

947 Race Report

by Ahmad Banoo, 2021

Joburg, you temperamental grumpy city. It's early summer but it feels like autumn in Cape Town. Low clouds, a stiff wind and it's below 20 degrees.

In the shadow of our rusted calabash, riders line up for the first big upcountry race since lockdown. So much energy, excitement and nervous waiting for the start gun. The City's premier monument finally comes to the heart of the city, mine dumps surround us, townships lie close by and the reef lays underfoot.

Rain threatened on all the forecasts and hardly a drop fell to everyone's relief. I suspect no one washed their car the day before.

It's all very well organised and clearly signposted. No queues no confusion, nobody looks where's the mountain and where's the ocean to get oriented. So very Joburg.

Off we go, and neutral feels less than idling as everyone accelerates to find a bunch to hang onto. It's fast, really fast. All the previous editions burned us immediately with an ascent after the start gun, instead it's a speedy descent into Soweto.

There's no time to look around Soweto and we're quickly spat out of the kasi onto the N17. The first bump bites joined right away by the gusting wind. Belting along the highway but hiding strategically from the wind, spinning through Kyalami on sweet pins and the burn of the hills thereafter filled my legs with sweet pain. That delightful rat run through the tree lined streets off Douglas Road was such a sweet interlude.

So I was gonna write up a whole article about the race, but most of us did it and it was amazing. Riding on Joburg's roads and having it all to ourselves makes me wonder what it would be like to do that every day.

The experience is encapsulated by one word, freedom. Complete and exhilarating freedom.

What else sticks in my mind now?

A big oke bussing into our C bunch with the leading D batch telling his mate in his thick West Rand accent, 'Watch out for the back markers they're clogging the road' - this was under the Jan Smuts overpass on the M1 - about 4 lanes wide. Typical Joburg driver.

Then there was this chap. His name on his race number is Xloop-XL - so I assume he is from the Kalahari and his name is written in K'xa spoken with a click sound (bilabial sounds). So I'm going 'Howzit !Koop' with a loud click, and this oke is too focused on his ride, so I asked him a second time but he doesn't reply. Finally on the Waterfall descent I say 'Boet what's your name?' And he says it's Kobus and I'm from Joburg South, man did I want to crawl away I'm embarrassment. It's gets better, so I say what's that name on your number plate and he says it's my nickname X Loop XL - no clicks just straight up.

Our red shirts represented today, visible at all times and the results speak for themselves. There are a few guys who stick in my mind though.

When we started the club two lighties pitched for rides, one with puppy fat and another who was worried he is too light. Nervous and skittish they persevered riding through winter and spring. My word, how these lads have come along. Ebi has converted his puppy fat into serious muscle and holds his own right at the front of his bunch.

Muhammad is a grimpeur of note and his skinny legs churn out more watts than Eskom.

Another legend is Firoz Limalia, ever so humble with a smile that looks a bit lopsided but we all know there's steel under that Lycra. He clearly loved it out there.

Butler finally broke his jinx and clocked a resounding sub 3 no doubt his compadre MZ marshalling him all the way.

Our club has a few grandmasters, chaps who have been cycling for years and are veritable libraries on wheels. I don't often get the chance to ride with them on a race because they're classy riders who punch above my weight. Today I got a chance to witness one of them.

Coming up to Montecasino he slid up behind me and then gave me a wheel to draft. We cranked it out down Witkoppen hopping onto a faster rider and then up Douglas. Working those rolling hills of Douglasdale and Bryanston he slowly pulled away tapping out his cadence. No great acceleration no fanfare, once again hopping onto a Vukani bunch and floating away. Arshad Tayob is one of the grandmasters at the club, some may call him the Ballie and other Ari, no doubt a remarkable rider.

Winning a bunch or coming in the top of your start group is a tremendous achievement. I had a feeling we may see one of our own do this. Throwing down his trademark blistering accelerations and catching me from 4 bunches behind on Jan Smuts I watched him sail away with ease. One of our humblest and friendliest riders Gamza of the 3 Karriems showed power on a bike, riding with a broken saddle.

All our riders showed so much courage, named and unnamed, guys who came in sub 4 and sub 5 and sub 6. My words to you is don't give up. Everyone started somewhere, just be consistent on your training and the results will show.

The finale was mindblowing, standing in the middle of pitch of a World Cup venue on was quite overwhelming. Our big family standing together and trading experiences and building our bonds of camaraderie.

For our next big event, it would be great if we learnt to ride in a bus and keep it together all the way through the race. Smart, calculated and focussed is how a team should ride.

Talking to spectators afterwards, it seems our red shirts were spotted all over drawing attention to our fusion of riding.

Onward and upward. Better together.

Looking forward to next year's race. Keep riding, keep training and live clean.

Ahmad Banoo