

Express Sport

Tension, crashes and thrills all in tour

Morwell's James Ibrahim recently competed in the Tour of Gippsland cycle race. Ibrahim battled through a crash in the early stages to finish in 97th place. Today the Team Race-Fenton Green rider shares with us his tour diary.

Day 1, Stage 1 - Wonthaggi criterium

AS you can imagine the tension was high and all 158 riders wanted to be one of the first 10 riders racing around the circuit to keep out of trouble.

The reason they all want to ride there is because there is less chance of crashing, and crashing there was.

About half way through the race there was a crash that blocked the whole road.

The two riders that started the crash were in front of me and I managed to squeeze through them at 45 km/hr with riders falling and hitting both my legs and



Rider:	James Ibrahim
Team:	Team Race-Fenton Green
Team mates:	James McDulling, Harry Rassie, Samuel Witmitz, Mark Chadwick and Oliver Kent-Spark
Race:	Tour of Gippsland

because so many people are so close to a great general classification result so all the intermediate sprints were raced as hard as the finish line.

In the end we all got through and had our focus on the afternoon stage.

Stage 5 - Morwell to Maffra 85km road race

STARTING in my home town, it was very cool.

To be doing something that usually takes me away from home, around Australia, and often overseas and to be

Stage 7 - Bairnsdale to Lakes Entrance 75km road race

THE last road stage is upon us.

Poor James McDulling rode his heart out this morning to stay in contention for the overall classification, and had a flat tyre about 20km into the race and never got back on.

When a rider has a flat tyre they move to the back of the bunch and put up their hands and the commissary (judge) calls the respective team car to come to the

The reason they all want to ride there is because there is less chance of crashing, and crashing there was.

About half way through the race there was a crash that blocked the whole road.

The two riders that started the crash were in front of me and I managed to squeeze through them at 45 km/hr with riders falling and hitting both my legs and I luckily came through them unscathed.

There were intermediate sprints on 11 of the 33 laps around the course where riders sprinted for first, second and third position to earn points and time bonuses.

Our team raced aggressively and I managed to get a second place on one of the sprints. With at least three crashes and none of our riders injured we were happy to get through unscathed.

Stage 2 - Wonthaggi to Wonthaggi 68.2km road race

WITH two long hills in the race that are less than 70km long there was no respite during the whole race.

Completed in less than 1hr 40min it was a super fast start to the race.

Surprisingly a group of 60 managed to finish the course in the front bunch.

James McDulling rolled in placed 11th and I managed to get another second place in one of the sprints.

I finished the stage in 14th and was sitting in 12th place overall at the end of the first day.

This puts me in a great position coming into the hardest day of the race tomorrow.

Damo, our manager, was happy with how we raced and we were all happy with how the team performed.

Day 2, Stage 3 - Warragul to Warragul 134km road race

WELL, the queen stage of the tour of Gippsland was upon us and we were expecting fireworks in the hills between



Relaxing: The Express caught up with James Ibrahim yesterday before he embarked on an "easy" three hour ride.

photograph: dalwyn hewitt

Warragul and Noojee, especially on Vespers Hill just past Noojee.

A large group of about 60 riders managed to get over the climb together.

That is a surprisingly large number as normally a hill that hard would whittle down a peloton of 160 riders to a group no larger than 10-15 riders.

We were doing at least 65k/h, going around a gentle left and the rear wheel was just taken out and it all happened so fast.

I was sliding for at least 20m before I hit the dirt on the edge of the road and that slowed me down a bit, then the tree on the side of the road brought me to a halt.

I have a hole in my right hip about ten centimetres wide and over a centimetre deep.

It was a hard 60kms to race with the sore hip and not being able to hold the handlebars with my left hand.

I was positioned 12th overall before

this and now my hopes for a shot at the overall are over.

Unfortunately Harry, who was also in the front bunch, came down too when he was feeding from the team car.

He hit the car and the road and has lost a lot of skin on his face and it is tour over for Harry.

He's just lucky he didn't get tangled up under the car.

And I'm lucky that I didn't hit my head, like the rider behind me who crashed and had blood gushing out of his head and nose.

He isn't racing anymore; at least I can front up for another day.

Day 3, Stage 4 - Newborough criterium

THE criterium in Newborough was super hard, had some short sharp hills and had some tight corners.

Not what you want to be riding when you can't squeeze the handlebars.

The race was hotly contested

Stage 5 - Morwell to Maffra 85km road race

STARTING in my home town, it was very cool.

To be doing something that usually takes me away from home, around Australia, and often overseas and to be doing that same thing right here in my home town, it's very cool.

The race out to Maffra this afternoon was pancake flat and with the race still so close for most of the riders, there was no chance of a breakaway succeeding.

It was raced at over 45 km/hr and we were all feeling super great.

But as soon as you hit the front of the pack it was like a punch in the face, with the wind making it at least 30 per cent harder when riding in the front.

Unfortunately we didn't know that the last kilometre was going to be super tight and twisty so there was no room to move up.

I felt so much better after the morning street circuit in Newborough; I think I just needed to keep on moving, as soon as I sit down everything seizes up.

We felt like we let ourselves down as we were aiming for a result in this stage.

As a wise old rider told me, we will channel that into aggression not depression so we are keen to do something in the next few stages.

Day 4 Stage 6 - Bairnsdale criterium

IT was literally one minute before the race that the rain started to pour.

This always means spills when it comes to criteriums, especially a tight circuit like the Bairnsdale one.

I was struggling to keep motivated around the circuit once it started hailing and all my dressings got soaked.

But seeing my team-mate James McDulling hit the ground in the wet, grazes all over his side and a cracked helmet, then get straight back up and get straight back into the race in the pouring rain, it was motivating.

Poor James McDulling rode his heart out this morning to stay in contention for the overall classification, and had a flat tyre about 20km into the race and never got back on.

When a rider has a flat tyre they move to the back of the bunch and put up their hands and the commissary (judge) calls the respective team car to come to the front of the convoy of cars behind the riders and he changes the wheel with spare wheels in the team car.

Unfortunately for James when he got a flat the main bunch was sitting at speeds over 45 km/hr.

This is the first year they have banned the use of radios between the riders.

Without race radios we didn't know he had a flat and couldn't drop back to tow him back into the bunch.

Unfortunately I got a bit squeezed at the last corner with about 800m to go so I had to touch the brakes.

I finished about 15th and Sammy rolled in behind.

Day 5 Stage 8 - Paynesville criterium

THE final day of the tour was greeted with gale force winds and

constant showers.

Luckily for the riders the race organisers were merciful enough to cut down the race to 30 laps and delay the start to 1pm, they also cancelled all the intermediate sprints for safety reasons.

Sam the team sprinter managed to get a 7th place at the finish line, a great result in the conditions and the team was happy to have made it through the tour with smiles on our faces and all the riders that we started with.

The tour is finally over and we're all keen for the rest of the national road series to come.

So this is how the tour of Gippsland went down for the Fenton and Green race team, I hope you gained a bit of an insight as to what it's like to do a national road series race.

James.

Latrobe City Cycling Club riders compete in 2010 Lakes Oil Tour of Gippsland. Full story in Monday's Express.