



**Long road:** John Farrugia rode more than 17,000 kilometres to raise money and awareness for Rotary Mental Health.

**Picture:** Shawn Smits

# 170 aching days on a bike helps cause

By **Grant Reynolds**

MELTON cycling enthusiast John Farrugia is a little saddle sore — and understandably so.

The recently retired diesel mechanic has just finished a 17,800-kilometre ride around Australia to raise money for Australian Rotary Health's mental health research.

Mr Farrugia said his wife Denise was the inspiration behind his decision to join the Great Australian Bike Ride.

"Denise had volunteered to be part of the support crew, which would have taken her away from home for about six months, and she asked if I would be interested in riding a stage. I said I wanted to have a go at the

lot."

Mr Farrugia said he was lucky to have raised a happy, healthy family, but he had relatives who had suffered depression and it was an honour for him to be associated with Rotary's bid to raise awareness and money to fund research.

Mr Farrugia said he had always been more a "social cyclist" and had never been involved with a club or in organised races, so a couple of months before the ride he hit the hills around Gisborne and on the Bellarine Peninsula, clocking up more than 2000 kilometres in training.

"I knew what I was going to be in for and the reason I did it was the

challenge."

The team of five riders from NSW, Victoria and Queensland — Gonny Rundell, 58, John Farrugia, 61, Roberta Gordon, 62, Tom Brown, 70, and Geoffrey Hawkins, 80 — rode an average of 130 kilometres a day in nine stages, taking them from Melbourne, around Tasmania, through Victoria, NSW, Queensland, the Northern Territory, WA and across SA, before finishing in Melbourne on October 10.

The trip took 204 days — and the group rode for 170 of those. The five riders were joined by about 200 others at various stages.

There were headwinds that seemed to blow the bikes backwards, no mat-



## Melton Express Telegraph

Tuesday 20/10/2009

Page: 4

Section: General News

Region: Melbourne Circulation: 8,212

Type: Suburban

Size: 476.25 sq.cms.

Frequency: -T-----

Brief: ROTARY  
Page 2 of 2



ter how hard they pedalled; dust storms, pouring rain, fog, blistering cold and sticky heat.

“You rode every inch of the way,” Mr Farrugia recalled.

“You had to focus; you couldn’t say you were sick, you had to keep going.”

He said he normally liked to ride

long distances without a break, but on this trip he had to make sure he kept fluid and foods up, and along the way he lost 13 kilograms and had four minor falls.

“You could eat up to four Christmas dinners and burn up all the calories.”

Rotary says sponsorship dollars are

still coming in, but it hopes to raise about \$200,000 in support of mental health research.

Mr Farrugia personally raised more than \$12,000 through sponsorship and donations.

**Details:**

[www.australianrotaryhealth.org.au](http://www.australianrotaryhealth.org.au)