

# RIDING WITH THE OLD BLOKE



Okay, so, what's been happening? Well, if you've been following **The Old Bloke Facebook page** you will have seen a few posts. But if you haven't ... So I'll start with a bit of a recap of things that have been happening over the past few months. (*Some of which hasn't been on Facebook*).

## RESTRICTED RIDING

Since about the middle of the year the area where I live had been subject to a persistent pandemic, resulting in a long-lasting lockdown, putting severe restrictions on any riding. Sure, we could use the bike for those "essential outings" (for food etc), which I did a couple of times, and then for relaxing. But, for a long time, we had to stay within our Local Government Area (LGA).



The riding itself wasn't regarded as "exercise" (as it was last year), but we could use the bike to go to somewhere to relax – which included sitting and relaxing, eating or drinking etc. So **I put a thermos and mug in the top-box** and rode to a nearby suburb. If a housing development can be scenic, then this was okay – a waterway in the foreground and mountains in the background.

It then got to where we could go into a neighbouring LGA, but had to stay within what was regarded as the "Greater Sydney Area". That covered a huge area, with my place of residence being towards the southern end of it. That opened up a lot of possibilities, but **prevented me from going where I'd prefer to go** – to the South or to the West. As many of you will know – or have worked out – I live a bit south of Wollongong. Going North involves at least traffic, and going East ... well, there's an ocean that way! It did allow me to ride about two-thirds of the way up Macquarie Pass; to where the boundary changed. So I did that once.

During this time there was a line of thought (said to be official, although I never saw an official statement) that said **police had been told not to worry bikers**, provided they were behaving themselves. A friend of mine regularly rode outside the designated boundaries without a problem. Then one day he was pulled over for a "breath test and COVID-compliance check." No problem with the breath-test (he's a non-drinker), but he was in an area well outside the designated Greater Sydney Area. The copper asked him what his reason was for being out? He replied, "Mental health day." And further explained that he wasn't going to stop anywhere, just ride to the outskirts of the next town, turn around and come back again. The man in blue nodded and said, "I

understand”, and sent him on his way. Opinion was divided as to whether that was confirmation of the afore-mentioned police approach, or just that the copper was in a good mood. Most said the former, but I wasn’t game to push it.

And then, from 1<sup>st</sup> November, the restrictions were lifted; **we were free to go anywhere** – provided we had been fully vaccinated. Since then I’ve still only managed to get in an occasional short ride. Other commitments, and unsuitable weather, has kept the bike in the shed.

### **PUZZLING PUNCTURE**

If you’ve been following the Facebook page you will have seen this; but I’ll put it here too. It was a unique experience, because **in over 40 years of riding I had never had my bike return home on the back of a truck** – until a couple of months ago. The reason? A flat tyre. And a very strange one it was!

I decided to go for a ride and have a cuppa at a lookout on top of the mountains. (Bulli Tops, for those who know the area). About half way there the bike started to feel a little strange; like it was moving around a bit at the back. I pulled over and checked the back tyre, which I suspected might have been low on pressure. It seemed okay, (I just looked at it while bouncing up and down a bit), so I kept going. But soon after, there it was: the unmistakable feel and sound of a flat rear tyre! I crawled along until there was space beside the road for me to pull over and stop.

Usually with punctures in tubeless tyres the tyre seals around what has punctured it, but this had gone down very quickly. Despite that, I couldn’t see any obvious cause – no tell-tale nail-head protruding from the tread etc. I do carry a puncture-repair kit, but I couldn’t see what to repair! So I called the NRMA. They took about 90 minutes to arrive, but at least I could have a cuppa while I waited.

Being a Sunday (*of course!*) no bike shops were open, so next day it was onto another truck to take it to my bike mechanic. He found the cause – a slash in the tread of the tyre. When deflated, the slash closed up, which made it almost impossible to see. When he took the tyre off he found the cause of the slash inside – **the broken off end of knife blade!** It had to have happened while I was riding, but I hadn’t heard anything flick up. A strange one, although having posted the story on Facebook, a couple of other people said they’d experienced the same thing! No way of fixing that, so it was a new tyre. Two new tyres in fact; as it was recommended that I replace the front one too, to keep both tyres the same. (Tyres were Michelin PR4, which were no longer available).



### **MICHELIN PR4 V MICHELIN ROAD 5**

To be honest, I wasn’t disappointed that I had to get new tyres. I’d had PR4 on the previous bike, and changed to the new Road 5 not too long before I sold it. I had always thought the PR4 was a *harder* tyre – maybe it was the sidewall that was stiffer than, for example, the previous PR3 (which I loved!). **The Road 5 seemed softer riding and gave more feel.** The Tracer came standard with the PR4 (*not a bad tyre to get as*



*standard!*), but being exactly the same tyre (including the same size) as the XJR1300 – which was about 40kg heavier – I figured that those advantages would be even more noticeable on the Tracer. So I had intended changing to the Road 5 when I could afford it. *I hadn't planned on doing it so soon though!* The front tyre had about 80% tread left, so I was able to sell that and get a few bucks to put towards the cost of the two new ones.

Reports I read from others who had gone from the standard PR4 to the Road 5 were positive, all saying that they were much better. Better handling and better ride. And so it proved to be. **The ride improved – especially on those small-amplitude ripples and bumps.** And there was **better feel through the bars too.** Michelin claim they are significantly superior in the wet to the PR4 (which were good anyway), and again, that was confirmed by reports I read. So I was pleased to get the Road 5s.

### ADDING A BIT OF BLING



There's nothing unusual about wheelstickers, except these were **home-made by a guy in England.** He was advertising them on the UK Tracer 700 Owner's Facebook page – which has a few overseas members like me on there too. I thought they looked good, so I ordered some from him. Good guy to deal with too!

### YAMAHA TRACER 9 GT

Yamaha's **MT-09** has been a very popular bike, and it has spawned a couple of off-shoots. One is the **Tracer**, known until now as the Tracer 900. I tested this back in 2015. There were things I liked about it, and things I didn't like about it. (Click [here](#) to read the test). Well, this year they have updated it, and it is now called the **Tracer 9 GT.**



Yamaha have always marketed the Tracer (700 included) as a Sports-Tourer; and still do. In fact they've moved it a bit more in that direction. There is a whole host of features to make it suit that role. **It sounds like a good thing!** But it ain't cheap! At just over \$23,000 ride away you might think it would be getting close to that superb tourer, the FJR1300; but no, you'll now pay almost \$32,000 for one of those! (Click [here](#) to get all the details).

### GOOD DESCRIPTION OF A BAD EXPERIENCE

**What is it like to be involved in a crash and taken to hospital with several broken bones?** No, you don't want to know; and nor do I. Well not from personal experience anyway! A friend of mine had this experience 11 years ago (before I got to know him), and he recently re-told the story of his experience on a Blog that he writes. **It is a fascinating read!** Not the gory details of how he hit a truck (*yes, he had a head-on with a truck!*), but the story of what happened afterwards – the transfer to a high-care hospital, including an ambulance trip and helicopter transfer; the experience in hospital etc. It's all these finer details that makes it such an interesting read. Click [here](#).

### DEBATABLE DUKES

Ducatis – you gotta love 'em don't you! They look fast just standing in the driveway, and they sound glorious!

But when it comes to practicalities, well, that's when it all gets a bit questionable. Guy Allen recently wrote an article on the **Ducati 916 from the mid 1990s**. (His **Allmoto** publications are a good read!). He described the sporting appeal of this super-sport beast, but his description of the riding-position was very telling. *“With a race-replica ride position that only the Italians could market and keep a straight face, it's murder as a commuter, a special kind of torture as a touring bike, and best suited to a quick squirt between coffees, or a proper gallop on your favourite set of corners.”*

And then there's the cost. Guy says that when new it was \$25,000 – which, he says, was 10 grand more than a Honda Fireblade! I checked prices today, and they are asking about the same money, or more: 25 grand or over, for a decent one! And they aren't quite 30 years old, so don't qualify for Historical rego. ***Watch the prices soar when they do!***

### **SPEED TRIPLE IS TRIUMPHANT**



The verdict is in, for **Bikesales' annual Bike Of The Year Award**. And the winner is....(drum-roll)... the **Triumph Speed Triple**.

The nominated bikes were reduced to a final three – the Triumph, the Yamaha MT-09, and the KTM 890 Adventure.

The KTM is a very different bike to the others, but each bike was judged on its merits. The Triumph and Yamaha are arguably competing for the same piece of the road. The Yamaha is cheaper, but the Triumph has a few more features and more technology. To me, it also looks a lot better than the Yamaha. I'm not a fan of the latest Yamaha front-end styling. The Triumph looks like it is angry and scowling, but it's better than the “Transformer”-style front of the Yamaha! Even from the side I reckon it looks better. Click [here](#) for the story.

### **FLOWER POWER**

I did post this on the Facebook page, but it hasn't made it to any of the update emails. **David** sent me [this video](#) of a trip he did to the **wildflowers in W.A.** Lots of flowers; and a lot of riding to get there – on bitumen and dirt and even a couple of water-crossings. It's a good look at the famous flowers, and the bikes that took them there.

### **FEEDBACK**

Phil responded to the item on the Ducati 916 by commenting on Italian sports bikes in general, and saying, “I rode an MV Agusta F4i once; without doubt the most ridiculous riding position imaginable.”

Several readers responded to an item on the Facebook page about a guy getting caught for doing 224km/h in a 110 zone. There was universal condemnation for this stupidity. But some told amusing tales of derring-do from back in those halcyon days of less speed-limits and more lenient police. All good fun!

Well, that's it for now. I hope you enjoyed the read. More news next time, with perhaps a nostalgic section too. Stay safe, and enjoy the ride.

*Elwyn*  
(The Old Bloke)