

Tour Aotearoa 2016 wrap-up questionnaire

henry fisher's feedback

Did you **LEARN** much on the tour (if yes, see below)?

YES - VERY MUCH!!

What **BIKE** did you take and would you recommend it?

I took a Kona Sutra, 2014 model, because that is my everyday everything bike ... and my only bike. It was both bad and good for an adventure such as Tour Aotearoa, as follows :

NOT GOOD BECAUSE :

- : the frame shape does not allow you to put on appropriately sized tyres for many of the sections of the route, only for smaller more road-suitable tyres up to size 40 (I think) which I did not find big enough or grippy enough travelling on rough roads / tracks;
- : the saddle that came with it is terribly uncomfortable for more than 2 or 3 days in a row ... yes of course I could have swapped it for a better one, but I had never cycled more than that many full days in a row before and so had no idea of the 'consequences';
- : luckily I swapped the drop-handle bars out for a wide straight bar, as otherwise the drop handle-bars would have contributed to some significant disasters off-road;
- : for a touring bike, it actually doesn't have a lot of fixing points for things like extra bottle cages or luggage options; and,
- : the frame and forks are all rigid, so for a lot of the tracks and for an unskilled cyclist such as me this (with the wrong tyres as above) made tough times tougher than necessary.

GOOD BECAUSE :

- : the steel frame is super strong, and though it got really bashed about by my regular fallings off, it is showing no signs of damage other than a few scratches;
- : I carried a lot of weight (way more than I should have) but the bicycle was strong enough to take it;
- : the gears, gear shifters, cable disc-brakes, brake levers and all parts are really simple, so I could often fix damaged parts after a fall myself or limp to the nearest shop where they would likely be able to sort me out (a few people I met with fancy gear got into trouble when it broke and shops couldn't help them); and,
- : it looked really old-school, so I hardly ever had to worry about it being nicked with all the other fancy expensive-looking bikes around!

What **TYRES** did you use and would you recommend them?

I used Schwalbe Land Cruiser tyres. They are hard-wearing (they still don't need replacing after more than 3000km!) and I didn't get any punctures the whole way. But they were not suitable for most of the off-road and gravel road sections of the course, and really noticeably slowed me down compared to almost all other riders. This made a lot of these sections very tiring and frustrating, and the tour was hard enough as it was to have to put up with any extra difficulties.

What **PANNIERS** did you use and would you recommend them?

I carried way more than almost everyone else I saw in the following bags :

- : 2 home-made small rear side pannier bags out of army-surplus rucksack pouches (a bit smaller than average front pannier bags), for food, billy, stove, gas and mug in left one, and tools, waterproofs, daytime warms, butt butter and more food in right one;
- : a home-made strappy holder thing for securing a waterproof roll-top bag to my handlebars, for tent, sleeping bag, roll mat, first aid and washkit;
- : a second waterproof roll-top bag attached to the top of my rear pannier rack, for clothes, general repair kit, electronics (spare batteries, solar charger, etc), emergency cake and book;
- : a bum bag either on me or strapped to the handle bars, with money, rash creams, shades, insect repellent, sun-cream, phone and immediate snacks, gps, compass, whistle, toilet paper and maps; and,
- : a ukulele strapped to the top of my rear pannier rack.

I clearly am not a "brevet"-experienced cyclist, and so would not recommend anyone follow my example! However, for having creature comforts along the way and excellent entertainment, I reckon I whittled it down to a minimum(!), and the weight distribution across the bike (with two 1-litre water bottles on the front forks) worked very well.

What type of **HANDLEBARS** did you use (MTB, Road, Jones, Woodchipper, with aero)?

I used just a straight-bar handle-bar, with some old bar-ends I got from the tip shop, no aero-bars. I found this really comfortable and great for on and off-road, sitting-down riding and standing-up riding. I didn't get any of that nerve-damage in my hands that so many people talked about, but I did move my hands around a lot and stretched out my wrists and fingers regularly.

Did you make any **CHANGES** to your **BIKE** during the tour?

Not during the tour, but just before I added a little wooden dash-board to the handle-bars which was great for mounting gps, solar panel or anything else I needed out in the open on different days. So simple, and so useful.

Did you change/ditch any of your **GEAR** during the tour?

I sent home some extra clothes early on as I realised I needed very little.

I did have a drop-bag in Wellington (halfway) with the South Island maps and guide book, and some polyprop leggings for the colder weather, and I swapped out my evening clothes for a fresh set ... but actually didn't really need to as I found I could wash things on the way and dry them on the back of my bike.

Are there any other changes you **WISHED** you'd made?

My bike clearly got me through, but I would have really liked to have been able to fit bigger more appropriate tyres. I'd also like to know just how everyone else had such small amounts of luggage compared to me!

What bike/equipment **FAILURES** did you have?

One bottle cage sheared off due to vibrations, and my rear wheel buckled towards the end but was deftly brought true at Arrow Bikes in Arrowtown. This developed into a split rim though as the spokes became super tight, but it is still just about running even now! I got through two sets of brake pads, front and back. The stitching on one of my home-made pannier bags began to give early on, but I sewed it up on the way and all was good for the rest of the trip. My bought-waterproof roll-top bags both got holes in them. I would class my saddle selection as a failure, or at least my posterior would.

How many nights did you **CAMP** out?

I camped out 15 nights out of 25 - there are some really great spots!

What was your **MOST** favourite part of the course?

This is the hardest question. The Timber Trail was excellent in the North Island, and the Haast Pass in the rain (amazing waterfalls) and coming through lakes Wanaka and Hawea was spectacular in the South Island.

And your **LEAST** favourite part of the course?

Without a doubt, the stretch of the Around the Mountains track from Walter Peak Station to Mossburn (with the exception of the side-trip to the Mavora Lakes which was ace but was an additional 14km). Not a good track for a bike like mine, and almost nowhere to stop and rest or shelter the entire way.

Any **OVERALL** thoughts/suggestions about the course?

Interesting alternatives for people on different types of bikes could be added (less 'adventurous' sections ... or maybe even more so!). But actually there is already so much variety of track types and very interesting places that the route passes through, so there's more than enough to keep (I think) every type of person really entertained along the way - terrific work, Kennett Brothers!

Did you value taking **PHOTOS** at the control points?

Yes, though I didn't always think about it at the time on the days when I was really tired out. But looking at the piccies and reading the descriptions when I was less tired reminded me of all the cool things at each of the control points. Sometimes having to stop to take the snap reminded me this event wasn't about the destination, but about the amazing journey along the way.

Did anything **EXCEPTIONAL** or surprising happen to you on the tour?

I became quite addicted to being on the bike puffing up hills and flying down hills, watching sunrises and sunsets, waving and smiling at people, having little road-side dances to get warm in the mornings, and singing out loud ... very badly. This is causing problems now I am back in civilised society. I also experienced firsthand how friendly and generous-of-heart Kiwis are - awesome!

Would you recommend any **CAFES** or **ACCOMMODATION** places?

Best cafe for me was the Rhubarb Cafe, Arapuni.

If you had to **PULL OUT** during the tour, why was that?

n/a ... yes I am surprised as well!

Did you suffer any **INJURIES** that lasted after the event?

My saddle sores never really went away for the entire trip, and I was on a lot of painkillers a lot of the time for that. They're slowly healing now.

Do you have any **GEMS** of advice to offer others planning the TA?

GEM 01 : Focus your energies on becoming one with your saddle before the trip as much as you can. Avoiding or reducing that pain will make a MASSIVE difference to your experience of the trip as a whole, and find out the best remedies for treatment! All else - fitness, fatigue, bike malfunctions, gear malfunctions, hunger, thirst - can be managed along the way.

GEM 02 : Develop a clear and simple evening and morning routine that helps you deal with the most important factors to keep you rolling : hygiene, nutrition, hydration and rest.

GEM 03 : Sounds a bit simple, but smile and wave at everyone you pass - it lifts the spirit and I reckon it got me a few free coffees and biscuits!

Any other comments, questions or concerns?

Just to say a massive thank you to all the efforts the Kennett Brothers put in to make this tour not just happen, but be a real delight to be a part of. Cheers guys!