



Noosa Winter Festival Wrap

Mother Nature gets us worried

Mother Nature wasn't playing her part of day one of the Noosa Winter Festival. Grey skies and intermittent showers took hold of day one of the festival. Indeed the afternoon prior to the Noosa Century Cycle, Mother Nature made a couple of thousand cyclists a tad nervous when the heavens opened with great fury. There weren't too many cyclists looking forward to their 100 km or 160km cycle across the Sunshine Coast Hinterland in this weather! It was late in the night when the rain abated, and sleep came. By the time the 5am alarm clock went off participants were heading straight for a peek outside to see what the sky had in store. Fears were alleviated to see a few stars what was shaping up as a clear day.

No rain but humidity to bring back memories of Summer

The rain left behind a warming blanket of cloud cover and a high dose of humidity. Only a few days prior the cooler temperatures meant an early cycle required dressing in all the winter kit to venture outdoors. Now we didn't even need a wind vest! It was a balmy 20 degrees at 6am and humidity was up in the high 80's. From the get go sweating was not an option but a given. While it was the 'Winter Festival', one could be forgiven in thinking we were in the midst of the warmer months of the year. Everyone at the start line was buoyed by the prospect of a good day's riding. They weren't disappointed. It turned out to be a stunning 26 degree day with the sun eventually poking its timid head out after burning away the last of the wispy clouds. The cyclists couldn't have been happier!

The Noosa Century mass peloton

As director of Smiling for Smiddy challenge events we limit our peloton to 50 riders. So it was a unique experience to push off alongside 800 riders for the 160km cycle in a well controlled mass start at 6am. For the first 20 kilometres the course is relatively flat. This meant during those 20 energised kilometres a peloton stretched as far as the eye could see in both directions. It wouldn't be until the first major climb of the day that the peloton would splinter. What a delight it was for the majority of the riders to bunch up like this and ride out of town incident free. There were a few nervous twitchy riders but everyone was on the ball and riding well in the mass peloton. There was definitely a buzz in the air and a heightened expectation of a great day ahead.

Wet Roads and slippery descents

With the rain and tree-lined shady course, the roads remained wet for the first few hours of the ride. Caution was the order of the day early on and riders appeared to be doing the right thing, not sitting too close to the rider in front and descending with care. A few descents were bone dry and presented a thrilling experience that only bike riders will be familiar with.

Camaraderie and looking after your mates

One of the things I noticed out on course, besides stunning scenery such as the Glass House mountains surrounded in mist with their peaks jutting out as if to say, "Look at me I am floating on clouds." Sorry but mountains tend to talk to me! Sorry I got distracted...anyway I was saying the one thing I noticed was the fabulous camaraderie, team work and mateship out there on the day. I saw mates stopping to help each other out with punctures; I saw a ten-strong bunch all in the same cycling outfits attending to one of their mates who had a mechanical issue. I saw riders pushing each other up climbs, getting water for others at any of the three well organised and friendly aid stations. I take my hat off to everyone who had an encouraging word to say to fellow riders as they zoomed past. I rode the entire way with my great mate Paul Dawson, a fellow Smiddy rider and a very caring human being. Paul thanked every aid station volunteer he came into contact with, every person on the side of the road manning the many intersections along the way, and at one stage organised a small peloton of 16 riders into a rotating group to share the load out front for a couple of minutes each. I saw a lot of that out there and it made me proud to be a cyclist and I thank all of you for that.

Cyclists are one big family

I admire the guys and girls out there that finish in the first group in around the four and a half hour mark for 160kms. I especially admire the masses out there that finish regardless of time; some are out there for up to eight hours. On the last stage along the David Low Highway, which still contains enough hills to zap the legs over the final 40kms, our group was passing a lot of the 100km riders and they were buzzing along and having a ball. Regardless of distance or time we share a common bond of all being cyclists and what a grand day it was to celebrate that 'Band of Brothers' bond.

This well-organised event is what we have come to expect from any USM event and you will not be disappointed if you were to put this event on your 'must do' list for 2012. It was my first time doing this sensational course as a participant and I cannot wait to get another crack at it next year.

Take care out on the roads.

Sharky