

## Chapter One - The Gathering

Dark, wet & windy. That was the scene as a group of scrawny and shivering so called athletes huddled under the verandah of the Romsey Pub. This was the 7th time that the event had been held and the prospect of horrendous weather didn't turn anyone away.

The seeding list was looking very strong and the general perception was that stage records would tumble. Some were predicting that up to 10 may go given the depth of the field.

Andre La Gerche and Ash Snowden were late withdrawals, but Charles Chambers and Scotty Bales stepped up to complete a 28 man field. The withdrawal of Andre meant a quick shuffle of the top order and Matt S became the 7<sup>th</sup> captain.

Selections got under way with Matt picking up Richard and passing over 3 higher seeded runners, and Paul overlooking Shane in favour of AL. In a costly move Ian was ignored by Coleman's Comrades and Tony Dell was selected ahead of LG. Either Thai said something to upset Matt, or Matt was refusing to pick in order as he picked up Juanita and Gary out of order. All selections then went according to the seeding list.

The teams were now picked:

The Asthmatics & Dan

Dan "Dan" Hornery ,Anthony "Mitho" Mithen ,Wayne "Metro" Williams ,Scott "Cotton" Bales

The Also-Rans

Colin "Thorny" Thornton ,Bruce "ATB" Arthur ,Anthony "AW" Weiland ,Jim "Jimmy" Grellis

Coleman's Comrades

Brett "BC" Coleman ,Shane "Slips" Fielding ,Charles "Charles" Chambers ,Matt "Lowthy" Lowth

Team Lost

Paul "PM" Martinico ,Anthony "AL" Lee , Ian "Denti" Dent , Craig "Craig" Harris

3 Guys, A Girl & a Pub

Troy "TW" Williams ,Nic "Nic G" Gilbert ,Tony "Tiger Boy" Dell ,Kirsten "KJ" Jackson

House of Paine

Stephen "House" Paine ,David "Smooth One" Venour ,Luke "LG" Goodman ,Thai "Thai" Phan

The Drowned Rats

Matt "Kyle" Sandilands ,Richard "Dozer" Does ,Juanita "JL" Liston , Gary "GGO" O'Dwyer

The teams organised their cars & planned their stage strategies before heading up the road to the start line. The 14 runners due to line up in the first stage of the day could be categorised into 2 groups. A) Those who were silly enough to attempt a warm up in driving wind & rain and a temperature of about 8 degrees; and B) Those who kept 4 layers of clothing on until about 30 seconds from the start. Whatever group you chose, you were sure to be soaked and freezing by the time you stood on the start line in racing gear for any longer than 10 seconds.

AL gave a quick spiel about the significance of the naming of the Nigel Aylott Relay just before 10 am and a few minutes later we were ready to go.

## **Chapter Two - Off and Racing**

The gun goes off and 14 keen runners (keen is relative) head off up the main street before turning right and heading out into open country. When the rain wasn't beating into your face it was just about knocking you off the road. Not an enjoyable time trial and the times were far from spectacular. Dan was quickest with 10:00 (2<sup>nd</sup> fastest in NAR history) with PM, BC & House running mid 10's and a big bunch of runners around the 11min mark. Of interest Nic G cleaned up Thorny by 1 second in the first of their battles for the day. After Stage 1 Dan's team held a 4 sec lead over TW's team.

A massed restart for Stage 2 and a very close battle between Tony, GGO & Thai with Craig not far behind. Cotton and Jim looked steady and Lowthy was wondering why he signed up to this race. TW's team had hit the lead with House's team 27 seconds back.

Runners were tagged into Stage 3 and believe it or not the weather was getting worse. This stage laid the foundation for what lay ahead with the lost kiwi Denti showing signs he had come out to play. He set the fastest time and opened up the lead for PM's team. AW was only 10 seconds behind Denti but was falling behind in the team stakes. House's team were sitting 2<sup>nd</sup>, 42 seconds back.

Stage 4 belonged to Nic G as he made up some time for his team and set a new stage record beating the Smooth One's 2006 record by 2 seconds (WELL DONE NIC!!). Dozer was only 12 seconds back with Slips

not too far behind. AL managed to hold onto the lead for PM's team with House's team now 46 seconds behind in 2<sup>nd</sup>.

As an indication of how bad the weather was at this stage of the race, AL opened the passenger door of PM's car and PM was being pelted in the face by rain whilst sitting in the driver's seat. At least the last km of Stage 4 was down breeze.

Stage 5, and the big boys came out to play. PM held onto his team's lead despite hesitating at the 1 and only turn and running the 2<sup>nd</sup> slowest time in the stage. Troy & House ran solidly to get their respective teams within 12 seconds & 30 seconds of the lead. But the story of Stage 5 was a 30 second stage record by Dan and in the process getting his team into 2<sup>nd</sup> place, only 2 seconds back. 4 teams now within 30 seconds, and the race was heating up even if the weather wasn't.

Craig, Tony, Thai & GGO battled it out for honours on Stage 6 all finishing within 20 seconds of each other, with Tony taking the points. Tony grabbed the lead for TW's team with PM's team 7 seconds back. Run solely on dirt roads this stage 6 is traditionally one where runners cop a spray of dust as cars go by. Instead this year, runners finished the Stage with their backs covered in dirt and wet grit.

Stage 7 was the run into Lancefield and once again Denti took charge running the fastest time with AW not far behind. JL gave LG & Charles a bit of a touch up (in the running sense) on the run into lunch showing that the girls were not to be outdone by the guys.

### **Chapter Three – Lunch Break**

As the runners headed in to Lancefield the skies cleared and we were able to enjoy a brief period out of the cars while we had a quick snack and a chat. The times were tallied up and the order was:

PM's team – Leading  
Dan's team – 1:04 behind  
House – 1:23  
TW – 1:51  
Kyle – 3:23  
Thorny – 4:33  
BC – 6:27 and rueing letting Denti slip away

AL announced the placings and as he began, the rain started falling again. Everyone was keen to get moving so lunch break was shortened to 20 minutes.

Big thanks to Grunter for making us watch him eat his delicious pie, pastie & cake from the local bakery.

#### **Chapter Four - Heading to the hills**

With lunch break over we had a short drive up to the start of the 2<sup>nd</sup> timetrial.

There were 13 very keen runners on the start line. None keener than Charles, who was bordering on hypothermia and started exhibiting icicles on his beard. 13 was not enough though and we were 1 runner short. Everyone standing out in the weather just wanted to keep things moving but there was some Prima Donna who thought that the race should wait for them. A minute later GGO hops out of his team car takes off his tracksuit and joins the other runners.

The field is set and they're off again. Metro went out to a lead early on, trying to assert some authority. Denti reeled him in after about 1 km to continue his dominance, but AW was having none of this as he took the honours in the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the timetrials and in the process recorded the 3<sup>rd</sup> fastest time in the event's 7 year history. Thai produced a big run to finish 4<sup>th</sup> and JL also ran solidly to finish 6<sup>th</sup> and smash her Prima Donna team mate by 28 seconds.

Denti & Craig had now stretched their team's lead to 1:27 and House's team had moved into 2<sup>nd</sup>.

The pain was now about to begin as we hit the hills. The NAR relay is won and lost in the afternoon legs and with the weather starting to look slightly better there was some steely determination entering many of the runner's faces.

A massed re-start for Stage 9, "The Big Hill", and all of the runners were anxious before this completely up hill stage.

Dan was on fire on the hill in what was the highlight of the day. He stormed up the last few kms to obliterate the previous record by a staggering 25 seconds. Troy broke 14 minutes to become the 6<sup>th</sup> fastest all time. AL and Slips, who are not known as climbers ran bravely to only finish 20 seconds and 27 seconds respectively behind Troy. The Smooth One suffered a shoe lace malfunction. Kyle heard rumours that VAL officials were once again hiding in the trees so he packed up stumps. PM's team still held the lead but Dan's team was now 2<sup>nd</sup>, only 32 seconds back.

On Stage 10 PM was determined to put the relay beyond doubt and also to claw back one of Hornery's records. He flew over the 4.45 km

journey in 14:10 to only miss the record by 4 seconds. BC was the only other runner to go sub 15 minutes. Nic G knocked off Thorny by 13 seconds. Mitho looked like he had been given downers as his leg speed slowed to a jog, although the times do show that he still beat House by 13 seconds. PM's team 1<sup>st</sup>, Dan's team 2:07 behind.

Stage 11 is a delight to run. Long winding downhill stretches on dirt roads. ATB relished the change and smashed the rest of the field, missing the stage record by 7 seconds, and recording the 3<sup>rd</sup> fastest time ever. ATB made up 2:14 on the leaders but his team was still way behind. GGO ran his best stage of the day proving he is a downhill skier. Scott Bales also put in his best run of the day. Lowthy finished his 4<sup>th</sup> leg and realised he had just done a years running in the space of a few hours. PM's team 1<sup>st</sup>, Dan's team 1:55 behind.

Stage 12, The Rollercoaster, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> killer stage of the day. PM ran the fastest leg to put his team in great shape with 2 legs to go. Slips (16:04), Dozer (16:09) and Nic G (16:10) had a great tussle. Metro took the honours over AW, reversing the 2<sup>nd</sup> timetrial result. Although we like to focus on the positives, it must be pointed out that the Smooth One had anything but a smooth run. 17:26 to record the 2<sup>nd</sup> slowest ever Rollercoaster, and only 7 seconds off last. The back half of this leg was ridiculously hard as runners battled not only the hills but a hurricane as well. PM's team 1<sup>st</sup>, Dan's team 3:15 behind.

Although 3:15 off the lead, Dan sensed that his team was still a chance. Back in March at Barwon Heads he had stormed home over PM's team from an impossible position to win by less than a second. He also knew that with him and Mitho still to run against a tiring AL and Denti that anything could happen.

The start of Stage 13 was like the end of Stage 12. Running up hill into a big gale. AL took over from PM, running nervously, knowing that Dan was bearing down on him. It only took 3kms to catch him and he went past with ease, quickly followed by TW who was also flying. Dan, 14:50, set his 3<sup>rd</sup> stage record for the day with TW only running 31 seconds slower. Thorny redeemed some pride with a win over his Geelong team mate with AL not too far behind. House put in his 2<sup>nd</sup> shocker for the afternoon and Sandilands, well, he was just thinking of Easter time up in Stawell. PM's team 1<sup>st</sup>, Dan's team only 1:35 behind. TW's team in 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2:43 back. All other teams were in a different postcode.

Could Mitho pull something out of the bag and pull off his first relay win. He was expected to out run Denti but 1:35 was a big ask over 3.7kms.

It was all academic however as Denti outran Mitho by 19 seconds. However Mitho did cross the line first to give his team consolation line

honours. Dozer ran the fastest time and Charles ran his best leg for the day squeezing in between Denti & Mitho.

The official times were:

1st – Team Lost: 3h40m02s

2nd – The Asthmatics + Dan: 3h41m56s

3rd – 3 Guys, A Girl & a Pub: 3h44m51s

4th – House of Paine: 3h46m27s

5<sup>th</sup> – The Drowned rates: 3h50m25s

6<sup>th</sup> – The Also-Rans: 3h51m03s

7<sup>th</sup> – Coleman's Comrades: 3h51m57s

Despite the strength of the field, the team times were not all that quick, although this is not surprising given the conditions on the day.

### **Chapter Five – The Wash Up**

Although a BBQ had been planned, this idea was quickly shelved and we all headed back to the Romsey Pub. As the runners pondered what might have been if they'd adopted different strategies or just run faster, a few jugs of beer appeared along with some dodgy looking dim sims, spring rolls and chips.

The times were tallied up back at the pub on some very scrappy timesheets and the presentations were held. Medals were presented to the deserving team of Paul Martinico, Anthony Lee, Ian Dent & Craig Harris. There were congratulations all round, medals to the winning team & the compulsory team photo.

Then it was time for the announcement of the runner of the day. As much as there were plenty of great efforts, there can only be one winner of an award like this. This year the winner was Ian Dent as the committee felt he had the most influence on the day in helping his team to victory. The other individual award was for most outstanding individual stage run of the day. Dan Hornery was the winner of this award for his outstanding run up big hill and smashing the old record. Dan and Ian both received \$25 Rebel vouchers

There were 4 stage records broken on the day. 3 by Dan and 1 by Nic Gilbert. Congratulations to both of you. On the other end of the scale there were 7 stages this year (nearly 8 – lucky for the Smooth One) where the slowest recorded time for that stage was run. We won't name the runners on this report but fair to say the atrocious conditions played a part in this.

Congratulations to all who ran & thanks to the organisers, seeders,

photographers (Grunter) & officials. It was a great effort to get 28 runners up to Romsey on a day that was not suited to running and a testament to the strength of the event.

PS. Special thanks to all the runners for donating \$10 to help out a charity. It was announced that the money would go to the Cancer council however it has subsequently been decided that we will use the money to give Chris Osborne and his family a helping hand by providing some assistance with cleaning and maintenance of their home during this difficult period for them.