



ride time, right place

PHOTOGRAPHS BEARDY McBEARD

After weeks of rain, the sun shone on the fifth annual Bowral Classic, held on December 11 and 12. HUW KINGSTON rode in the 120km Challenge, one of four gran fondo courses through the Highlands countryside. He explains why the Bowral Classic has proved to be such a success.



“That’s what cycling does. It creates joy and fulfilment – it brings everyone together.”

ABOVE CYCLISTS GATHER IN BONG BONG STREET FOR THE EARLY MORNING START. BELOW AT THE STARTING LINE FOR THE 150KM MAXI CLASSIC.
OPPOSITE PAGE THE OLD HUME HIGHWAY, HEADING TOWARDS BERRIMA.

THE SUN WAS IN MY FACE as I popped over a little rise before the narrow road swooped down to a creek. A creek that, like all creeks in this La Nina summer, was flowing and babbling away. Over the babble some chickens chuckled from a ridiculously verdant paddock, and I swore I heard a woman shout across in French.

For a brief moment I was away cycling the backroads somewhere in Europe. “Keep it going Huw, only 20 kilometres to go,” said Jemima in her Jindabyne Cycling Club jersey, as she flew past me. This, and flying past Glenquarry Hall, reminded me where I was.

After a cancellation in 2020 due to COVID and a postponement in 2021, the fifth Bowral Classic was on the road and around 2500 riders were enjoying it. I’ve recently spent nearly 18 months living away from the Highlands, and I couldn’t think of a better way to remind myself what a special location it is, nor of the ups and downs it offers.

In a summer better suited to kayaking and ducks than to

bikes and chooks, it looked like the weather might claim the Classic. On the Thursday and Friday before the weekend event, rain smashed down on the region with localised flooding. This forced the cancellation of the Dirty Bowral, a gravel road and fire trail event planned for Belanglo State Forest on the Saturday. A new addition to the Classic weekend, many had been looking

forward to it, but we will wait another year. Patience is perhaps a virtue many have learnt these past two years. On the Saturday afternoon, the new Criterium race was able to proceed, taking place on the roads encircling Bowral’s Loseby Park and attracting 130 entrants.

On the Sunday morning, the sun rose over Bowral’s Bong Bong Street as riders queued at coffee shops, took up a place on the start line and bantered back and forth. Nervousness, bravado, shivers; the usual mix at any

endurance event. First off, to a start gun fired by Wollondilly MP Nathaniel Smith, was the 150km Maxi Classic, then off we went in the 120km Challenge, the biggest field of the ride. The last timed ride to depart was the 85km Rouleurs. A ride not a





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP CENTENNIAL ROAD, BOWRAL; THE TOP FIVE IN THE WOMEN'S DIVISION 1 CRITERIUM (WINNER ELLA BLOOR FROM THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS CYCLING CLUB, CENTRE); COMPETITORS IN THE NEW CRITERIUM RACE AROUND LOSEBY PARK.

race but, with timing chips on the bikes and bragging rights on the line, there was sure to be plenty of hard charging.

Showing that the Bowral Classic has something for everyone, more than 250 riders then rode off for the 35km Social ride, a course complete with a voucher for a mandatory coffee and cake stop in Berrima.

“The vibe was unbelievable,” said Mike Tomalaris, well known Tour de France commentator and MC for the weekend. “On Sunday morning the main street was a sea of people, of colour, of jerseys. People were in such a buoyant mood. Despite the early start, everyone was buzzing. And that’s what cycling does. It creates joy and fulfilment – it brings everyone together.”

Local riders were out in force. From Ella Bloor and Karen Evans taking high positions in the Maxi, to Southern Highlands Cycling Club president Zac Hulm and crew piloting special cargo bikes with their special cargo of elderly Harbison residents on the Social ride.

We really did get to see the very best of the Highlands, taking the backroads through Berrima, Moss Vale, Sutton Forest, Bundanoon, Robertson and Kangaloon. Even a spot of Highlands mizzle didn’t dampen spirits at a feed station enveloped by fog at Fitzroy Falls Reservoir. Those in a hurry didn’t stop, those in need of an energy boost grabbed a banana

or bar, and those taking it easy enjoyed an egg and bacon roll from the Lions Club barbecue.

From 2010 to 2015 the Highlands hosted three of the largest mountain bike events in Australia and now the Bowral Classic is established as one of the biggest road rides. Given the perfect terrain, the little villages to enjoy and the views to take in, it is perhaps surprising how bereft of bike tracks and paths we are, how rare it is to find a streetside bike rack. Cycling continues to boom across the country and so many regions are investing millions in facilities for local riders and visitors alike. Hopefully the Highlands can pick up on that.

The cloud lifted before Robertson, usually the mist capital of the Highlands, with a warm sun powering us all the way back to Bowral, although

that power certainly waned on the killer King and Queen of the Mountain climb up the Gib.

At the finish in Loseby Park, riders relaxed, refuelled and recovered, many keeping to the maxim that every good ride should start with a coffee and finish with a beer. All in all, a brilliant day out and the perfect showcase for what we Highlanders know we are lucky to have as our backyard. **HL**

The 2022 Bowral Classic takes place on October 15 and 16. For details, visit cyclingclassics.com.au

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