

Great Race 2016

Cold Start

When the bikes all start first or second time, you know you are set for a good trip. With bags packed, bikes checked, and spirits high, we set out of the sunny Melbourne suburbs towards the dock, ready to start 12 days over the rugged Tasmania countryside.

Arriving at the port, most had already shown up, discussing in little clusters about where they were looking forward to visit, and what kind of terrain we should expect. Everybody was a bit excited and anxious to get away from the rigmarole of work, and just spend some time cruising and drinking with friends, so after a late start, the Ferry slid out into the night with a cheer, carrying us the 370km to Tasmania through the choppy waters.

After a fitful night's sleep and a heavy dose of coffee we assembled on the lower decks of the ferry, ready for our first day of the Gypsy Tour. With a small stop for breakfast in Davenport, we headed towards our first destination, Stanley, the grey clouds overhead not extinguishing anybody's excitement. Stopping on the way to visit Ken Jupp's awesome collection of classic Triumph's and other British bikes, we quickly got caught up in the astounding scenery of the Tasmania countryside as we headed along the northern coast.

With the final hours of the first day wicketed with mist as we drove through the highlands, we arrived in the idyllic town of Stanley, ready for a scrumptious dinner at Hursey Seafood's, as Chris gave out the official Gypsy Tour 2016 pins.

Rising early the next morning for one of the longer legs of the trip, the sounds of penguins being our natural alarm clock, we coasted down the A10 towards Waratah, where we stopped and refueled in the crisp mountain air. Not even the low visibility nor the slick roads could stop us having a blast as we throttled down the mountain passes as we entered the mining country. We arrived at the lakeside village of Tullah early in the evening (probably doubling the population) and proceeded to drink while the mechanics and tinkerers tried to isolate the issue afflicting Mr. White's & 52 Blackhawk (And the first of many bodge-jobs to be done to get us all around Tassie)

Like a morning rooster, the purring of the Indian's being started in the yard woke up the sleepy hamlet, and we began our long route down to Queenstown. Cutting across to the ocean via Zeehan and Strahan, the truly alien and empty environment was truly made clear; the only signs of humans being old and abandoned bits of archaic mining machinery strewn across the occasional bare hill amongst a sea of verdant greenery.

Celebrating a good day's driving with copious amounts of beer and huge pizzas to boot, we settled into our accommodation, ready for the group to split the next day. With the majority heading towards Hobart, a small group of us were headed back up towards Launceston, ready for the Great Race to start the day after.

Race Rivalry

With some minor issues with Pete's #35 leaving him to get picked up by the recovery vehicle so they could fix it, the rest of us headed through the luscious mountain path of the B26, possibly one of the greatest roads on the trip. Weaving through the backroads as they wound their way around mountains, and overlooking forests and lakes that were seemingly untouched by human hands, you truly got a sense for the emptiness of the Tasmanian Countryside. As an added bonus, we bumped into Mr. 101 casually as we passed through Tullah!

A quick detour to Richardson's Harley museum, and we arrived at the hosts of this year's Great Race ; Country Club Tasmania. After registering the bikes and getting some minor adjustments out of the way, we joined in with the communal BBQ, as everybody got ready for the awesome events of the next day, with rumors and advice spreading throughout the crowd, the most common tip being about throwing away the map!

Being Bike #14 guaranteed us an early start for the race, so we turned in for an early night. We arrived the next morning with no holdups, everybody beaming as the race officially started with the first bike leaving at 8 AM. Out from Launceston, we headed towards the north-east of the island, and our first average time trial of the weekend; a 33mph average goal in the stretch between Turners Marsh and Piper's River. A quick fuel stop and a shake of the leg and we were off towards Bridport, making good time as we proceeded to blitz through the gentle meander of the terrain.

Or so we thought.

As we quickly learned, the road between Bridport and South Mount Cameron is poor at best, and ravaged at it's worst. Numerous potholes and unseeable dips in the road made for rough traveling, and more than a few times I heard the suspension bottom out on the bike. When we thought it couldn't get worse, the feared 12km dirt track entered into view. Slightly muddy conditions made the track incredibly slippery, and we saw more than a few riders turn back against the conditions. Large lumps of rock were camouflaged against the dirt, and dodging them at the last second meant bolting across the ravines left in place by the tractor and truck tires as they networked between the farms.

Breaking through the other side, fists raised in the air, we hit the checkpoint at South Cameron with plenty of time to spare. Driving through the valleys at Derby, we quickly upped the pace to get in our lunch at Branxholm. With both bikes and riders fed and ready to go, we jettisoned onwards towards Scottsdale, hanging a left and beginning the descent into Launceston. With the road between Springfield and Nunamura being a great sightseeing opportunity, and minimal instructions, we coasted our way through the woods and hills, before finally seeing the suburbs surrounding Launceston appear in the Horizon.

With day one complete, and 185 Miles rode, the environment inside the hall as we came together for the first dinner was jovial. Smiling faces and raucous laughter disguised everybody's interest in the day's results, and we were shortly told that out of the roughly 4000 points earned on the first day, there was only a 104 point lead by one of the teams! We also learned that the Antique

Motorcycle Club of America would be running an Australian event in the near future, with the specifics being released in August, much to everyone's surprise.

Also given were the results of the day one time trials with the results as follows:

First Time Trial:

First: William & Di Macnamara

Second: Ian Gordon

Third : Gary Goodwin

Second Time Trial:

First: Kevin Green

Second: Tony Smith

Third: Matt Willis

Overall:

First: Charlie Barber

Second: Chris Wells

Third: William & Di Macnamara

The Break Down

Day Two gave us a nice late start, with only 160 miles to travel, and yet it was a frantic and muggy start to the day. Rainfall in the night had meant that the electrics on Rick's bike were being particular, and after an hour of tinkering by various people, the Midas touch of Mr. Pilgrim saved the day and got the bike going again. Our unsuccessful repair attempts meant we missed the car park time trial in the morning, and we got to our starting positions for the race just in time. Our route carried us up through Legana towards Exeter, where the first average time trial hit us with a 31mph limit.

After that, it was a nice seamless ride down to our lunch spot at Mole Creek, and it was only when we hit the checkpoint at Sheffield did we realize in our excitement we were now missing some of the bikes, and a cursory glance at our phone told us what we didn't want to hear when we were already behind time : Rick had broken down, and was being carted to lunch on the back of one of the recovery vehicles. Luckily it was fixed before lunch was over, and we hustled onwards towards home base. With some awesome scenery present at the next checkpoint, based up at a lookout point up in

the mountains, we arrived in good time back at the Country Club, and settled into our cups as we awaited the dinner and the final results of the race.

Trepidation and speculation ran the crowd as we eagerly awaited the results of the race, and were held at bay by the news that the team who led the first day had not kept their lead in the second day, and there was less than 50 points between the teams. Silence spread across the hall as the letter was pulled out of the envelope, and : “Harley Davidson wins!”

Sigh

Apart from mild disappointment that we didn't’t win, the evening was full of good food, beer and conversation. “Ah, we have 2 years on Harley anyway, and we will get it next year anyway” was heard often amongst the whispers of the Iron Indians.

Packed and ready for the next jaunt, we had a long stretch ahead to reunite with the rest of the Iron Indian’s : 234km’s down the middle of Tasmania, crossing down to Eaglehawk Neck where we would spend the night. Pulling into Campbell Town for breakfast, Sandy’s Sport Scout decided it was taking a break and powered down just as we rolled into the servo. A bite to eat and we began tinkering, and after nearly two hours, a new battery and a broken generator chain, we were ready to continue the ride south.

A rainstorm in the valleys around Campagnia caught us by surprise, and we looked particular bedraggled as we drank coffee and worked out the quickest route down and across to Eaglehawk. Just over an hour later, we pulled into the car park, tired and a tad bit hungry, to be eagerly met by the rest of those who had headed into Hobart. A big (and probably best) meal of the entire trip had us sprawled across this large table, and with Hogg near the centre it was a bit reminiscent of the Last Supper!

We traipsed onto Swansea the next day, but not before visiting the historic site of Port Arthur, and being fully engaged in the history behind the prison life there, and the unfortunate massacre that occurred nearly 20 years ago. It was kind of haunting walking through the site there, knowing the pain and suffering that occurred there in both the recent and distant past.

The next day, we popped in to see the Bicheno Motorcycle museum, a small shrine dedicated to some of the rarest and iconic motorcycles of years gone by, before we swung around the trunk of Elephants Pass in a light drizzle to arrive at the world-famous MT. Elephant Pancakes for a delicious lunch, before twisting down the riverside valley into Scamander and up into ST. Helens. Being one of the final nights on the trip, we got everybody together outside our accommodation , and shared a BBQ amongst ourselves, until we slowly returned groggily to our rooms and slept.

We trekked out towards Launceston the next morning, and a quick detour to see Colombo falls was magnificent, until we tried to return to the main road, where we found ourselves swarmed with cows on both sides of us and several farmers trying to herd the beasts back towards their paddock. A few strays had even managed to get a Kilometer or so further up the road, and so we kept our eye out for them until we left cattle country. It was only once we got into Launceston did we realize what we would encounter the next morning.

The road leading to our accommodations car park was on a 45 degree angle, and the car park to the right. This meant that in the morning (That evening being ST. Patrick day), a left hand uphill turn was required for everybody to leave the accommodations. To add to this, it was going to rain in the night. A lot. Our final evening was spent split apart, the classier individuals heading into one of the restaurants in the center of town, while the rest just decided to get lashed up in one of the local pubs.

As we feared, the final morning did not go well. With a large number feeling seedy from the previous night, a torrential downpour lashing down from the heavens, and that damn hill in the way, we struggled to get the bikes out, and after a few last-minute applications of WD40 we were en-route to Davenport for the ferry that night. Stopping by Anver's chocolate factory for a refreshing cup of hot chocolate, we descended into Davenport and eagerly awaited the ferry to arrive, so we could escape the rain.

And as we boarded the ferry, it was a sad realization that the Gypsy Tour 2016 was over. An awesome two weeks spent barreling around the beautiful Tasmanian Countryside had ended as quickly as it begun. A big thank you to Chris Horner for organizing the trip, and a smaller one for everyone who came and made the trip so pleasurable. Until the next Great Race!

By William Barthelmie