

Cyclo Sportif Garden Island 15 May

The forecast for Sunday was for showers and a strong wind from the north east. Combined with a new format (individual timing), a new course, access to a restricted area on Garden Island and new caterers (the Safety Bay Primary School P & C), there were understandable concerns that the event may encounter significant teething problems.

The first sign of reassurance was the overwhelming support from riders – an upper limit of 1000 riders had been set, and that number was reached and registrations closed days before the usual deadline.

Despite the change of format, the registration tents dealt efficiently with the lines of riders and with the rain holding off and the now customary music at the start, groups of riders were sent away in each of the A (3 laps), B (2 laps) and C (1 lap) categories, each lap being about 35k.

The course took us away from the Safety Bay Primary School, around Shoalwater Bay and Point Peron, over the causeway then out and back on Garden Island past the Navy installations to Sulphur Bay. The threatened rain did not eventuate, although the wind provided something of a challenge, particularly over the causeway, with a welcome push home on the return of each lap. For many, if not most of the riders, this was the first time access has been possible to Garden Island, and it was occasionally a challenge to combine concentration on the wheel in front while taking in the sights. Navy personnel monitored riders' progress, even though there was the occasional unworthy thought that they should have been put to work upgrading the road surfaces on the causeway and the island itself.

The course felt very safe – despite the number of turns and intersections, traffic managers and marshals were clearly in control, ensuring that every intersection was managed efficiently.

In the A and B groups, many riders remained in their starting bunches, or variations of them, and although riders spread out over the course as the morning wore on, the camaraderie that typifies Cyclo events remained evident, as many solo riders paired up then joined bunches to take advantage of the momentum of a group. There were a significant number of new riders, many of whom were taking part in their first 'organised' ride, and the layout of the course allowed both new and experienced riders to share the course without difficulty. Credit must be given to the motorists and residents of Safety Bay, who appeared to tolerate with patience both the constraints caused by the number of riders and the aural assault of Dapper's music at the start/finish line.

The grounds of the Safety Bay Primary School were the venue for parking, registration, lunch and post event presentations.

The fears held before the event proved groundless – from the record number of entrants to the enthusiasm of the riders for the course, the calm efficiency of the traffic marshals and the hosting by the School, the change of format, course and venue was a success. Swan Valley, traditionally one of the best patronised events on the calendar, looms, with a return to the teams format.