



Not The Spoken Word

Bi-monthly newsletter of The Western Australian Historical Cycle Club Inc.

Perth to Sydney 1933 Record Tandem Ride

On November 4th 1933, William "Billy" Read and Gordon Jones, members of the Bassendean Midland Cycling Club, left the Perth G.P.O. in Forrest Place Perth, in an attempt to ride to Sydney in under 23 days. The solo record at that time was held by another West Australian, Vic Waltham, who had ridden from Sydney to Perth in 26 days 3 hours 8 minutes in 1927.

The tandem was steered by Read, aged 31 years. He was short and sturdily built and had been a racing cyclist for 17 years. Jones, aged 22 years was taller and lighter than Read and had raced as a West Australian junior. The men had trained for five months, cycling 640 km a week. Their daily average distance had to exceed 190 km a day, a gruelling task in view of the unsealed and corrugated roads of those days, and the very rough track between Coolgardie and Adelaide

Their machine, an Aussie tandem was fitted with the "latest and greatest labour saving device", a 3 speed Cyclo variable gear, internal brakes and Dunlop Perdraiu tyres. A tank to hold 9 litres of water was fitted between the frames of the machine. There were no backup vehicles as today's riders enjoy; between towns they were dependant on their own resources and had to carry all they needed.

Read and Jones were given an enthusiastic send-off by a large crowd. Their cycle was brightly painted and they wore green and gold guernseys, plus-fours riding breeches and white fisher hats. The first three stages were to Cunderdin, Southern Cross and Coolgardie. By the 8 November they had reached Balladonia after 15 hours of hard riding through heavy sand and against strong head winds. From Balladonia, the cycle was fully loaded for the crossing of the Nullarbor. The water tank was filled as well as four detachable water flasks. Although they had

arranged for food supplies to be left at some stations on the Nullarbor, they carried tinned provisions and a blanket, the necessary spares and a minimum of personal items. The tyres had to bear a weight of over 190 kg on very rough roads.

There was no made road across the Nullarbor and at one stage they spent two days wheeling their cycle through heavy sand. Another section was pitted with camel tracks; sometimes the country was overgrown with brush and near the Madura Pass the jagged edge of limestone had been exposed by strong winds. One day they had 12 punctures in 26 km and finished up walking to the next station. In addition, they battled head winds and hot weather. Also near Madura in WA, they attracted the attention of a herd of wild steers. Read later commented that was when they easily registered their fastest burst of speed for the whole trip and just managed to out-distance the herd.

The riders sustained a bad fall approaching Iron Knob in SA. They were descending a hill when the wheel was caught in a rut and they were thrown over the han-

dlebars. Read had numerous abrasions and a badly sprained shoulder, Jones escaped with slight abrasions.

Undaunted, they remounted the cycle and carried on. After leaving Port Augusta, they suffered a blowout due to the great weight on the tyres and had to walk 24 km to the next town. Going to bed at midnight, they were up and on their way at 4am covering the remaining 290 km to Adelaide by dark - the journey so far had taken 14 days.



Jones (left) and Read - image courtesy State Library of NSW

One would have thought that their worries were over but after leaving Adelaide, they encountered heavy rain and further strong head winds which slowed them to an average 11 km/h causing them to fall behind schedule.

Reporting when 160 km out of Melbourne, Read said that they were both very saddle sore and could only ride short distances. In spite of this, once free of the head winds they made good time and when 26 km out of

Club Calendar

Meeting - January 16th 7:30pm

Arross Clubroom.

Meeting - February 20th 7:30pm

Arross Clubroom.

Meeting - March 20th 7:30pm

Arross Clubroom.

Meeting - April 17th 7:30pm

Arross Clubroom.

Meeting - May 15th 7:30pm

Arross Clubroom.

AGM - June 19th 7:30pm

Arross Clubroom.

Meeting - July 17th 7:30pm

Arross Clubroom.

Provisional 2017 Display & Ride Dates

Ride - Garvey Park January 22nd 9am

Ride - Heathcote to Point Walter

February 26th 10am

Display - Guildford Heritage Fair

March 26th

Ride - Rockingham

April 23rd 10am

Ride - Vancouver St Fair

Albany May 6th

Display - Moondyne Festival

Toodyay May 7th

Display - Arthur Grady Day

Fremantle May 27th

Western Australian Historical Cycle Club Inc.

PO Box 224, Applecross, WA, 6153

email info.wahcc@gmail.com

President: Robert Frith

Vice President: Merv Thompson

Treasurer: Malcolm Bell

Secretary: Robert Hunt

Committee Members: Malcolm Buckland

DISCLAIMER The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the WA Historical Cycle Club and the accuracy of information published herein is not guaranteed.

Melbourne they were met by the Australian champion cyclist, Hubert Opperman, who rode with them the remaining distance to the Malvern Star Agency in Elizabeth Street. They were welcomed there by many people prominent in cycling circles but there was no time for self congratulation, they stopped only for a light lunch and started off again on the last leg of the journey to Sydney. From there on, the conditions were vastly improved and Read and Jones made good time, averaging 32 km/h. For the whole trip they had averaged five punctures a day and, except for replacing tyres and a few spokes, the Aussie tandem had come through unscathed.

Their arrival in Sydney was reported by the Guardian, Nov 27, 1933.

"Sunburnt and with their equipment spattered with the mud and dust of four states, William Reid (sic) and Gordon Jones of Western Australia, rode their gaily coloured tandem bicycle to the General Post Office at 9am today, and signed a time-sheet which showed that they had ridden 3,003 miles across Australia in 22 days, 17 hours."

After returning to WA, Read, who had played a leading role in the Bassendean-Midland Cycling Club, became its first life member. He died some years ago.

Gordon Jones, after working for WA Govt. Railways and then manager and part owner of Moondah at Gingin, retired to the metropolitan area becoming an active sportsman, playing bowls with the Bedford Bowling Club. He died in 2013 aged 102 years.

Jan Lonsdale

