

Last weekend saw 8 Griffith Club riders travel to Falls Creek to contest the 3Peaks Challenge. This 239km ride takes the riders over some of the toughest terrain in Australia with the mighty climbs of Mt Hotham and Falls Creek being tackled. The crazy riders were Jason Minato, Jeff Stoll, Russell Webb, Phil Twigg, Peter Budd, Kingsley Massey, Rob Hall and Gary Polkinghorne.

Sunday morning dawned and with it the rain clouds. The ride with 4500 metres of climbing was going to get a whole lot tougher. And tougher it was.

There were 1250 riders who started the 239km event with 718 riders finishing. The event is a challenge ride not a race so for 532 rider not make the finish speak volumes for the difficulty of the event.

The riders had a 35km descent to Mt Beauty to start the ride but had to contend with wet roads even if the rain was yet to start falling. Fortunately all the Griffith riders made it to the bottom of the climb without incident.

The first peak was the climb of Tawonga an 8km climb with a consistently steep gradient. This climb saw the rain starting to fall and it was to follow the riders for most of the day.

The second peak was the climb of Mt Hotham. This is a 30 km climb that takes you to the ski fields with the last 15 km providing 4 steep walls to negotiate. As the riders climbed the rain fell harder. The higher the riders climbed the lower the temperatures plunged.

Towards the top of the climb there were rivers of water running down the road as the rain intensity picked up. At the top of the climb the wind decided to play a part and blew the rain sideways as the riders now descended to the lunch break at Dinner Plain.

The riders arrived at Dinner Plain, the half way point for the ride a shivering mess. Fingers struggled to open the wrappers on the sandwiches and the jaw struggled to chew. This lunch break was a make or break for riders mind and body. The body was crying for relief but mind knew there was still 120km to ride.

A quick stop was the order of the day and those that got out on their bikes with a minimum delay soon were heading for warmer weather of the valley with the added bonus of the rain stopping. The long descents with sweeping bends meant the riders didn't need to ride the breaks and made the descent fast with speeds of over 70kph flashing up on the speedo.

The sun almost tried to come out at Omeo but that was the weather gods just teasing. The skies soon opened up once more and was to stay with the riders all the way to the finish.

The sting in the tail of the ride was the final climb back up to Falls Creek. It is difficult to describe this climb. The severity of the grade hard to imagine. The riders made a left turn at the 200km mark and rising before them was the monster of Falls Creek.

The road went up and up and up for 8 leg tearing kilometers at a savage gradient. Many riders became walkers due to the difficulty of tackling this climb with 200km already in the legs. Those that kept riding

were doing so on will power as each bend just brought more despair at the road soaring upwards before them.

After the riders had met the challenge of those 8km the gradient relaxed to be just difficult and the riders then knew that they could make it to the finish although there was still over 30 km uphill to ride.

The riders that kept their lunch break short were able to tackle the climb with good light but those that lingered at lunch and arrived at the climb later in the day soon found themselves racing the fading light.

The final kilometer saw the spirits soar as the finish line was just around the bend. Riding in to the finish chute to the applause of the by standers standing in the rain was an experience to savor.

Rob Hall did a magnificent ride and was in the top 4 riders to complete the course. He finished in a time of just over 10 hours averaging 26.5kph for the event.

Peter Budd and Jason Minato were the next to finish after pacing each other since the Dinner Plain stop. They were followed a short time later by Russell Webb who had pulled off a huge ride.

Puncturing with less than a kilometre to the finish is not what Phil Twigg needed but a tyre repair soon had him feel the warmth of the applause as he rode up the finishing chute.

Jeff Stoll also punctured within 3 kilometres of the line but his tyre was not going to be repaired. A large cut put finished his great ride with the line tantalizingly close.

Kingsley Massey and Gary Polkinghorne were defeated by the light and safety concerns. Both riders had tackled and defeated the hardest part of the climb but had to retire with the rain still pelting and darkness making it impossible to see the road. Both riders made it passed the 210km mark and had a relatively easy ride to complete the course. Next time. Gary's ride was one of courage after falling at the 60 kilometre mark and dislocating his shoulder. Gary rode the Mt Hotham and Falls Creek climbs with a damaged wing and deserved to finish until the darkness closed in.

The riders knew they had faced a monster ride in the most atrocious conditions. The first 3 Peaks Challenge has now become a legendary event and is the premiere one day challenge for any bicycle rider. No doubt there will be more Griffith riders up for the Challenge next year.