

I was put in with a mixed group of 10 other solo riders and as we set off we formed into a tight line – cruising at about 35kmh as we draughted along behind each other.

I warmed up quickly enough – or at least my legs did – but the air was still so chilly I had trouble moving my jaw to talk as I eased past the rider ahead of me. Then from behind there was a shout of “rider down” – a cyclist had hit the road after her front wheel touched the back of another bike. We were told later she had to be taken to hospital to get her elbow stitched up.

As there were support vans behind us we could only assume they would pick up the pieces. We pressed on, passing slower riders as we approached Raetihi before turning onto the rollercoaster back road taking us to the river at Pipiriki.

A GROUP of riders in the Arrows team joined our pack before the Air Force team wooshed past – a five-man peloton pedalling in unison, flying by as fast as they could to prevent others latching on to take advantage of their slipstream.

I hung on to our group – my speedometer topped out at 62kmh on one downhill – before I was dropped by the bunch. Resigned to a patch of solo riding, I eased off and enjoyed the scenery for about 10km before the Powered by Stroopies trio caught me. I latched on and stayed with them as Jim’s cellphone-powered stereo belted out AC/DC.

Ultimately the music or the hills – I’m not a brave descender – defeated me and I was on my own on the last few kilometres into Pipiriki – a tiny cluster of houses and a closed cafe. The two-hour ride from National Park had been a blast.

The ride had to be interrupted at Pipiriki so we could be driven over the next 18km of gravel road past Jerusalem to Ranana for a restart. It was a chance to chat with the Stroopies and sample one of their stash of stroopwafels (syrup waffles), meet the Air Force team and hook up with solo-riding veterans like myself who formed a loose band for the next two days.

The strongest rider in our group was GNS scientist Martin Grundwell of Lower Hutt, proudly equipped with his new \$13,000 bike – just like Cadel Evans’ Tour de France machine.

Fellow Huttite Dian Bell, a champion triathlete who was leading the women’s individual section, and her brother, Craig Stockwell, were in the same bunch as we lined up outside the Ranana marae at midday for the second leg into Whanganui. I was able to stay with the group for the first 30km as the road rolled down beside the river.

But there was no hanging on as we began the climb up “Gentle Annie” at Aramoana. I grovelled to the top on my own, sped down the other side and then battled the final 15km into Whanganui.

Riders assembled for that day’s prizegiving at the Red Dog pub before driving south to prepare for stage seven – 74km from Pahiatua to Masterton on route 52 via Alfredtown.

This time I managed to team up with Dian Bell, before we were caught by a larger group, including Jim and his mobile sound system.

The rest of the stage was a repeat performance – with about 15km to go the Air Force team again bombed past in tight formation and I was ultimately blown by the pack on a hill before the last stretch into Masterton.

The eighth and last stage was a criterium – a series of multi-lap sprints on a closed circuit starting on Parliament’s forecourt racing down to the bottom gate, up Molesworth St and back in through the top gate.

For most of us – including the even more obviously uncompetitive team



Veteran’s vision: Peter Yarrell and son Simon came up with the concept to help promote cycling in New Zealand.

On the road – for charity

THE TOUR of New Zealand is the brainchild of Marlborough-based father and son Peter and Simon Yarrell, who were out riding together two years ago when they came up with the idea of organising a ride the length of New Zealand.

Simon Yarrell, who has twice won the two-day Coast to Coast and his dad, who has organised the Queen Charlotte Classic multisport event for the past 18 years, were inspired by the Government’s cycleways project.

They came up with the idea of a celebration of cycling – a tour pitched at all Kiwi cycle addicts, the most dramatic, accessible multi-day cycling stage race ever to hit New Zealand.

Yarrell, an energetic 68-year-old insurance broker, got the show on the road

enlisting sponsors and a large corps of volunteers to help run the event as a charity fundraiser.

The eight-day tour was designed to provide an experience of some of the best scenery and roads and promote New Zealand as a top-class international cycling venue.

But the length of the country required the event to be split in two – a South Island tour from Bluff to Picton and a North Island tour from Cape Reinga – with all competitors getting together with criterium races on a short closed-circuit course outside Parliament.

Eighty started at Cape Reinga and at Bluff there were 180, the ranks filled in part by Tourism New Zealand-sponsored feature writers and photographers from lifestyle and cycling publications in Hong Kong, Japan, China,

Britain and Australia.

There were corporate and private teams, with riders substituting for each other on different days, solo entrants and riders who just joined in for a stage or two.

Yarrell was delighted with the support and sponsorship the tour had secured, with more than \$65,000 raised for three charities – the Hikurangi Trust, St John Ambulance and the Westpac Rescue Helicopter Service.

Although Yarrell would have liked more riders on the inaugural tour, he believes the concept has now been proven and that all the elements are in place to make it a major event on the cycling calendar.

The tour is scheduled again next year – organisers are planning to run it from April 20 TO 27 – and details will be posted on the Tour of New Zealand website.



from Hong Kong who rode the South Island tour on sturdy and heavy touring bikes – it was a fun way to end the tour, but for others there was more at stake.

Dian, who had won the North Island tour, had to beat her South Island counterpart to secure the overall women’s prize and she did it

with style. Dan Underwood, a Tokyo-based Kiwi, won the individual men’s title while the Air Force team were no match for a better drilled Christchurch Boy’s High team.

The Tour of New Zealand is a challenging but rewarding event which deserves to be part of the country’s cycling calendar.

Final tussle: The Air Force and Christchurch Boys’ High School teams raced for the inaugural Tour of New Zealand team honours outside Parliament.

TRAVEL TALK



Genevieve Rousseau Cung is the marketing manager at Le Cordon Bleu New Zealand, and she is not averse to putting something wild on a plate.

How often do you get away?

I would normally travel overseas four or five times a year for work, and I always make sure I have at least one trip a year for pleasure.

Where was your first trip?

My first trip was with my family when I was 5. A road trip to Old Orchard Beach in Maine, United States (I am originally from Quebec City, Canada). Then I undertook my first solo trip at age 19, touring around Spain and France for two months.

Why do you travel – business or pleasure?

For both – lucky me.

What is your favourite destination overseas?

Buenos Aires, Argentina. For too many reasons to list.

And in New Zealand?

I always enjoy summer holidays in the Coromandel for the pristine beaches and the camping fun with friends, and in the Bay of Plenty for some family time, but I am also very fond of road trips through small towns in the South Island with my Kiwi man.

Best trip ever?

A Christmas road trip my partner and I did a couple of years ago starting from Canterbury [Britain] all the way to Amsterdam [the Netherlands], passing through France to visit my family and through Belgium and Germany to enjoy Christmas markets and mulled wine. Coming close behind were a summer holiday spent in Corsica doing a five-day tramp and exploring the island on a motorbike, and a sailing trip from Sardinia to Tunisia. Bliss.

Worst?

I can’t think of any bad travelling experience – fingers crossed.

If you could be anywhere but here, where would that be?

Buenos Aires (I am simply in love with that city), or in Quebec to be closer to my family and friends.

What is the wildest sight you’ve witnessed while travelling?

I haven’t witnessed it, but I have certainly heard it – a snake hissing next to me while I was working on an organic farm in Costa Rica. Watching Vietnamese people crossing the streets of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City is pretty wild, too, as well as the roasted dog I’ve seen cooking at a local market there.

The most heartbreaking?

Shanty towns of Mexico and Brazil.

Who (or what) is your favourite travelling companion?

Who: My Kiwi partner Dean. What: A good book – you are never alone with a good book.

Where to next?

Malaysia and Thailand to represent Le Cordon Bleu New Zealand.

Find out more at lecordobleu.co.nz.