

Philip Island? – that way son

I rode to PI on my own, leaving early Wednesday morning. I had caught a head cold from my grandson the weekend before, had Tuesday off work and was still getting over it by the time I was to take off. I had packed the night before but had yet to load up the bike. I was loading the last of the bags on when my girlfriend called in to see me off. It was lightly drizzling on and off, it was cold, I was cold and we were debating if I really needed to take my gumboots. Angela asked two quick questions – how small could I roll them down to? And giving how small they could be, what would it hurt to take them? It was the first of three defining points of my weekend away at MotoGP 2009: given how wet the island was, the gumboots were SOOOO bloody good to have!

So all loaded up, I headed out at 7:30am in light rain. Got to the start of the freeway about 8:15 and passed the first of many bike packs at the Cross Road / Portrush Mobil. During the ride to Melbourne I never saw a group of riders larger than three on the actual road – all were pulled over at servo's.

It was great riding conditions for quick riding: no strong wind to battle and not cold enough to cause one to stop and pee and warm up every hour or so. It was overcast and drizzling till about Tailem Bend and from there to Melbourne it was fine and even clear blue sky. I made it to Melbourne with just the two petrol stops one at Bordertown and the second at Ararat.

I was hoping to catch the Queenscliff to Sorrento ferry and then sleep the night at Rye. The last ferry is 6pm VIC time. I got there 5:45 .. SA time – and therefore 15 minutes too late.

I kipped the night at a caravan park just out of Queenscliff and was up next morning and out at the ferry by 20 to 7 – first one for the day was at 7am. There was only three bikers on the first ferry – couple doubled up on a hog, myself and another local guy on a Ducati Monster 1000 riding to work. I chatted with the Ducati guy for a while, the first of countless people you meet at bike gigs – a stranger except for the shared common bond of motor bikes and riding.

The two and a bit hours to the island was in rain – heavy in parts – but apart from still being heavy in the head from my cold, it did little to dampen the mounting excitement of making it to the island. Pulled in just after ten to the wet and windy trackside campground.

Slip into that ,sport!

With the pre-booking I had received my camping entry wristband in the mail. This meant I could ride straight through to the camping ground. At the ground entrance, security waved me down to check my luggage for alcohol and after 10 seconds or so of patting my panniers and rucksack I started the slippery descent down into the grounds. Most of the spots by the fence perimeter were taken and at this stage most of the whole middle of the ground was empty. It had stopped raining but you could tell this was temporary as the sky remained heavy with rain clouds and it was quite windy. As for the riding track through the camp ground, well, that was already slippery and starting to muddy up. I rode down as carefully as I could with a fully loaded bike, stayed off the front brakes and tried to not drop it in the mud in front of everyone.



Two-thirds of the way down the second defining moment: I spied Mark and Steve and then Grant and Alli – woo hoo Sabers, just like that! I pulled over and parked up by the crew. There was “MacGyver” Steve, Mark “I can pack my bike higher than yours”, Grant “Mr Woodstock”, Allicat, Dennis “my Triumph doesn’t leak oil!”, and “Whyalla” Dave. There was space by them and I was in like Flynn. They were still settling themselves in having only arrived not long before me. What a find! I was a Philip Island virgin and to run into the other Sabers guys was just excellent. This was going to be way cool.



It was very windy and we had to rig up tarpaulins against the outside of the fence-line we were camping along to act as a windbreak. Unloading, setting up the tent and then moving in and unpacking in the wind was mildly challenging, changing out of wet weather gear and riding leathers was great, unpacking and putting on my gumboots was priceless. The rain was on and off all day and as more riders rode in the track was just getting more muddy and treacherous as quite a few found out, even some of us. (No names mentioned here!)

Grant showed us newbies around the essentials: the showers which may or may not work, the firewood place, the entertainment shed, the merchandising area (where we ran into Fred “Yes I have an apartment”) and the all important bar from which the first of many beverages for our guide “Mr Woodstock” were picked up (and I must say quite quickly put down again ... empty!)

What happens on the island, stays on the island

OK, so it rained; there was a few bike races which were fairly interesting; we ate and drank the recommended daily intake of all essential to health and vigour, the very conscientious amongst us had a bit more than the recommended, and some (no names mentioned) had wayyy more than could be seriously considered even safe!



Remarkably no-one passed out ... well not for very long periods at any rate.

And that was generally how we passed the first couple of days: eat, check out a bike race, wander around with a “healthy” drink carefully disguised as an iced coffee milk (no names mentioned) checking out other peoples rides. The range of bikes was astounding as was the diversity of people who rode them. The other cool thing was how the campers lived: some brought a veritable home-away-from-home with fridges, BBQs, bunk beds, some cooked over an open fire like our neighbours Wayne and Jethro from Mildura. Sme looked like they had a liquid-only diet, some of the digs were definitely bloke-safe only ... but I never saw a fight all weekend – blokes doing blokey stuff (and the obligatory girl who lost her clothes, on the back

of the bike of the only gentleman in the place who took her round the campsite looking for her clothes) – overall I think people were just more interested in having a good time than causing a bit of biff.



So if the days were good, clean and sober wholesome fun, evenings were just more of the same but with a little less of the sobriety. I cannot remember Friday and panadol helped with that on Saturday morning, but Saturday night was definitely a social highlight.

The evening started with the Sabers crew and entourage eating the trackside cafe out of all their remaining steaks, drinking copious amounts of their red wine, and generally making a ruckus – someone (no names mentioned) wanted karaoke with their dinner!!! We were eventually “thanked for our patronage” ... and then someone (actually I cannot remember who, so, no names mentioned) came up with the blindingly brilliant idea to head into Cowe – the big smoke of Phillip Island – to “see the sights”. Somehow we made our way to where the buses departed. Even more surprising we all made it onto the same bus and to top it off, we were on the correct bus heading into Cowe! Another person (who shall remain nameless), led the “singing” if it could be called that. It was definitely not going to win X-factor ... one of those situations where the enthusiasm outweighed the talent ... but the vote was unanimous that Australians sing better than the Brits and the Germans – well they may have been Japanese but I always have trouble telling them apart!!! Who would have thought it but a kids song about “wheels on the bus” was a crowd favourite ... encore anyone?

What happened on the island will stay on the island but suffice to say we did make it back to the campground ... eventually.

Oh, and there was few more races on the Sunday, one of which a certain young Mr Stoner on board a Ducati rode a bit faster than everyone else that day and he got a gold sticker or something.



Roads, bugs, and pizza at the pink house

Ride leader Mr Woodstock had us up early on Monday morning, packing up our tents and bikes in the dark. We wanted to be on the road by six am, hopefully before most of the other 10000 odd bikers in the campsite. And after two mostly fine and sunny days, it was threatening to rain again and as we started to ride up the hill out of the camp ground it started to lightly rain.



Heading off the island over the bridge we did as we were instructed by our betters and performed the age-old custom of the two-handed wave goodbye and made for the meet point and Fred.

Who proceeded to be late ... and then forgot his wallet (names can be mentioned now as we were off the island :) ... and then said "go on ahead, I'll meet you at the ferry", but didn't say which one and decided to ride off into the sunset :)

So it may have been about 11am before we finally got a ferry to Queenscliff but it was well worth it. By now the weather had turned just brilliant. Didn't need the wet weather gear anymore and we could settle down to some nice riding out towards the Great Ocean Road. On the ferry ride we had picked up a guy from WA riding back to SA and with Fred already on the road to Mount Gambier ahead of us, the posse now consisted of rider leader Grant (Blackbird), Allicat (CBR600), Dennis (Triumph), Steve on the VFR, Mark (CBR400), myself (VTR), Jack from WA (Beemer) and Whyalla Dave on the Honda Sabre as tail-end charlie.



The ride from Geelong to Torquay was busy with road works and a lot of traffic but when we turned inland towards Colac the traffic thinned right out and we had nice riding for a few hours before Grant took us south through the Otways towards the coast and Apollo Bay.

This was the third defining moment for me on this Phillip Island adventure. I have ridden through the Otways a few times – once the opposite direction and another time this same way, but there was something about this time: great riding weather, riding with friends, the pace Grant set, just where we were at that moment maybe. I remember riding behind Alli and seeing her every now and then sit up and wave her arms in the air at the coast view or the green hills with sheep or cows or just a spectacular view – I would turn to glance at whatever she happened to be pointing at and it occurred to me that I had missed this on my previous rides as I was riding by myself and concentrating on the route and not seeing the view. I think this occurred to everyone in some way or other because as we came down the hill into Apollo Bay and pulled in for lunch, we all had the same silly cat-stole-the-milk grins on our faces as we took our helmets off.

Jack the guy from WA was just blown away by what we had just ridden through for the past two or so hours – I guess we all were. Tip of the hat Grant – sublime leading my friend.

The sun was low in the sky and evening bugs were EVERYWHERE by the time we made Mount Gambier which was about 7pm I think. We finally met up with Fred at the sleep point

for the night – the caravan park up the top above the green and blue (or is it blue and brown?, apricot and mauve??) lakes. And to top off the colour chart, we had our healthiest meal yet: pizza from the pink pizza bar and beer.

Last day riding was the final leg back to Adelaide – no rush, no bother, just a cruisy ride through the Coonawarra to Keith for a final lunch and then home. We said our farewells at Taillem Bend and the ride back was just a bunch of guys on bikes – the odyssey was over and we were just riding on the same road. We had shared an adventure but it was over and just a memory now ...

... until next time!



Many thanks Grant, Dennis, Alli, Fred, Mark, Steve and Whyalla Dave (and Mr Stoner) – I had a great time at Phillip Island, and cannot wait to do it again.

Robbe Stewart

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