



# Epic bike journey ends

THE Australian Rotary Health Research Fund bike ride around Australia will finish next week as cyclists head back to Melbourne after an epic journey around the nation.

The relay, of nine stages, which began on March 21 in Melbourne will end next Saturday. The purpose of the relay was to raise awareness of mental illness which affects as many as one in five Australians.

Rotary clubs of Bendigo are supporting the event, with a community lunch planned at the town hall at about 12.30 on October 7.

The lunch will be followed by a fundraising dinner at the Rotary Youth Camp in Axedale.

Four riders who are participating in the 18,000 kilometre ride will be joined on the Adelaide to Melbourne leg by another 20 riders. On the morning of October 7 they will leave St Arnaud to ride to Bendigo.

Local riders are encouraged to meet the group at Marong at about 11.30 and join them for the ride into town.

Rotarian Jacques Olivier, from Bendigo, took part in the Tasmanian leg of the ride, joining about 80 other riders during the first stage from Mornington to Hobart.

"I was the only one with a mountain bike which the other riders promptly named 'the tank'," he said.

"There were four groups; yellow for the men on fancy, carbon racing bikes; blue for people on less fancy bikes; the green team was mostly on hybrids or entry-level road bikes - and my tank; while the red team of Rotary exchange students pedalled along on borrowed bicycles. The first day was Mornington

to Parliament House for lunch, and the official send-off.

"Late afternoon we flew to Launceston, while the support vehicles and bike trailers were on the ferry.

"Our bikes arrived in Launceston at eight in the morning on a cold, rainy Sunday. It was on this day that everyone found their spot in the group."

Mr Olivier said he was frustrated with the average speed of just 18km/h of the green team after he'd been training for months.

"One leg of the ride was deemed a free ride, so when the testosterone-pumped riders on their fancy bikes came past, I decided to chase them

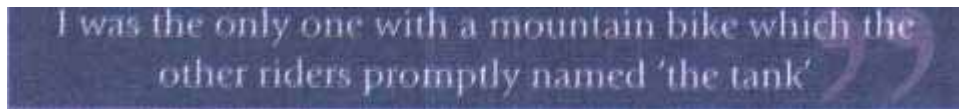
riders than could fit on the trailer. Another rider with me stayed behind to be picked up by the yellow trailer."

Mr Olivier said the free ride from Queenstown to Strahan and Zeehan was quite amazing, except for the hills between Strahan and Zeehan.

"The wonderful scenery lifted the spirits of most of us after the first four days of hard riding," he said.

Poor weather saw the first casualty with an 82-year-old participant, John, injured while crossing rail tracks.

"John was always in the leading group but fell where train tracks crossed the highway diagonally. The first rider indicated the tracks, but John



on the tank. Some of the yellow team were surprised to have the tank join them and were encouraging, others just snorted," Mr Olivier said.

"This motivated me even more to join the leaders and their rotation at 27km/h. As the speed slowly crept up, I ran out of gears at 35km/h. When we reached Burnie, my legs were like jelly. The next day I came to realize it was a mistake to push myself so far, but it changed my status as the bloke with 'the tank'."

Mr Olivier said his muscles ached the next day through the mountains to Queenstown.

"I was joined by a bloke who moved down from yellow to blue. Yellow did, on average, 120km a day; blue, 80; green, 50; and red 20," he said. "The blue team now had more

and the next three riders came down. John was taken to hospital in Hobart where a pin was inserted in his hip.

"Due to strong winds at Hobart, it was deemed unsafe to ride across the bridge.

"Most riders then stopped in Hobart, leaving 14 for stage two which finished in Healesville," he said.

Mr Olivier said the ride from Tullamarine to Healesville was pleasant; fitting considering it was the last leg for some riders.

"I bonded with the other riders and my fitness levels improved," Mr Olivier said.

"I hope God blesses me with good health to one day ride around Australia like the two women and men having ridden almost 18,000 kilometres," Mr Olivier said.

