

Ladies and Gentlemen, an Hour of Power.

Written by Robert Crowe September 17th, 2005

Have you ever been on a cycling high, alert to every muscle in action, pleasantly conscious of your tyre contacts with the road – so that every twitch you make seems calculated and precisely executed to get the ultimate riding experience – effortlessly? You are sensitive to the elements; temperature, wind changes and road friction. You can change your mind and adapt to whatever the conditions require. A different posture, deeper breathing, switching certain muscles on or off to access the right mix of leg power; it's all just a matter of selection. 'Easy street'. This experience is commonly had on Thursday mornings during the 6am 'Hour of Power' ride from Cnr North Rd. & Nepean Highway to Café Racer, St. Kilda. Not just by the author either!

The Hour of Power is not just a dash for the 'Drivers' of the sport. Drivers come for the frequently recorded 55kph speeds along the Beach Road, the maddening gutter line of 60-100 odd riders singly strung out on a good summer's morning, and the multi-train sprint finish for the BP Service Station, Elwood, where every possible training technique (bar rocket launchers; wait for it..) has been trialed in order to find the definitive muscle power secret to catapult the lucky rider off the front for a victory before some leisurely latte's.

Within the fast-paced arrowhead, there is also a great mixture of Melbourne's variety of cycling types; there's room for the sport's Splashers, and the Cowboys, Wankers, Fanatics, the Garbos and the Go-Getters. Even the odd Hubbard seems to find his place on the Hour of Power race. It's been my curiosity to understand those who make up the Power Peloton, and report on the way our 'daily' Beach Road cyclists start the day and participate in this addictive sporting underworld. They are the ladies and gentleman, but warriors, of the Hour of Power.

Splashers

Splashers make our cycling world go round, if we didn't have riders who would do all the training, get all the gear, turn up in rain, hail or shine, and pay the regular entry fee... we would have no long trailing bunch tails and no breadth in the field. For the Splasher may make trouble in the middle, do a crooked ride up the side, fend for the end, or be in bandages on the mend. But Splashers don't go to the pointy part of the bunch so they rarely mess up the dash for the top pace-setters. They make the fields a spectacle to witness from inside and outside the bunch. Normally, limited training packs of 2x2 become big fat bunch rides full of fun with the Splashers arriving in droves to 'get on the wheel' and do the full Hour. So remember for the next time you're throwing hooks, Splashers are our friends, number one. (Examples of classic Splashers are good ol' copper & BikeNOW rider, David Eadie, or Col the famous Painter).

Cowboys

These guys are actually Porsche look-a-likes (a-la Volkswagons), with little idea about how to run the machinery. In real races the Cowboys burn up their fuels before half way and never pose a threat, but the Hour of Power is all of a quick 50 minutes at the helm and suits the proverbial Cowboy down to the ground. You may even see him lashing it shortly after the ride commences in Brighton, or jamming for pace at 3-quarter time and racing the clock at Black Rock. He is eager to make good impressions but achieves little more than hiking up the average train-speed for a solid contribution. When the carriages turn west for home at Moordialloc, the Cowboys will often cop some shooting arrows in the legs for a while, but it aint long before they're charging the field again around Beumaris Hotel and Rickett's Point summit. Here's the thing though, you can bet these guys will not only be there when it gets hard, they'll be trying to *make* it hard for the closing stages all the way from Sandringham... to about... Glenhuntly Road. (Our current big reputation Cowboy is trusty Rusty Russell Edgar of the specialized Freedom Machine squad).

Wankers

Wankers, Spankers, and Yankers, they're all the same. The Melbourne cycling scene has contributed an exponential growth to the bicycle industry because of our large number of Wankers. The Wanker is well

renowned to focus mostly on the apparel of the sport rather than better known 'forward propulsion' technology we call muscle training. Wankers are beautiful beings though, basically for their immaculate appearance in the top range of clothing and bicycles (even to the point of checking 'frame paint' weight differences!). But they're also magnificently imaginative in creating surreal abilities. They live in a wonderful dream world where Lance Armstrong goes lactic on the hills at their mercy and they sprint the pants off Robbie McEwen down the home-straight. Their only problem is, when the real shit comes down they are more than likely to go down with it, stuck back in the bog of the burn-offs, but still looking priceless amongst the debris. This most often occurs at exactly 6:48am, around Elwood where 'Superman's Straightaway' leads into the finale BP sprint. If you find yourself boxed in by Wankers there, you can kiss your Power Ride placing goodbye and return to try again some other day. (Our highest quality Wankers in the pack are Marcus Balscheit the gollywog, Duncan 'Addicted' Murray and Nick Caple the King of Choice; experienced players of the Cowboy's posse).

Fanatics

The opposite of a Wanker is a Fanatic. That is, a rider with an obsession for the technologies of training like special fitness programs, heartrate and power outputs, bunch skills or tactical schemes. What better place for these eccentric creatures to reside, than within the Hour of Power. And that is exactly where you'll find them for this is their home. The Fanatic lures levels of lunacy in a dogmatic dedication to chosen training theories. You can sometimes pick a Fanatic for their unusual riding characteristics, such as getting stuck on inappropriate gear ratios like 53x12 or 39x19 while the bunch is at cruising speeds. Thus a fanatical pedalling style is produced of madly over-spinning or truck-gear lugging. But watch for 'foibles at the front'! By favoring a fine position in the first five of the field's arrowhead, these knowledge-natives fanatically refrain from firing *on* the front until their favorite fragment of the Hour when their real workout begins (this is most frequently on the bend up 'Mirror Mountain' just after South Road turn-off). Funnily, their form proceeds until the 'BP freeway' where their fated formula will have the 'Pace-Maker Fanatic' falling by the way-side to the fearless fury of the 'Fanatical Finisher'. Now, this last specific type of fanatic will feign fitness until the final sprint but has no other special form; more classically known as a 'sit-on-sprinter'. (A fairly well known and rather formidable Fanatical Finisher is the fast HLP/Ridewiser rider, Azza SOS (Son-Of-Snake) Salisbury, who is renowned for his inconspicuous arrival at the front with just 20meters to go!).

GARBos (Good Average Rider of Bikes)

Just like our community garbage-man, a real cycling Garbo also stands to be the most unnoticed person in the day but has the most necessary role of all. In the cycling world, the Garbo goes quietly about his ride but is forever providing necessary duties. He'll be pacing at the front, giving a spare drink bottle to mates, or setting up the wheels ahead to provide the perfect lead-out. These guys are the bunch-life's 'motor mowers', or the working class 'top fueler'. The good average rider of bikes has perhaps the best seat in the field, riding excellent position in bunches, just by habit. You'll see them hooking up at major train pick-up points of the Hour of Power, such as along the 'Southland Express-strip' or in the 'Sandringham Subway' (the passage between Black Rock and Hampton). GARBOs are generally mocked for their incompetence to rise higher than 'just off podium placings', or their occasional rash moves through the pack, leading occasionally to crashes by lesser skilled participants. They are effectively, just... taking out the rubbish. However, the Garbo is without doubt the most reliable performer in the field that you can bet will be honest, loyal, and above all, still there at the end - ready to help. If you want a team-mate that won't double-cross your plan, and won't disappear right when it all matters, get in touch with these good natured types. Otherwise, you'll probably miss them in all the mayhem. (Prevalent Garbos of the Hour are Dave 'Steggles Chicken Legs' Sturt the silent-policeman, Peter the Russian 'Kamikaze-pilot on wheels' alias 'Ekimov', and Chris 'Take My Shirt Off' Teakle, the most prevalent GARBO around the arrowhead).

Go-Getters

Not to be forgotten and never to be doubted again! This lesser known species of 'race-chaser' is actually the sport's darkhorse. Go-Getters have become loomingly everpresent in cycling's modern age after a quiet entry into the top circle of road racing throughout the late 90's and early 2000's. The new millenium has brought with it a sense of balance and beauty in the bunches. If you look, you will see numerous Go-Getters playing amongst the 6am gladiators, gleeful in their gumption to join the race with grace. Side with them as they're expert chat partners in the social sections of the Hour of Power course; that is, at the start-line - Nepean Highway service road, and the 'Southland Express-strip' where the downhill commences. But let your lady go

at the round-a-bout as the classic Go-Getter doesn't back being boxed in for the bends. Once the hammer goes down, the Go-Getter will wait and watch - since their motives lie more in the relaxing latte that awaits the field in St. Kilda. They know too well the idiosyncracies of the erratic Cowboys, the fluctuating Splashers, the tentative Fanatics and the disappearing Wankers. In fact, the key informants for all this Hour of Power know-how actually came from these folks of finesse, the real refinements of our cycling culture. (Queen of the quest for quality feminine Power in the Hour is still summer-surfacers Go-Getter Girl, Katie 'Koots' Mactier).

Hubbards

Lastly, and least typical of the bunch-rider stereotype, are the Hubbards. Long transcendents of Old Father Hubbard McGowan, from the Cedar-rocking-Chair Chatters Club (CCCC), these folks are also often referred to as Gumbies (say 'gum-bees') because of their likeness to the famous stretchable 'Gumby Man'. The Hubbard, or Gumby, is basically ignorant to any culturing or knows no etiquette of his sporting era. Inside every sporting scene we see the odd balls that seem to miss the 'look' or the 'way to do it' but stick at the game relentlessly all the same. Consequently, they are never held back by the all too familiar traditions of 'pack mentality' like: fears of looking stupid, training too hard, training too little, becoming unpopular in the bunch, or ending up as laughing stock. Rather, they just make the best of what they have. Needless to say, the Hubbard often becomes a surprising athlete who seldom runs outside the top 10. In fact, some of the world's best cyclists arrived via Hubbard-mentality (eg: Miguel Indurain, Henk Vogels). So it is fitting that in Melbourne's cycling circles there is a fair share of Hubbard-ised participants. Watch out for these individuals; their rear wheel is likely to be one sure ride to a seat at Café Racer! (Hour of Power graduates of the Hubbard School include Olympian rider Baby Huey (alias Big Dog Crowe), the mysterious lone ranger Richard Read, and Classical Café Clown – Steve Psoras).

The Last 'Un-named' Crusaders. (Un-talked about, Bunters and Drivers).

By now it is 7.45am, the Hour of Power has raced to St. Kilda, the Café Racer latte-shopping spree is over, and most riders have re-lived their roles in the Power Peloton. The Cowboys have lassoed their round-ups, Fanatics had their fandangle at the front; the Wankers have tried their hocus-pocus, but to no avail, again. Most Go-Getters have slipped away to resume a more typical day in lady-like identities of our traditionalist town. Hubbards have gone for extra training, while GARBoS are still stuck on warm-down rounds of Beaconsfield Pde after the lead-outs. As for the Splashers, well they were long gone nearly an hour ago, passing through the northern suburbs by now on bunch attendance elsewhere. So alone now, and rolling the sunny trundling ride home, you may ponder where you fit into this whole Hour of Power scam. Are you one of the Last 'unnamed' Crusaders? A 'Bunter' or a 'Driver'

You'll be forgiven, thinking you're a Driver. But alas, a true Driver (say after me, 'BIG HITTER') is not typically aware of itself. A Driver cannot *think on its legs* properly (ie: if you *think* you *are* one, then by definition, you're *not*). This leaves the pondering pedaling-identity searcher with one final categorical cyclist classification to consider: the Bunter. In a recently unearthed script from the old traditional tour-o group rides of the 80's, the fun-ride entry list summarised the 'Bunter' into three distinct groups of wishful fliers: Pelicans, Turkeys and Galahs.

Pelican Bunters are exactly as they look in real life > Big mouthed, loud calling, out of proportion bird-brains that amount pretty much to little more than a gob full of fish. If you're a Pelican, you'll find you can't stop yacking on topics about relatively meaningless bike jibberish, and usually start annoying people in your proximity soon after settling near them in the training bunches.

Turkey Bunters are, plainly, just too big to be riding bikes. The proverbial 'Turkey' can put out some mean-arse pedal-power when the road goes flat, so will rarely be seen after the 3-quarter way point of the Hour of Power. Little more needs to be said about these Big-Bird Bunters of the echelon, as you should *never* piss one off, especially a V-8 type Turkey (also referred to as a 'Block of Flats').

Galah Bunters are the jokers, gigglers and laughing stock of the pack, all wrapped up into one colorful squawling mess of feathers. Galahs don't wear matching outfits #%^&*!> and have hardly any riding composure at all. They don't pedal straight, they can't sit still in the bunch, they're known for spending more time looking behind themselves than ever looking forward! The Galah is thought to have originated in the crazy farm fields outside Ghent, of Belgium, and migrated to Australian cycling packs in the late 70's. If you're curiously identifying with this Bunter type, you'll find without too much difficulty that you're naturally over-socialising and flying about with other Galahs and Pelican Bunters, perhaps the odd Turkey here and there. After all, it is just like the saying goes... birds of a feather will *always* flock together.

With almost all being said and written, disclosing *The Last Crusaders of the Power Hour* may have left you none the wiser. Perhaps try again at the top of the categorical list (go to story start). Maybe, on closer inspection, you really are a frenzied Fanatic? After all, why the dickens would you be reading all this gobble-dee-gook if you were not? Whatever your case, it remains necessary to remind everybody, that whatever kind of cyclist you *are*, have *become*, or are *destined to be* in times ahead, one thing is for sure...

The Ladies and Gentleman of the great morning Hour of Power adventure are bicycle riders alike - thrill-seekers of the human race, searchers for the best seat for the living soul.

God's speed to you all. Form is temporary, class is forever.
Grab your gloves, 6am warriors, for we are going for a ride – a ride you'll remember for the rest of your life.

Experienced & Written by Robert Crowe OAM
© 2005 Ridewiser Consultancy

'Ride the Journey of Your Life More Wisely'

