
With a little help from my friends

Matthew Bradbury

On PBP, support comes from all directions—family, friends, locals and other riders.

With a group of other Victorians I was in the 90 hour start time. We left at 10.30 pm, an hour later than the scheduled 9.30 pm start. The first 10km was amazing, with people of all ages cheering from roadsides and bridges over head. The first 150 km had people settling in, trying to calm nerves and find suitable groups to ride with.

We were riding through towns and countryside I was wanting to see but it was too dark. We stopped at a town for water that a shop keeper was shelling out. They were opening crates of bottled water for free. He had his 8 year old son helping out at 3 in the morning! So I gave the boy my first clip-on koala (I took as gifts for the kids). So with a “Merci Monsieur” from the boy I was on my way again.

I arrived at the first checkpoint and was met with a lot of people suffering. Some had crashed in the wet conditions with some claret showing on their foreheads. Others were demoralised by the cold hypothermic conditions there was a lot of negativity bandied around. I had to go. So out into the torrential rain I went to forge ahead into the black French night.

I arrived at the second checkpoint 220 km in and the first to swipe our cards in. I met a mate of mine from Brisbane Bruce Dodds, plus Catherine and Phillip. They were ready to go and I was feeling good so we left together. The rain had eased a bit so we were enjoying ourselves riding through beautiful French towns. People were out calling “Bravo! Bravo!” Every town, day or night there was always some people cheering us on. I would ride through towns and count how many kids were up ahead and toss out the clip-on koalas accordingly. It was funny watching these kids duck, not knowing what was being thrown at them, then realizing after we passed.

We came into Loudéac the 450 km mark looking for our first sleep. We had been riding for 26 hours and exhausted. I met my girlfriend and my brother there, who had set up the tent for us already. We climbed in and had five hours sleep. We thought that was enough and we set out again. This was one of my hardest moments, putting soaking wet clothes back on after being warm, and going back out into the rain shivering. (I learnt later some Australians couldn't even get some floor space to put their heads down at the Loudéac checkpoint—they did it harder than me.)

A little way down the road was the secret control. Bruce said he was tired so we

She said, “We’re not even at Brest yet!” I said, “The next checkpoint is 10 km away and we have less than 200 km to go!”

decided another half hour sleep wouldn't hurt. We laid on the timber floor boards for a kip. The alarm went off and so did we. Not far down the road I was suffering for sleep so I said to Bruce, “Next town we stop for coffee!” (I never used to have coffee on a ride until PBP) I was wandering down the road very dangerously side to side for a while. Then I looked up and there was a coffee bar. I was excited! We bought our coffees sat down and took two sips then fell asleep sitting at the table. I woke up, looked out the window and the sun was up. I said, “Doddsy we gotta go!”

We felt we now had enough sleep and we set off for Brest.

The weather got better and better the

closer we got to the coast. Arm warmers were off for the first time sun was out feeling excited as we rolled into the halfway point. Crowds at each checkpoint welcoming us were great. Hours of cheering they would be there for, and they really lifted our spirits as we came into each mental target. I thought I would give them something to cheer so I sprinted uphill to the finish, zipped up the jersey and threw my hands up like I won a stage of the Tour. The shrieks from the crowd really cracked me up.

We spent some time at Brest that included another hours sleep. After that it was exciting because 600km was the furthest I had ever ridden, and that was only two months earlier to qualify. The pain factor was creeping in by now and I was getting by with Neurofen for my right knee. Also for the next 600km my memories were becoming a blur. For instance about the 800km mark my backside was so sore I feared I wouldn't finish (bad seat). Bruce gave me this second skin thing to try. Its supposed to give another layer between me and the seat, but I think that should of been used before the ride not after the damage was done. So I was desperate. Next town I stopped at the pharmacy. With the language barrier an obvious problem, I was playing charades with the lady behind the counter: “I need some...cream for my **bum!**” She understood, “Merci beaucoup!”, and I was away again with much relief.

As we kept rolling along this never ending roller coaster, we saw amazing sights, like where the human body can sleep quite comfortably. Garages, shop doorways, bus stops, coffee shops, town squares, church steps, under tables, and any available dry floor space at checkpoints. People in towns opened their doors for us, some had blow up mattresses for cyclists and they would wake you up when you needed.

I met some more people on the road like Rebecca from Sydney, who was going well. Also Andrea from California, she was riding by herself so I thought I would say, "G'day". She wasn't really making sense. I said, "We're nearly there you're going to make this!" She said, "Honey! We're not even at Brest yet!" I said, "Love! The next checkpoint is 10 km away and we have less than 200 km to go! Let's stop and have something to eat." We stopped under a tree to get out of the rain and had a bite to eat. She came good and when we arrived at that

"You can't afford any sleep." I explained that without sleep we wouldn't be able to pick up speed. After a small argument he relented, "OK, you can have one and a half hours but that puts you on the time limit!" I said, "Great!" So we turned in for a sleep but before we knew it, it was time to get up again! Off we went at 30 km/h again, feeling good we rode ourselves back into time. My right knee by this stage was the size of my thigh. We came into the last checkpoint less than 100 km to go really excited knowing we were going to make this. However my knee

the world on the roadside cheering us in. My girlfriend and my brother was there waving madly and screaming themselves hoarse! The Australian families recognising our distinctive jersey yelled, "Well done Aussie!" Turning into the final turn at the checkpoint down the hill into the gymnasium it all overwhelmed me. I took a few minutes out for myself, to come to grips with what I had just achieved. Absolute exhilaration inside, bursting at the seams we swiped our cards for the last time. We achieved it in 88 hours. Naomi and my brother Dan came in, we



Rolling through a village just outside Brest.

next checkpoint, she threw her arms around me gave me a kiss and grabbed a photo of us, "That's Gold!"

At this stage Bruce and I were tired again and need sleep. We're losing time on the bike and we have to come good again. I said to my brother, "Dan, we need sleep." He said,

was giving me curry now and I couldn't put energy through it anymore so I riding home on my left leg.

Coming into Paris seemed to go on forever through the 'burbs. Getting within 3 km to go I was recognising it all again and then I saw the families of cyclists from all around

popped the champagne (French of course), congratulated each other and swapped stories. I said to Dan, "See? I told you we needed that hour and a half sleep!" He turns to me dryly and says, "What are you talking about? I only gave you 45 minutes." So I hit him and we laughed hard.

Photo: Björn Blasse

Checkpoint

The endurance cyclist's magazine

No. 34 Summer 2007/08



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