



# Roberta has epic ride

Through wind and hail, cyclist makes her way around country

By PETER GARDINER

If you run into Noosa's cycling phenomenon Roberta Gordon soon and feel like congratulating her on her epic around-Australia ride to improve mental health, get one thing right.

Don't say: "Well done, Roberta, on making the 17,800km trip, despite the hellish hail and the demon headwinds gusting to 90kmh, to raise more than \$40,000 for Rotary's mental health campaign."

You will be selling her amazing feat of endurance – too many days in the saddle before rest days, and one epic 179km ride in a day, rising in the dark and mounting the bike by torchlight – well, short.

It was 17,803km – not a metre more or less. She has the certificate to prove it.

The gutsy 62-year-old Noosa lifesaver was required to dig into her deepest wells of resilience built up over more than 20 years of triathlons to make it to the Melbourne finish line.

She was one of only four riders to make it all the way, with her three riding amigos, another woman and two men, aged 58, 62 and 70. Tom was the 70-year-old adventurer/yachtsman, who Roberta allowed to draft behind her for much of the way.

Along their test of toughness, which might have turned lesser riders into basket cases, they were joined by support riders. All were raising money for Rotary Health, with the common motto of "together on the road for mental health", as part of the Great Australian Bike Ride.

The ride, in addition to battling hypothermia coming into Albany after freezing rain and hail, featured a "wedding" and a "funeral".

On such a long haul the one thing they could not leave behind was a sense of humour. Their stunts included wedding one love-lorn bloke to one of the male support drivers, who dressed in a flowing bridal sheet.

Along the way they also held a funeral, for the Great Australian Bike Ride, complete with coffin, to bury whatever frustrations they had with their demanding schedule.

Roberta crossed the finish line on October 10, World Mental Health Day, escorted by local riders including two cycle police, before enjoying a civic reception with special guest Michael Klim.

The peculiar challenges Roberta pointed out in emails to friends along the way included: "We camped 50 nights across the top end. Rain started at Moora

north of Perth and kept up for weeks around Margaret River."

"From the WA border to Billabong Roadhouse has been the most gruelling and long stretches – 140km, 160km days – so six hours in the saddle and little change in the scenery once the boab trees stopped and, ohhh, the bike seat is sooo cruel to my derriere."

The Eyre Peninsula was even nastier, with savage winds that slowed their progress to just 9km – a far cry from the tail-wind assisted assault on the Nullarbor, when she averaged 38kmh.

Roberta has been home a week and has little time to rest on her laurels – she is back swimming, building up her arms for lifesaving duties, and at the weekend volunteered again at the Noosa Triathlon.

The ride was personal for Roberta, who used exercise and triathlon racing to overcome severe depression when it struck almost half a lifetime ago. Now she has nothing but joy ahead as she waits for the arrival of her first grandchild. That means a trip back to Melbourne to see the expectant parents by more conventional means.



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■ LEFT: Roberta Gordon back in Noosa at the Tri after her 17,000km charity bike ride, above.

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