

Riders,

The grand depart is almost upon us. The 9th Sydney to Surfers Tour is about to roll out and I expect you are all tearing at the bit to get going. It's too late to improve on your condition, the best thing, is just let the excitement build. Last years Tour was a marvelous success, with the ENGADINE Rotary Club writing a cheque for \$111,000 to Father Chris Riley's "Youth Off The Streets".

A superb effort from everyone involved but the Rotary men & women deserve special mention. They do the anonymous work behind the scene and put in tireless hours in support during the ride. We, the riders have all the fun and not forgetting, a lot of the Rotary people do the ride as well.

With thoughts of the road ahead, the stories you'll hear are all pretty much true except the climbs are exaggerated out of all proportion. You know how people's memories are. But once you have mastered the first climb on the first morning, you are well & truly on the way.

One thing for sure, warm autumn days on back roads and highways invite you to go the long way home. From an observers view, a cycle tour from Sydney to Surfers Paradise might appear a little old fashioned in these modern times, dare I say unglamorous.

But there is poetry and purpose to it, with the wind in your face, gliding quietly across the landscape with a rhythm and physical pleasure that belongs only to being on a bicycle.

Those who have signed up for their first Y.O.T.S. Tour and are wondering, is it as good as it's cracked up to be. Ask the guys & girls coming back for another shot, they will be filled with the same anticipation as on their first tour. Believe me, it won't let you down. It is a special week.

This years Tour will be minus longwinded, political speeches, at least Robbo has promised as much. However, you will still have to endure the banal tripe that the Pack Captains serve up on the penultimate stage in Kyogle. It is just part of the ride.

We will have various levels of fitness and experience within each group. Of the long time riders I ask, please share of your experience & offer advice kindly. Terrain on occasion will be an advantage for some and I don't just mean the hilly stretches.

There are plenty of flat roads, which will suit the big guys and particularly if the pace is on, they will be making everybody hurt.

We all like to have a crack now & again and from previous tours it's evident that a lot of people want to give it some gas when the opportunity presents itself. To that end, there will be stages where it is okay to put some pace on.

So expect a good hit out on occasion when road conditions are right. At the very least, attacks off the front make for an interesting day, gives everyone something to talk about at dinner. We all become legends around the dinner table.

When things hot up, the stronger riders will be making the pace. However the action isn't necessarily all in the break away, but organising the chasing group. The chase group can be just as adrenalin filled, if they get organised, ride intelligently, share the work and don't try to reel the break in on the back of one rider. Whether you're in the escape or doing the chasing, it's all about the fun.

Having said that, we are going to be disciplined about it, nothing foolhardy. The Sydney to Surfers ride is not a "free for all. " We ride hard, but absolutely no tear arsing in traffic. The YOTS Tour isn't some cowboy outfit or Gold Coast bunch ride. We ride a steady tempo on single lane roads with traffic. The only occasion hard tempo is permitted, is outside of suburban areas on double-lane divided road or on the quieter country roads later in the week.

The rest of the time, especially in the built up areas or busy single lane road, where safety is a real concern, we ride a close formation.

The first couple of days are not the occasion to be putting the pace on, because of traffic and built up areas. We'll spend most of the first two days at a steady tempo, settling the groups in, getting used to each other on the road. There will be some harder efforts but nothing fancy.

Day 3 brings perfect riding conditions. This usually ups the anti somewhat, particularly, if the wind is behind us. However we need to be very conscious of the road conditions and behave accordingly.

I emphasise we don't ride hard tempo on suburban roads or single lane highway. If conditions permit, double lane divided road & the quiet country roads, the only exception. If a chase is on, when the dual carriageway runs out, break it off. Sit up and wait. Reform the group with the support vehicle. It's simple common sense.

Apart from the obvious safety concern, the Y.O.T.S. Charity require a permit to conduct this event each year, and each year the Red Tape gets harder. Remember our behaviour reflects on the whole of the charity ride.

Let's not jeopardize the Rotary Club's standing with the community or the authorities. The same goes for coming into town at days end. Keep it sensible. There is no finish line. If you still have something left, save it for tomorrow.

We all have fond memories that come to us when we travel roads we have known before. Point to point rides, have a special kind of feeling as each stage unfolds, changing rhythm with the lie of the land or the strength of the wind, rising from the saddle to put in that extra effort.

So different to familiar rides at home and after days on the road, there is a perverse pleasure in legs too tired to walk and yet will get up and do it all again the next day.

Pedestrians know not of these experiences, neither of course do motorists. Only a cyclist could know the feeling and it's useless to try to explain it to anyone else. Cycling may be an antiquated way to approach the world, it demands long hours, at times lonely, but there is nothing quite like riding a bicycle at full tilt.

Concentration becomes meditation – or something else, almost beyond thought. It's unlike anything else in the world of physical effort, whether it's rolling down a quiet country road in the baking sun or out in the predawn, there is magic on the bike.

The old hands know the routine & the road ahead. If you need any advice, just ask.

Good luck and God speed

Wayne McIvor