

The 2013 Gibb Challenge – As seen by the Royal Hutt River Silvertails

Prologue - notes for aspiring competitors

Hank Koelmij, Skip Lissiman, Andrew “Macca” McMillan (Capt.) and Ian “Sandy” Sandover of the Royal Hutt River Silvertails were accepted as a late team entry in the 700km 2013 Gibb Challenge mountain bike ride from Derby to El Questro station. It was an honour for the team to represent HRH Prince Leonard, HRH Princess Shirley and The Principality of Hutt River.

The Royal Flying Doctor Service was the primary charitable beneficiary of the Gibb Challenge and some 70+ teams contributed to raise over \$375,000. The RHR Silvertails featured in the top 10 fundraising teams.

Despite our short but generally excellent forward planning, there were a few hitches before the event started.

- At our gala pre-event fundraising event, David Hutson learned that one should remove those expensive sunglasses before undertaking an unfamiliar watersport activity such as stand up paddle boarding. Skip learned that lending goggles to David Hutson to recover the lost sunglasses could result in the loss of said goggles.
- On departure for the Kimberley Macca found that after keying a withdrawal into an ATM and removing the card, one should then remove the cash from the machine before heading for the boarding gate at the airport.
- Always check the rental 4WD has an operation manual – otherwise you have to make a call interrupt Buzz’s morning routine at Rottnest when the Budget car breaks down on the delivery trip from Kunnunurra to Broome. However, we got great service from the national Budget operations manager – auto gearbox overheated apparently due to heavy trailer - fixed when overdrive disengaged (that would be in the manual!).
- Sandy confirmed to us that spare tyres are only useful when they are the same size as the wheel to which they are to be fitted.
- With a 4am wakeup for a 6am start, the team learned that they should avoid the company of the event nurses on the night before. Here’s Skip belting out an old favourite (Men at Work’s “Down Under”) with Hank and nurse “Bernie”. The performance brought on a Hakka from the Kiwi patrons.



Day one – A long fast ride from Derby to Imintji

A tough 240km leg with 35 degree and humid conditions was anchored by Skip and Hank while Ian and Macca recuperated from the pre-event festivities in the Budget mother ship at the 20km mark.

We snapped to our senses when a bloke flashed by complete with aerodynamic “teardrop” helmet and mountain bike in time trial configuration. This was our first sighting of eventual winners the "Hard R's". The event was going to be more serious than we had planned for!

Minutes later a bunch appeared followed by a plume of red dust raised by about 100 support vehicles and we were pleased to see Skip and Hank in amongst the lead group.

Ian joined in and Skip pulled over for a spell at the first change and Macca relieved Hank 10 km later. We rolled on in pair formation pretty much that way for the rest of the day punctuated by ritual smashings of the lead bunch by Hank and Ian - the carnage soon resulted in two contenders for second place – RHR Silvertails versus the Jabiru Jets.



Late in the day as the Silvertails brutally pounced on the misfortune of a cramped Jets rider and rode off to a clear break only to be caught and passed by the Jets at the last kilometre.

The Jets guy was heroically powerful and fast and probably deserved the chockies but years of foul play on Mounts Bay Road kicked in at this moment as Hank and Macca jumped onto his wheel and drafted through to a perfectly executed 'Allen Maneuver' finish to fight of the Jets and land second place behind the Hard R's. The Jets were so surly about the finish it could have come to blows if not for the calming influence of their captain, a Baptist minister.

We pitched our tent and went for a refreshing swim in Bells creek which was covered with 'Lylys' (that's Hank English for 'lilies'). Then it started raining!



On return to our camp ground we discovered the specially graded soil mixed with rain the turned into a very sticky mud. Tough night in the wet tent!

Day 2 - the mud run to Mount Elizabeth

Our Second place on day one earned the Silvertails a seeded place at the start on day two in group A. Ian and Macca took the anchor in really tough conditions where the fresh Gibb River road mud caked thickly on our tyres. With little traction in the mud our maximum effort yielded about 18-20 kmh for the first 30 km or so.

Late in the morning a plume of dust on the road arose as Skip came off. Up went the call “Rider Down”. Skip recovered and finished the day well.

In these conditions the bunch exploded early but with determination and a slowly improving road surface the Silvertails powered away to take second place followed by a well-deserved swim in a creek en-route to the camping ground.

After the fall Skip did require a visit to the nursing station. At the nursing station Ship spotted Ian who was claiming to have tick lodged in his groin requiring close attention – a likely story Ian and seen through by the nurses!



Day 3 - Another mud run then time trial to Ellenbrae Station



Camping facilities at Ellenbrae Station were great but turned very boggy after a night of heavy rain to the point where many 4WD's got bogged leaving.



A course change required a long drive through seriously heavy Gibb mud and then start a 70km time trial. This wasn't officially timed but because we rode so well we claimed a moral 2nd place. More rain over night but Camping at Ellenbrae station was pretty good and we had a magnificent swim (and beer) in the camp watering hole.



Day 4 - dusty and rutted roads but at least the rain stopped at Home Valley Station

Seeded in group A we had a great advantage over other teams who faced serious vehicle dust clouds.



Silvertails showed some great form on the road today and early held on to (and even helped) some of the Hard R's riders after blowing off the other teams. Decidedly, in the mid-section of the course a clash of the captains evolved, but Macca couldn't hold on to "mental Marks" 40+ kmh performance on the time trial setup (toughen up princess!). Macca also got a serious fright when following Hank through a floodway and rode over a 2 metre king brown snake - brown corduroy pants please!

Cocky about a certain second place, the Silvertails went into tourist mode leaving the Triton behind for our glorious decent to a finish at Home Valley Station. Unfortunately we started celebrations a lot early Skip fell off his bike (again but got up really quickly) and were caught napping by the Jets who slipped by as the boys were posing for pix on the roadside 5km from the finish.



A furious chase broke out culminating in the Silvertails boys riding down the Baptist minister captain of the Jets at the finish (minister's wrath was calmed by the Derby police constable and a few reds at the bar).

Good drying weather, excellent showers and plenty of bon homie at the bar made for a good night's sleep.

Day 5 - a glorious ride to the finish at El Questro

Like the tour De France, the last day was a non-competitive celebration of our efforts and the magnificent East Kimberley.

Having packed our now dry belongings we were set for a special ride as a team with the Hard R's to El Questro.... Or so we thought.... until Hank declared his riding shoes and new Silvertails team gear had been stolen. An emu parade, public announcements and unpacking the trailer revealed nothing. Spare shoes and gear were offered by others and finally we set off across the impressive Pentecost River and on to the finish at El Questro with the crime unsolved.



We said our farewells at the final dinner which Skip combined with a crowd pleasing snooze.



Epilogue

- RFDS proved their worth during the Gibb Challenge with two medevacs: one competitor had a heart failure and the wife of the event organiser had suspected appendicitis – Both reported to be OK.
- Ian packing his bag at El Questro - "what the f*@% Hank I found your lost gear packed in my suitcase" - Hank had panicked the day before when the contents fell out while loading Ian's bag on the trailer Hank had grabbed everything within reach including his own riding gear and stuffed into Ian's suitcase.
- After an almost superb performance (apart from engine cut out delivering from Kununurra to Derby and the bull bar falling off) the Triton burst a front tyre on the sealed road driving sedately to the airport from El Questro.

Thanks again for the support of those who donated to the cause and those who helped us along the way with gear and equipment.

P.S. Our fundraising achievement has us seeded to participate in the 2014 edition of the Gibb Challenge. Our brilliant bike rack is stored in Kununurra - any takers?