

Learnings from the Sam Miranda Road Race sufferfest

This weekend just gone I met a few of the [Vigor](#) crew at the Sam Miranda winery in the King Valley for the 100km Sam Miranda "Strade Nero" Road Race which included the Strade Nero, a 6km dirt climb.

Like the [Mansfield to Mt Buller Race](#) there was no C grade women's option offered so we were forced to race B grade. I'm still unsure how women who aren't convinced by their coaches to enter are supposed to get a start in cycling but that seems to be the way that it is and the way it will continue to be.

I do wonder if Cycling Victoria took a punt on a race like this and offered a C grade, and really put it out there so people were aware of it, if more women would enter?

Since the Mt Buller race I have moved to Albury and considerably upped my riding. I would say I am much fitter than I was back then and was therefore not as uncomfortable about riding B grade and was certainly not entertaining thoughts about coming last this time.

About 15 minutes before the race it was announced that A and B grade women would be starting together. Before I could panic Mr Osteohealth (Tom Barry) pointed out that with A grade at the front I certainly wouldn't have to do anything up there. Nice. That sounds logical. All we had to do was hang on.

As soon as the race started, it was ON. Rach and I exchanged quizzical looks and a couple of 'frogging hells' and almost got dropped on the first corner. Right away I noticed I didn't feel well...at all. We managed to catch up and Rach remembered how to change gears with her new racer Marco (as in Marco A-pollo) running SRAM Red rather than the Shimano 105 she is used to.

The pace was definitely quick and you could quickly lose a couple of metres if you weren't paying attention. I lost a few metres when someone in front of me got a bit too close to the person in front of them and took evasive action which got a few heart rates up...or up more than they were anyway!

It was about 10 or 11kms in when [some bright spark up the front](#) decided to attack and it was almost all over, three of us dropped out the back, someone from Hawthorn CC, Rach and myself. With Rach behind the other rider my grand plan was to have a nibble on some bartape get the Hawthorn girl behind me and Rach behind her to catch us back up. The first half of my plan went beautifully, Hawthorn got on the back of me, Rach on the back of her, we caught up and... then I blew up. Hawthorn rode merrily away on the back of the pack while I tried not to throw up.

It was then I thought "what the hell is going on", I've been training heaps, I should be keeping up! I felt dizzy and nauseous and just had zero energy. I had a good rest this week and should have

been raring to go.

Rach offered me her wheel to sit on as we watch the race disappear up the road and out of sight and I had trouble even hanging on then. A few times I really thought I was going to yack and was fairly sure I wasn't going to be able to finish.

Not being able to eat made things even worse, just the thought of food was making my stomach quiver but luckily I was drinking well and had carb drink and water which was something.

We had a chuckle at the sprint stage, which I basically rolled through with Rach taking the 'win' in our 'unofficial C grade' race. We got just through the first KOM when the B grade guys caught us, well four of them and their spares car. After the descent the rest of B grade passed us in a bunch then the rest in dribs and drabs.

We'd just hit the Strade Nero (6km dirt climb) when we came across a lone B grade rider doing the awkward 'I've got a puncture shuffle' and stopped to see if he was okay. He said he had a spare in the spares van but that had gone with the break and wasn't behind them. I gave him a tube and some co2 but the valve on my tube was too short. The A grade guys were passing us by now so I gave Rhys Pollock a cheer, and then the A grade spares stopped and gave the guy a wheel.

He kindly rode with us for a little while and had a chat and when a couple of A graders who'd dropped off went past he hopped on their wheel and was off.

By now we were climbing in all kinds of strange dirt, some slippery mud, some gravelly bits but it was interesting enough I didn't feel like I was climbing! Tom drove past and said only a km and a half to the top, which I actually heard as 'only an hour and a half to go'..either way it wasn't pleasant!

I think luckily for us, Marita had long gone from the top so there was no way back for us except to ride. I know I would have been pretty tempted to get in if she'd been waiting there, but it would have killed me to do that. I would much rather really suffer for another 40kms than DNF. So suffer we did. I still wasn't eating, I tried a little nibble on a dextro bar but my stomach said that was a terrible idea so gave up.

The next 10 kms were great fun descending into Whitfield, where I stopped at the pub for a wee. What???! You can do that in recreational rides!! On the way down we saw one female rider waiting with the sag wagon, and another walking along with her bike with a bad tear in the tyre.

After we got out of Whitfield it was really time to suffer, but I managed to get the dextro bar down which helped. The headwind...was challenging. Time to bite some bartape! I was struggling to even get to 30kmh in the wind and it honestly felt like we were doing a turns of few hundred metres and swapping, but strangely I was feeling better and better. Somewhere around here Rach mentioned

the sag wagon lumbering along behind us and we were both pretty adamant we were NOT getting in it. Thankfully they stayed a good distance behind although we did feel a bit of pressure!

With around 20kms to go I think Rach said the words I'd said about the start of the race "I'M FROGGED". We both popped a gel, well I got half of mine down before deciding the rest probably wouldn't stay down.

I was counting down every few kms out loud to Rach and with about 4 kms to go I started to question whether the race was exactly 100kms. I didn't voice my concerns outloud because we were both in agony but when we got to 98kms with no familiar landmarks I realised it was going to be longer.

About that time when we were both ready to throw our bikes into a paddock Steve and Marita drove up next to us and cheered us on and said it was only just down the road and then a right hand turn and then a left hand turn and ride over a rainbow and then you are pretty much there. We glowered back at them and there was some banter about how we'd already done 100 frogging kms and could they please pull over ASAP and let us in.

Not that we would have. There is something quite weird about what your mind does when you are SO close to finishing a race but it feels so FAR! Maybe its a just me, but I love it. Sicko.

For probably the last 30kms of the race there'd been a little carrot in red and white in front of us, not sure which grade he was from but we tried so hard to catch him, probably missed him by a few hundred metres in the end! It definitely helped having him there though!

But eventually we finished and somehow managed to get off our bikes. Tough, tough race.



So, what went wrong? After checking out the results from the rest of B grade we were still well off the mark of being competitive. My upset stomach and the combination of A + B grade into one mega-awful grade were the two culprits.

I was sick for a couple of days after the race and am just feeling human again now, but I didn't eat well at all the week before the race. I was away for work and while I was well rested I probably stuffed up nutrition wise. Not being able to eat much during the race made it even worse.

Unlike nutrition, the combination of grades is something I have no control over, but it most definitely impacted on us, the C grade riders who had to ride B grade. I do wonder if my stomach had been okay and we'd just raced B grade without the combination of A grade, if the result would have been different. I hope so. Although had we stayed on rather than dropping off the distance probably would have been a challenge later.

The only way to get better at this is to race more. Also...maybe do some speedwork and practice cornering :-p

Thanks again to Rach for looking out for me. And Liam, Steve, Marita, Tom & Lisa for your support!

Also thanks to the organisers, it was a top location and the fact you could get a good coffee before the race, and good wine afterwards....its the way bike racing should be!

Bring on Tour of Bright...(ahem!....in c grade!).

- Jen