's car horn at 4:30am and cries of joy and excitement could be heard emanating from assorted tents and swags. The front convoy went careering off into the fast-approaching sunrise with 'Evil Wes' and Timekeeper Su leading the charge in Mark's Troopy. Fortunately Mark was riding and thus wasn't witness to the feats that his Troopy achieved over the next few days. Ed was the first rider into the lunch stop, closely followed by Jason. The Sweep had been concerned about the limited pickings on offer with so few riders out on the track, but was overjoyed to have his services required early on.

Crew and officials were delighted to have the sun emerge from the morning's cloud and temperatures rise as the day went on. The riders weren't quite so thrilled and the afternoon stage saw Richard hit the wall as he became severely dehydrated. Heinz arrived at the finish fuming after constant problems with a broken pedal. He raised the ancient art of bike-tossing to a new level as he took out his frustrations on his not-so-beloved bicycle. A new campsite on a smooth prickle-free claypan in between the dunes was a popular choice - the dry, calm conditions made this a lovely spot for the evening. Donna had been promoted to Fines Mistress in the absence of Jack, and took the opportunity to ladle fines on all and sundry for offenses both real and imagined.

Day Two - Su seemed very disappointed at the lack of sand available to make the riders miserable this morning, but cheered up when a howling head wind blew up as the front convoy set up at the lunch stop.

More headwinds conspired to make the afternoon a fairly long haul for most of the riders. The nightly briefing was greatly enlivened as tales of Keith's fiery episode began to emerge. Without doubt this was indeed a worthy contender for the 'Goose of the Day' Award. All present were strongly warned against asking for assistance with matters electrical from Keith, as if his burnt and bandaged hands and the charred remains of his HF radio weren't warning enough.

Day Three - Louise and Donna headed out early to evacuate Richard to Birdsville. The patient did arrive safely despite the ladies' efforts to crack his head on the roof of the vehicle as they soared over the dunes. Louise pretty much said it all as they fronted up to one monster of which she said 'that's not a dune - that's the #%@?! Great Wall of China!!' While the approaches were firm, a vertical wall of sand greeted drivers on several occasions. Most took the 'spread your wings and fly' sort of approach with the notable exception of Bean

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and Doctor Hugh. Wanting to be different they got thoroughly bogged on the top of the last big dune and spent half an hour or so digging furiously while the Water Stop Three crew watched with interest from their vantage point at the base of the dune. It wasn't half as much fun for the riders who staggered wearily over the steep sandy caps while being lashed with sand flung at them by the raging wind.

That evening the Goose was retrieved from Keith after allegations of inappropriate treatment. Bean immediately prescribed bed rest, recuperation and counselling for the Goose after its traumatic experience (possibly motivated more by the fear of his own Goose-worthy performance than by concern for the Goose we suspect).

Day Four – The riders got some respite with flat and fast conditions as we arrived on the Birdsville track before turning off onto the Inside Track. All, except for Ed that is. Ed, with a two hour plus lead on Heinz, decided to continue straight ahead towards Birdsville (we can only presume he wanted to check that the beer was cold). After an extra 26km he did rejoin the race completely unfazed by his slight detour.

A revised night stop avoided the mosquito-ridden waterhole of past years and even offered a couple of trees. With our arrival in Birdsville looming Donna stepped up the fines pace and few escaped unscathed with the Sri Lankans coming under fire yet again.

Day Five - Crews enjoyed a lovely smooth fast run into Birdsville for a refreshing shower, callously ignoring the agony of the riders as

they ploughed along into a vicious headwind with the temperature climbing steadily. The Sweep was starting to perk up after a couple of quiet days but all rolled safely over the line outside the Pub in high spirits.

As the celebrations got underway the Goose was declared fit for service and promptly awarded to Doctor Hugh. You would expect a Paediatric Surgeon to have a certain degree of manual dexterity but this was all too often sadly lacking in Doctor Hugh, who, by all accounts, cannot even manage to button up a shirt without mucking it up.

With 2007 being the 20th Anniversary of the event rumours are flying thick and fast as to who will front up on the line. Former Race Director Rod Townsend is said to be planning to ride. This rumour has sparked a deluge of former riders calling to offer their services as Sweep.

Several support crews have indicated their willingness to support a rider next year. Please get in touch if you, or a friend, are keen to ride but lack a vehicle and crew. A request from Bean - If you have donations or sponsorship money from 2006 please collect these funds so that the final result can be notified to PBF for this year's event.

Race dates for 2007: 2st – 6th October
Rider numbers – maximum of 50
Opening date for entries: 1st March 2007

See ya out there!

Gaye (Flipper)

