

Our Road Trip to the 2012 MotoGP at Phillip Island

We departed David's place at Modbury North at exactly 6:27am; 3 minutes early by my standards, and I was the LAST to arrive! Everyone was waiting patiently for me, and I was blown away that a bunch of blokes would all be organized at that hour of the morning. "What a start to my first trip with my "new" club-mates" I thought to myself!

Things could only get better, and they did! Over the next few days I began to realize that the only group that'd be better organized might be, and I repeat "might be", the bloody Australian Army on a major exercise!

It was fantastic and a real pleasure to be a part of, and a real credit to Otto, David and everyone who helped in the planning of the trip.

The four travelling days, two to the island and two back, took us on roads that most interstate travellers don't use. Consequently we saw parts of South Australia and Victoria that we may otherwise have never seen and which made the travel all the more interesting. That also meant very few semitrailers and caravans, hidden cameras, coppers or general traffic; what a delight for a bunch of gentlemen on motorcycles! We also passed through some little villages with interesting names or features; Frances being the first that springs to mind, but I promised the boys I wouldn't harp on about Frances and its pub, disappointed though I was at the time, so I'll move along to the thriving metropolis of Gymbowen! It had a derelict "Bar" that I'd have loved to look at properly but I must've been the only one to see it! It would make a great photo, so perhaps next time. Arapiles was the next unusual name, through Horsham and before you knew it we were zigzagging our way up the Grampians and on to a lookout with a magnificent view over the sharply edged mountains and a great spot for photos of us old buggers from the Juventus Motorcycle Club!

After our overnight stay at a Comfort Inn in Ballarat (sounds dangerous but wasn't!) we headed for Healesville for a lunch stop, riding through the delightfully green country via Daylesford, Woodend and Kinglake, a region which was totally devastated by massive fires a few years ago. It was great to see the trees coming back to greenness again. Coincidentally we were very high up on a ridge through there and the view right through to Melbourne was really spectacular! Next was the descent into Healesville, a motorcyclist's delight as we wound down the sinuous strip of bitumen, one beautiful bend after another, all the way towered over by huge Mountain Ash trees and tree ferns that we just don't see in SA! We were as happy as a bunch of schoolboys while we relaxed and ate lunch in Healesville! We had to put on our wet weather gear at some stage as we headed further south towards our destination but it didn't really rain although did get colder. Naturally the traffic thickened as we got closer but it didn't take long until the coastal waters came into sight and then we were pulling up into the carport of our double story "home" for the next few days. It was a very nice place, and I was more than happy to be able to "convert" the downstairs lounge into my own bedroom (two lounges pulled together became my bed) as four adults in what was really the kids room with four bunk beds was rather cramped I thought. The modern upstairs kitchen/lounge was superb, likewise the bathrooms, bedrooms and front and rear decks as well as the green and grassy area of Smith's Beach!

Another major advantage of where we stayed was that we were able to walk to and from the track. Admittedly it was a 35 to 40 minute walk but this was, I've no doubt, all part of the organizing committees surprise package, a daily fitness routine thrown in at no extra cost!

Our pre-booked seats in the Lukey Heights Stand were in an excellent spot beside the track, with views out over the Southern Ocean an added bonus. The riders come uphill on a sweeping left-hander as they approached and passed us and quite a few of them slid off right in front of us or at the right hander just a short distance further along the track. Spectacular stuff! Now my good neighbour Chris decided that I just had to see Stoner Corner, so a few of us set out on another epic walk. Fortunately for me we came across the "XXXX" mobile pantechnicon/bar and even though it was only 10am I recalled what one of my sons had once told me a few years ago: "Dad, it's 12 O'clock SOMEWHERE in the world!" So up the stairs we climbed, and the view from there was even more spectacular, including the "XXXX Angels" in their skin-tight red jeans! The beer was lovely and cold of course but the crowning moment for me was as we were leaving the bar. Deep Purple cranked up on the sound system and I thought I must've died and gone to Heaven! What a start to my first day at a Moto GP event!

The next two days of practice and qualifying plus some support races were filled with drama and excitement, as expected, but of course "that wasn't all!" Located right behind our stand was the Supercross circuit! All we had to do was stand at the side or top of our grandstand and we got a bird's eye view as the dirt riders flew through the air from one jump to another. This was all included in our Luxury/Top Notch Package! The only down side of these days was the coldness of the surrounding air and the occasional very light rain but we were, after all on the bottom of the continent so were lucky it wasn't raining heavily. Race day's weather however was just about perfect, no doubt also organized by the said Juventus committee!

Our last day at the track was race day and what a day it was to be an Aussie at Philip Island! Arthur Sissis gained his first ever podium finish with a fabulous third in the Moto3 race and we were able to watch his inside passing manoeuvres on the right hander just past our spot. Gutsy stuff to say the least, and "he made them stick"!

Then there were the 600s in the Moto2, featuring Aussie Anthony West who had also never been on the podium Phillip Island. He too rode like a man possessed in another very exciting race, eventually forcing his way into 2nd spot which was also fantastic to see! Now I can't help myself here, but did you read that young Mr West has recently gone "positive"? Yes, failed a drug test taken a month or so ago for a stimulant (just "the thing" for motorcycle racing I'd reckon!). He received a one month suspension. Lucky he's not a racing cyclist! Makes you think though, doesn't it?

Casey's race was really just a procession after Danny Pedrosa fell off early and Jorge Lorenzo just circulating safely to finish and become World Champion. Casey was just perfect, lap after lap, precision personified, always "on the nail" and no doubt in a world of his own! I had never seen bikes at that level before so for me it was really amazing to watch these guys come past every minute and a half or so, and as for hitting 333 to 335kph on the straight every lap, that's just incredible!

However incredible as it all was, one of our crew, and I'd never mention my neighbour's name for heaven's sake, was drifting in and out of consciousness as the race progressed. Ah, it'd been a tiring

exercise by that time after all! Later that night we drinkers probably consumed a few more coldies than previous nights because there were a lot more great moments on which to reminisce, but I can honestly say that I never once witnessed drunkenness or stupidity, not even by me!

I need to add at this point that if there was a job to be done someone had probably already beaten everyone else to it! Cleaning the barbie (Otto,) cooking the grub (various), washing the dishes (many), sweeping the floor, preparing the caramelized onions or coleslaw (Gus, our great resident chef), driving into town for more supplies (Brad and the lovely Bianca); this was a special group of people. And on the way to and from the island we were guided by our baggage handlers/GPS operators, Fred and David. (Most of the time accurately, although on one "off course detour" we did get to ride over the most dangerous, wobbly, up and down section of bitumen road we'd ever experienced, but for which we'll be eternally grateful!) What a bunch!

Monday morning's departure was scheduled for 7:00am and this time I was on time too! The highlight of the day for me was the ferry ride across the water from Sorrento to Queenscliff. The weather was lovely and the water calm as I SMS'd my wife and a mate to tell them where I was at that moment in time; somewhere different, especially for a South Australian. Then more back roads and green countryside, a lunch stop somewhere and then, when we were only about 40 or 50 km's from our overnight town of Hamilton, we drifted into the thriving metropolis of Noorat and there was this beautiful, old, double-storied pub, the Mount Noorat Hotel. Wow! It really stood out in what was honestly just a little village of a town, one store, a few houses spread out here and there and this beautiful old pub. We automatically stopped and all agreed that this was a photo opportunity too good to be missed. Helmets were off, stretches taken, a look around, photos...great. I'm afraid my brain was thinking of other things; "This is a classy old pub, there's not far to go, we will never get back here together again, ..." Oh yes, I'd also forgotten to mention that the pub didn't open until 4 pm and it was now only 20 past 3! I thought of my dad, Kevin (he liked a beer too!) and thought how proud he'd be of me if I could strike-up a friendly conversation with the proprietor and get us in "a bit early". So I knocked on the front door, then the side windows, back door, etc. I called out in my nicest tones, but wasn't having any luck at all! I had virtually given up hope when all of a sudden a light inside came on, the front door opened and a woman called us in! Yes! I hasten to add that she wasn't particularly happy, but she given up trying to ignore me. She was the proprietor and had been asleep! "Oh shit" I said to myself! But again I thought of dad, started talking/explaining/begging forgiveness and now Elinore and I are the best of friends! The Guinness was superb and she gave us a history lesson regarding the district of Noorat before having a photo with us as we were about to leave. The rest of the trip was just a steady realization that SA is hotter and drier than Victoria, but finally having the Coorong on our left provided glimpses of a different environment which was good. David and Fred said their goodbyes to us at Taillem Bend, Gus turned off at Tungkillo, Paul at Birdwood, and then Chris took off like a man possessed. He was back in the hills and in his element! Otto and I just cruised along until I was held up by slow traffic around Chain of Ponds and then I refuelled, on my own again, at St Agnes.

I've said all that needs saying plus a bit. That was one of the most enjoyable weeks of my life. So well organized, and a great bunch of people who just happen to be a part of "my" Juventus Motorcycle Club!

Thank you guys, one and all, it was such fun!

Brian O'Grady.

PS

Struth, I forgot one major sticking point: "Ya can't rely on Otto to bring the bloody cheese!"