

A wonderful experience

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Well what can I say? A gruelling ride of 1245 km on my speedo in what were less than charitable weather conditions. One of the Aussie riders rated it by far the toughest of his three events.

I finished about 8.00 am on Friday morning after finally getting to start at 10.50 pm on Monday night. We were due off at 9.30 pm but were delayed in heavy rain while bike checks were completed. They had two officials checking four thousand riders out. A total of 5300 riders entered and about 1400 dropped out. I got to the front of my starting group when a very untimely puncture cost me about 15 minutes. That was the last time I got any real serious drafting and the last time I had any show of doing my estimated time.

I chased for the next 110 km and cooked myself to the extent I was on my own and passing a whole lot of riders and not getting a decent pace line going. The faster riders were gone. Two of the Australians in that group finished in 68 hours and while that does not mean I would have finished with them I would have had a better chance of getting in on Thursday night riding in the pace line.

It was not all bad. I got to enjoy some great sunshine on day two, even had to get the sun block out. Most of the hills were very manageable and I only found myself grinding in the granny gear 34-25 a few times. The rain was at times very heavy and if you are riding at night the visibility drops and so does your pace. Riding back into Loudéac there were several fast technical down hills and a lot of heavy rain—yeah! It was at this point 48 hours into the ride I got better than a nap; I got three solid hours of sleep in a dorm. This particular dorm was

full of 400 fold-up bunks with a blanket on them. I don't remember hitting the pillow and got woken as requested at 4.00 am. Breakfast of sausages and mashed potato with gravy was superb and on the bike again into more mist and rain.

Later on in the day I got to a point where the electrolytes were tasting awful and I could no longer drink properly. The water tasted foul and I felt quite sick. I rode on slowly and either sipped or gargled the water and tried to eat bits and pieces with varying degrees of success. I stopped at the second to last checkpoint, can't remember the name, and tried for a two hour sleep. The door kept banging so after an hour I was back on the bike. About twenty kilometres down the road it was sleep time again. Wrapped in the thermal and lying on a forecourt, I don't know how long I slept for, but woke to the sound of cyclists riding through. Up I got and away; I managed to hook on to a group for a while but riding in bunches was now very hazardous. Most riders were very tired and were prone to swerving without notice. If you passed, it was with a wide berth, or you risked getting taken out. If I rolled to the front I invariably rolled right off the front and lost any help I might have been getting.

I rolled up the last few hills with a sore left ankle, a battered soul and a bruised ego but rolled into Paris around some tortuous and circuitous route to get to the finish line a very tired rider. It was back to the hotel, packed the bike and sent it home.

The shoes, thermal blanket and some other gear were thrown in the rubbish, don't want to see them any more! The bike went well apart from a puncture before the start and punctures at 30 km and about 500 km. The chain had to be cleaned and oiled twice and the rear brake decided it should stay on when ever it was applied after about 800 km.

I felt as a rider I was remarkably resilient, if I may say so myself, apart from minor blisters and chafing and numb big toes the body has fully recovered and the thought is I could do better in four years. Does anyone know a good psychiatrist? My belt was short of holes when I got back to Paris, I never got to weigh myself but I definitely lost two inches around the waist line.

There is also a great story to tell about the support. An Italian rider told me the last time he did it the support was much better and like a great party throughout the course. This time the support wasn't quite so great but my puncture repair at the 500 km mark was carried out by a total stranger who had a foot pump in his car and spare tubes. The tables on the side of the road with coffee and cake were superb. Kids would high five the riders and almost beg you to stop for coffee, water and cake. The many checkpoints were great with great support. The risk of course was a loss of a substantial amount of time while your partook of the hospitality.

All in all a wonderful experience that will always return many fond memories.

Corrections and updates

Prior to homologation, preliminary results for PBP 2007 were printed in *Checkpoint* No. 33. With homologation now complete, the following corrections are required.

Corrections

Henry De Man (incorrectly shown as DNF) and **Mark Purvis** (no result reported) both completed successfully.

Stephen Chambers, James Chong

and **Simon Watt** were shown as finishing but did not complete within the time limit. **Allan Dickson** was shown as finishing but actually abandoned at about 700 km.

Updates

Also not previously reported were the successful completions by some Australians and New Zealanders

participating under other flags: Australians **Wayne Maurer** (UK), **Justin Sykes** (UK) and **Johnny Zgoznic** (UK); and New Zealanders **Rod Oliver** (Netherlands), **Jennifer Watson** (Canada) and **Patrick Wright** (Canada).

Results for other Australians abroad—namely **Yvette Fuser**, **Andrew Macintyre**, and **Denise Silk**—were previously reported.

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