

ON YOUR BIKE!

Saddle up to discover where to find the biggest, best (and most beer-fuelled) cycling events around Australia

Best Oz cycling events

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Walk into any bike shop now and you'll find road bikes, mountain bikes, cyclo-cross bikes, gravel grinders, e-bikes and more. I'd include unicycles, too, but that group gets a bit upset when you call them 'bicycles' when they're not.

It's not surprising, therefore, that across Australia you can find hundreds of events for all bike and rider types – from club events attracting a couple of dozen cyclists to mass-participation challenges attracting many thousands. Here are six events to consider boxing your bike and flying off to ride in.

L'Etape Australia

Snowy Mountains NSW, 2 December 2017

You might well not want to go all the way to France for a piece of Le Tour action – and, in any case, you might have some difficulty gaining entry. Fortunately, in 2016, Australia's Snowy Mountains became an official destination for a Tour de France-approved L'Etape event. The French word l'étape means 'stage', and that's exactly what you get.

You can 'Race' 157 kilometres, or 'Ride' 126km on courses that wend their way from the Thredbo Valley through Jindabyne and out through the Monaro via Berridale and Dalgety. While grand chateaux and imposing

churches are in short supply, you will see plenty of merino sheep, expansive views of Australia's highest mountains, a crossing of the iconic Snowy River and a glorious palette of yellow, green and polka-dots. All this is on roads closed especially for an event that last year attracted more than 3,000 riders.

Ride alongside four-time Tour de France champion Chris Froome, who will also be holding clinics and sharing his extensive knowledge. With Phil Liggett and Matt Keenan as official commentators, spectators will think they're on the couch watching SBS at 2am in July.

letapeaustralia.com ▶



L'Etape Australia in the Snowy mountains. © Sportograf.





Great Otway Gravel Grind.



Peta Mullens in the Otway Odyssey.

Cycle networks such as those found around Forrest have revitalised many rural centres across Australia.

Otway Odyssey and Great Otway Gravel Grind

The Otways VIC, 24–25 February 2018

For a dozen years now, 1,000 or more dirt-seekers have converged on the little village of Forrest, which is surrounded by the towering eucalypt and rainforest of the Otway Ranges. The Otway Odyssey was always a journey for mountain bikers keen to take on 10km, 30km, 50km or 100km races along forest tracks, dirt roads and single tracks.

Single tracks are the holy grail of mountain biking: purpose-built, narrow trails that twist, drop and climb through the terrain. Cycle networks such as those found around Forrest have revitalised many rural centres across Australia. Elite riders will smash the 100km course in a little over four hours, while those at the back of the pack will take up to 10 hours to grind through the full distance.

Speaking of grinding: two years ago, a new event – the Great Otway Gravel Grind – was introduced to the weekend, with two course options: 49km and 97km. Riders compete on bikes that look like road bikes – and indeed, some are – but they’re designed to be robust enough to handle dirt roads, not asphalt ones. The keenest cyclists can do the Gravel Grind on the Saturday and the Odyssey on the Sunday.
rapidascent.com.au



Great Otway Gravel Grind.

**Fat Tyre Festival
Melrose SA, 8–11 June 2018**

How does a tiny village on the edge of the Flinders Ranges, some 275 kilometres north of Adelaide, become a renowned mountain-biking centre? All that was needed was a bike-shop owner from the United States of America, a young couple from New Zealand, some broad-minded farmers and a bunch of enthusiastic villagers. Melrose, population 406, embraced all of this more than 15 years ago and now, Over the Edge, a bike/coffee/merino-wool shop, sits proudly

in a town with some 100 kilometres of trails at its doorstep.

For more than 15 years, mountain bikers from across Australia have been descending on Melrose over the Queen’s Birthday long weekend in June for an event that encompasses rides, skills clinics, food, music and endless discussions about tyre widths, gear ratios and the mythical ‘flow’. The Fat Tyre Festival is very much about the ride, not the race – indeed, competitiveness may have you thrown out of town.
melrosemountainbike.com



Single Speed Nationals

Alice Springs NT, 13–15 July 2018

Any national championship where hosting rights are decided by a joust between candidate towns on kids' bikes gives some indication as to the seriousness (or otherwise) of this event. Alice Springs put their best jouster forward to claim rights to the 2018 Single Speed Nationals. If Wagga Wagga offers you Gears & Beers, this one is all about just one gear, plenty of beer and more than a smattering of beards.

'Singlespeeding' is perhaps the purest and simplest form of mountain biking. Bikes are equipped with one gear only, and any serious approach to the racing is frowned upon. Most championship courses have a 'beer shortcut' (drink a beer or do a penalty lap) and each rider carries the number plate '1'.

Surprisingly to many people, Alice Springs has the most incredible mountain biking, with a very active club and a couple of major national events held there each year. The 2018 Single Speed Nationals will base itself out at the historic Old Telegraph Station.

facebook.com/groups/87297156996/

Gears & Beers

Wagga Wagga NSW, 30 September 2018

Some wise soul once said that every good ride should start with a coffee and finish with a beer. While I'm not sure about the latter after a sunrise ride, it's generally a reasonable proposition. Down in the NSW Riverina, they've formalised the link with Gears & Beers – an event with a name I'm certain would have included a third noun, had the organisers been able to think of a coffee-related term that ended in 'ears'.

The baristas are pumping it out from before dawn as riders in the Dirty 130 ready themselves to start on a course that winds on blacktop and dirt, suitable for road and gravel bikes, through the northern hills of the Wagga region. Later, the Filthy 50 set off (they like their rhymes in the Riverina) – and so on, with races over various shorter distances down to an easy nine kilometres.

Once the biking's done, it would be rude not to hobble straight to the Craft Beer & Cider Festival, where the wares of around 15 craft brewers are on tap for those seeking post-ride hydration in the company of 1,500-odd bike-minded souls.

gearsandbeers.org.au 📍



Pedal powered Smoothies at The Fat Tyre Festival. © Sam Bruce.

The beauty of the stage race format is that you get to settle into a rhythm for a few days and enjoy and endure the ups and downs with your fellow riders.



All images this page of Cape to Cape. © Flow Mountain Bike.

Cape to Cape

Margaret River WA, 18–21 October 2018

Sometimes, a day on the bike is just not long enough. Which is why each year, some 1,200 mountain bikers gather down Margaret River way in late October for the four-day Cape to Cape. In the 10 years the event has been running, it has been the catalyst for the development of trails around the region that can be used for year-round riding.

Traditionally, the Cape to Cape has showcased the south-west region of Western Australia in a point-to-point race format, journeying from Cape Leeuwin, the most south-westerly point in Australia, north to Cape Naturaliste. In 2017, however, all four race stages started and finished close to Margaret River – two at wineries and a third at a brewery – making logistics easier for riders.

The beauty of the stage race format is that you get to settle into a rhythm for a few days and enjoy and endure the ups and



downs with your fellow riders. With each of the four stages of the Cape to Cape covering either 50 or 60km, this is a very manageable event for any keen mountain biker.

capetocapemtb.com

None of the above events offer enough challenge for you? Well, there's always the Indian Pacific Wheel Race in March (indianpacificwheelrace.com). Fully self-supported, this race of a mere 5,500 kilometres will take you from Fremantle to Sydney.

See you at the start! 🏍️