



TOUR OF MURRAY

The Fenton Green & Co. RACE Team has just completed the arduous Tour of Murray, which is the longest stage race in Australia at just over 900kms (The Tour Down Under is around 840kms). The tour started in Echuca with a 155km road stage that was marred by a big pile up in the first 10kms of the stage. Unfortunately, we lost Brendan Schultz in that bingle. Schultz was physically ok but his bike was rendered unrideable due to broken forks. Whilst the bigger teams are able to keep their riders racing with the use of spare bikes, the reality for us is that a broken bike means Tour Over.

The remaining team members managed to get through the crash with James McDulling the worst affected with a bit of skin off the knee and wrist. The rest of the long stage was accident free and the boys got into Rochester tired but content.

Day two included a super quick criterium in Echuca, followed by a 100km road stage in Moama. Harry Rassie and James McDulling dug deep in the crit to finish in the lead bunch in the morning and all the riders survived the afternoon stage. The team packed up after stage 3 and drove a couple of hours to Swan Hill in preparation for the next day's action.

Day three consisted of two criteriums; the morning stage was a 50km epic in central Swan Hill in which Oliver Kent Spark put in a stellar performance finishing with about 25 other riders in the lead group. The afternoon stage was conducted in the streets of Lake Boga. Harry, James and David Tozer all managed to keep pace with the leaders in what was another very quick crit on a fast flowing circuit.

Most people thought that Day four would be a pivotal day. With a 100km road race in the morning from Swan Hill to Nyah West and then a 60km road race from Nyah to Managatang. 160kms of racing on skinny country roads would normally lead to echelons being created and time gaps occurring, however the benign conditions meant that the vast majority of the field, including our multi-skilled team manager, Damo Harris finished together without any time losses. Damo's expectations prior to the race probably didn't go too far past stage 1 so it was a magnificent effort for him to still be racing (as well as undertaking all of the management duties) through more than half the tour.

Day five was another two criterium day held in Robinvale in the morning (45kms) and Euston in the afternoon (52kms). A crash in the Robinvale stage took out Ollie Kent Spark, 'Young-blood' was taken to Mildura Base Hospital for precautionary x-rays on his skull, fortunately the medicos gave the all clear but Ollie's tour was over. Harry and David had solid stages but the focus of the team's attention was primarily on Ollie's well-being.

Day six, (the end of the tour was in sight) was the popular Ouyen criterium in the morning and the notorious Patchewollock road race in the afternoon. The tour has for several years co-ordinated with the organisers of the Great Vanilla Slice Triumph so there is always a real carnival atmosphere in the Ouyen Township. Harry and David both survived the furious pace of the morning criterium and were rewarded with free cinnamon donuts (is there anything better than free, fresh, hot cinnamon donuts?).

The afternoon stage (86kms) has historically been 'moving day' for the tour with wind and skinny roads blowing the field to bits but once again the tour was spared by near still conditions, whilst we lost Damo on this stage the three remaining riders (Harry James and David) were more than happy to finish unscathed, particularly as there was a big pile up in the last km.

The penultimate day was another two criterium day. A super fast Merbein circuit stage was followed by 12 laps of a 5km circuit of the small township of Cardross. The wind that had been non existent for the first five days turned into a gale for this stage and the field was immediately smashed into several groups, our boys all lost time but remained keen for the final stage.

The Mildura criterium has for several years been the final stage of the tour, it has some similarity to the final stage of the Tour de France with multiple circuits of the main thoroughfare of the town. There is a sense of satisfaction in just getting to the final stage and even more so in finishing the stage in the lead bunch, all three of the surviving riders felt that satisfaction.

Whilst we didn't have the fire-power to push for stage or general classification results, we did provide three young riders in Oliver, Harry and James with invaluable experience in tour racing. The boys maintained focus and morale for the whole of the race and will no doubt have captured great form for upcoming events given that they basically motor-paced for 900kms over 8 days.

A big thanks goes out to Terry and Marjorie Schultz for being Team Mechanic and Soigner and of course to Damo Harris for all of the organisation that goes into putting the boys on the start line.

The RACE bike trailer was also a welcome addition, not only did it make transportation of equipment so much easier but it also is a great exposure to all of our wonderful sponsors. Thanks to the Board and everyone who makes RACE happen.