

Scootering Around Australia:

Well Sunday August 6th has finally arrived.

At 7:00am Gerhard arrived at the take off point and to load his final bits of gear into the Van. After a quick coffee and some last minute packing by Neil and James, the van was ready to roll.

A short trip down the Eastern Freeway to meet up with Julio at the Treasury Gardens and then onto Federation Square to get ready for the send off. We arrived at about 08:50am to meet the QBE Mini and scooter with its trailer which had been circulating through the Melbourne streets around the morning. The Lord Mayor John So was already there along with about 30 people and around 10 scooters and bikes. The atmosphere and excitement was starting to build.

While overcast, the morning was quite pleasant being 10 degrees which was not too bad as all the support crew were all wearing short sleeve QBE promotional shirts. Friends and family started to arrive as well plus some of the scooter enthusiast group plus more scooters and bikes had also joined the group so in all there were about 20 scooters and 10 bikes.

Finally the time had come and John So moved into position and the flag dropped, the crowd now around 60 gave a big cheer and Julio rode onto Swanston St. A quick U turn, down Flinders St, through South Melbourne to WestGate Bridge.

From the top of the bridge, you could see the bay which was like glass – a good sign as it indicated no wind meaning the ride would be much easier. There was the occasional patch of blue sky as the van turned South East along the Geelong Freeway.

Thoughts of last goodbyes from the families, anticipation of the trip, and realisation of the fact that we were now actually underway after the months of planning finally hit home.

It seemed that in no time, we were on the outskirts of our first land point Geelong. We had already travelled for 45 minutes and travelled 68km's. Gerhard was taking the first driving stint and James on the camera in the front passenger seat. We had one Ulysses club rider Perry on his Kawasaki accompanying us. As we went through Geelong, it started to rain, very lightly at first but it then started to get heavier. As the wireless network hadn't been activated, we had to do a bit of a workaround. Thanks to mobile technology, a quick call to home and Michael checked out the weather bureau radar. While it was clear everywhere else in a 256 km range of Melbourne, we had picked the wet area. As we headed towards Colac, it slowly cleared up and by Winchelsea, the rain had passed completely. A quick stop in Colac to change over rider jackets and to put on the wet weather overalls purely for warmth then off again.

The countryside is quite flat and the main industry is dairy farming. The older farm buildings standing out by the number of chimneys with some having even 6 chimneys poking over the roof line. The occasional flock of white cockatoos in the trees don't seem much fussed as the traffic speeds by under the canopy of the trees where they are sitting. You can almost imagine the plains like a clean bit of paper with the cross hatched lines of the start of a noughts and crosses game.

This area has been settled for many years now and every now and then there are old stands of pine trees in straight lines across the plains – old wind breaks to protect the cattle from the cold winds.

The mobile went off shortly after leaving Colac from Luke who is a reporter from the Colac Herald. Unfortunately we had missed him and only got his call 5km's after Colac so we weren't able to stop and go back. We will have to see some digital images back when we get to Adelaide. About 10 minutes later, the mobile goes off again but this time it was Julio's father – I explained that I had diverted the phone and Julio was busy but we could see him and everything was OK.

We had been on the road for 2 ½ and completed 196km's as we passed Mt Leura and slowed down on the approach into Camperdown. A short stop to take on fuel for the scooter and a quick break out of the van. Dale Maggs who is the President of the Motor Cycle Riders Association (Victorian Branch) and his partner Rachel pulled into the Service Station just as we finished refuelling the scooter. They had left Fed Square with us but motored ahead to have breakfast on the way. Honda had loaned Dale a 1300cc bike so cruising was no problem.

Then it was back into our home for the next 15 days the black van and off again. Next stop Warrnambool or so we thought the plan would be. Julio just kept on riding through and onto to Port Fairy where we stopped for petrol and lunch around 1:00pm. A quick break which was enjoyed in the sun that had broken through finally. Off we headed due west towards Portland.

Bit of a wrong direction as we approached – blamed the signage which wasn't quite clear so that cost some 15 minutes of lost time but putting a positive spin on things – at least we got to see Portland. Once back on track we were now heading for Mt Gambia which was some 90 minutes away. Phoned ahead to let Tim Snegg of the Limestone Coast Ulysses Riders Club know when we would be arriving. We finally crossed into SA around 3:20pm with a short trip of about 15 minutes to our meeting point at the information area on the approach into Mt Gambia. There waiting were about a dozen members of the local Club. Apparently it was the day of their monthly ride so as Tim said, they just made lunch a little longer so they could join in with our journey.

We stopped for about 5 minutes to do a photo shoot and another refuel with the group and exchanged badges before being escorted through Mt Gambia and onto Millicent. The main party rode with us for about 20 minutes before

some dropped off. A core of 2 Ulysses riders pushed on. It sounded as though the weather was being very kind indeed as many of the Club commented on how bad the weather had been for the last few months for riding and indeed the Sunday before had been very cold indeed.

Although we are now in the final phase of winter, at 4:15pm in the afternoon, the sun is now streaming into the front windscreen. Sunglasses essential so as to make sure we don't run into any of the riders. The three riders – the scooter and the two Ulysses guys silhouetted against the sun in front.

At Millicent, the Ulysses boys waved us goodbye and it was back to solo riding for Julio. We had a call from a well wisher Tania who apologised for not making the send off but I explained to her that the send off went very well and the trip was going fine with Julio riding along comfortably. Dale had disappeared at this stage – we think rocketing ahead for a short blast. Rachel had joined us in the van to warm up a bit and relax the muscles.

At Kingstone, Julio waved us into a Servo as he was getting hungry and it was also time to fill up the scooter and the van. Julio got out his favourite tucker which is a sandwich of Hungarian salami and cheese with a drink (normally coke). This was the first refuel for the van in the trip. It had covered 631 km's on 62.94 lts and at a cost of \$94.35.

The horizon to the west started to take on the yellow tinge of an approaching sunset with the sky above a clear powder blue. To the west, there was a low grey layer of cloud what we presumed to be a sea mist.

We continued our drive north west and headed into the start of the evening dark as the sun slipped uneventfully behind the mist cloud. The road was quite bumpy at this stage as we all lurched around left to right with the heads bobbing from side to side in unison. It almost took on the images you see of a crowd in a poler coaster ride. Rachel and I kept nodding off for a quick snooze then jolted back to reality when we bounced heavily over the bumps. By this stage, Julio and Dale had changed to following the van as a safety precaution so that if there were any wallabies or kangaroos, they would at least have some protection.

The road just kept going straight ahead on the GPS. Luckily it was a divided highway and as the evening slipped into full darkness, the headlights of the oncoming traffic lit up the trees like torches shining through the mist. The native forest only a bare 2 meters from the road surface, created a dark tunnel effect in the high beam of the van. On we pushed towards Adelaide. Around 7:50pm we passed through Tailembend. I always remembered this name from my grandmother who spoke about her parents when they had a farm in the area many years ago. The story my gran spoke about was how the place got its name – apparently the local aboriginal people at the time use to describe the particular place on the river as “where the tail (river) bends” hence Tailembend. Not sure if it's a true story but it is a good yarn anyway.

Finally around 9:15pm that night the GPS squawked out – 100 meters then do a u turn and you are at your destination. I must admit that having been in the computer industry now for over 35 years and seen the enormous changes in technology; I am still fascinated by mobile technology but now really impressed by GPS. To drive into your own city is to some daunting but into a strange town and to be guided perfectly to the spot where you are staying both visually and auditable is simply magic. I do need to put in a special plug here as one of our very kind sponsors Prospectors Earth Sciences have loaned us a Garmin GPS and Shannon, I think you know we are impressed.

Back to business – the drive wasn't quite over. Unfortunately the Motel where we were staying had what can best be described as a tunnel drive through and the van being quite high – even ignoring the radio aerial simply wouldn't fit. As you can imagine, we have quite a bit of luggage both personal and spares etc, car fridges OK, stuff..... A quick enquiry to the desk clerk revealed the old back entrance so Gerhard drove around the block and into the back of the Motel. We unpacked the basic gear while Dale and Rachel got settled and Julio jumped into the shower. As the dining room had well and truly closed by this time, some pizza was ordered while the rest of us got ourselves unpacked and settled down. Dinner arrived and we all sat around discussing the day and its highlights. At the risk of incriminating either of the riders, there will be no mention of speeds attained when certain opportunities were taken advantage of. Everyone other than James was booted out of the room at 11:30pm with the fond prospect of an early start and I mean early. Julio wanted to be on the road next morning at 5:00am and that's another story.

End of day 1.

- Neil Relph