



NATIONAL DUCATI RALLY - NEW ZEALAND - MARCH 2020

STORY & PHOTOS By Rob Stevenson

I met the President and Vice President of the New Zealand Ducati Owners Club, Ange Richardson and Darryl Smith, at the 2019 Ducati World Presidents Meeting and kept in touch with them on our return. When I saw the details for the NZ NDR for March 2020 I thought here was an opportunity to catch up with Ange and Darryl and see how the Kiwis do things. So I signed up and became a member of the NZ club which was included in the price. It was only a quick trip given my beloved was staying at home, leaving on Thursday, back on Monday. A few weeks later though I saw a post about "Turismo" and saw that there was a follow on ride after the NDR for 5 days around the South Island. Never mind I thought, maybe next year.

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Canovas, the new ANZ Ducati head was instructed not to fly by Ducati but Brook Henry was still attending as guest speaker. Should I go, shouldn't I go - hmmm, things weren't too bad yet here in Australia/ New Zealand so I should be able to make my quick trip to NZ and get back before anything deteriorated I thought.

The Thursday evening Air NZ flight from Brisbane was about half full with 1 or 2 people wearing masks but otherwise unremarkable and 3.5 hours later, we arrived in Christchurch about midnight NZ time. On the way into town, the taxi driver told me of the trauma he still suffers from the Christchurch earthquakes - my immediate impressions were of a sea of Hamptonesque style housing in a green landscape of trees and parks with a compact CBD. The earthquake scars were still obvious with a large number of vacant city blocks being used as carparks and buildings being shored up by containers but also a large number of new buildings.



After a few hours sleep in the Quest on Manchester Street, it was up and across the road for an excellent coffee and bircher muesli followed by a quick walk around the area to orientate myself which was full of eateries and coffee shops. The morning was very much cooler than our late summer Brisbane mornings. Then it was on with the bike gear, I put my suitcase into storage at the Quest and walked across the road to Casbolts where I met Jules, Jason and Tum who were looking after the shop whilst Judith had already gone up to Hanmer Springs to set up their shop stall. Tum (Tim) wheeled out the demonstrator Scrambler 1100 with a grand total of 200ks on the clock for me.

I found my way to the Z service station on the outskirts of Christchurch which was the appointed meeting spot and became acquainted with

the Scrambler. Dave was first to arrive on his 748R. Dave is a well travelled Scotsman who raced 250 Production in Australia against the likes of Karl Muggeridge and Anthony Gobert in the mid 90s. Understated with a soft Scottish brogue, I immediately liked him. Guy then arrived on his 1299 Superleggera accompanied by his wife Kerrie on her white 821 Monster. We headed north and picked up Paul on his Monster 1000, stopping for coffee along the way at the historic Hurunui Hotel where we met another couple before completing the 130 k ride to Hanmer Springs. We passed an MG rally on the way. They certainly do love their cars and bikes in NZ. We arrived at the Heritage Hotel in the forested little town of Hanmer Springs which sits in the foothills of the ranges and is renowned for its hot springs. After settling in, I helped Darryl set up the various Ducati banners inside and out and wandered around listening to the rumble of Ducatis as

people arrived and chatting to people. Evening drinks were held in the long twilight accompanied by some light food. A very pleasant way to end the day.

Saturday dawned fine and brisk. Thankfully, there are several good coffee shops in Hanmer Springs. After some caffeine intake, I put the Scrambler out for display in the naked section in the forecourt of the Heritage Hotel and bikes started filling the courtyard as the day warmed up. It was glorious standing around and looking at bikes and chatting. The Kiwis were very friendly and welcoming. Brooke Henry was doing the judging and I think was finding the going hard - there were so many nice bikes! There were several bevel SuperSports and a MHR, a couple of SportClassics, several 1098 Streetfighters and a Hypermotard with carbon blingie bits. There was also a nice range of Monsters but sports bikes are obviously popular in NZ as there was a good group of Panigales and other 8 valvers with one V4 Tricolore. The fact that Kiwis also like touring on their sports bikes was obvious

with several sports bikes sporting long tubed Ventura racks along with a custom aluminium pannier frame on one Pani. There was also a large group of Multis, a couple of STs, a 907ie and several older belt Supersports.

After a pleasant morning, we gathered for the ride briefing before the ride to Reefton via Lewis Pass. Ride leader Nick (or was it his brother Chris) was leading the ride on his Hypermotard. He told us to be careful and warned us in particular that this was the migratory season for the Lewis Pass Mountain Penguin which the Department of Conservation had warned would be crossing the road this time of year. He also noted that we should be careful to keep our helmets and gloves on to avoid the corona virus which had led to the cancellation of the annual Lewis Pass Mountain Penguin cabaret and fashion show due to their having imbibed a case of Corona earlier in the week (dry sense of humour these Kiwis). We left the hotel with the sport riders shooting up the road as usual and the rest of the riders





finding their own pace. We wound our way through the river valley in the shadow of the mountains crossing the shingly alpine river on several occasions with that peculiarly alpine milky shade to the water as it passed over the blue stone. Then it was a turn to the left at Spring Junction and into the forest winding our way slowly upwards. I was expecting some tight and twisty going but it was mostly 65k sweeping corners. The road quality was excellent and there was little traffic. The road was very reminiscent of the Omeo road and obviously constructed to withstand the extremes of temperature in these climes. The Scrambler 1100 needed some suspension setup but the wide high bars meant it was easy to lever it around the bends at a respectable rate and the mild trail tyres didn't cause any issues at all. Reefton is a pleasant little town with several pubs and cafes and a pleasant time was spent over lunch before returning the 130 kilometres to Hanmer Springs, at a much slower pace stopping to take some photos along the way. The afternoon sun was warm and the typical apres ride started on return to the hotel. The AGM of the NZ club was held late afternoon with many issues being shared with our club.

News came through that evening that the NZ Prime Minister had announced that all people coming into NZ would have to serve a 14 day self isolation period and I started to feel a little nervous about getting back home. Yes, I could get a more expensive flight home but surely there would be no issue before Monday night.





Then it was on to the Gala dinner with a very interesting interview with Brook Henry – he has a remarkable association with Ducatis going back to the 60s and he attributed most of his success to the quality of his New Zealand tool maker apprenticeship. The guys and girls partied on late into the night after a lengthy prize giving session. Sunday was grey and cool but there was no rain thankfully. The Turismo riders were to leave about 9am to start their 5 day circuit of the South Island. In typical fashion, 9am came and went – after the briefing eventually took place, riders left in dribs and drabs. I saddled up on the Scrambler and left having an easy ride. Of course, it wasn't long before the Turismo riders started coming past a rate of knots – fortunately the 80k speed limit in these parts is not heavily policed. I came across Guy and Kerrie who had stopped for fuel and followed them back into Christchurch before parking the Scrambler for the day and exploring Christchurch.

The news that evening was that PM Morrison was making all arrivals to Australia from midnight go into self isolation for a fortnight. Unfortunately it was too late to do anything about it by that time so I became one of the first "international" arrivals to go into self isolation on my return to Oz on Monday afternoon. I'm glad that I made the effort to go to the NZ NDR – it was a great experience, beautiful country and I very much enjoyed the company of the Kiwis. And thanks again to Judy Casbolt for the use of their Scrambler. I now understand the attraction of New Zealand to us Aussies. Maybe there's a thought for a club trip.



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