

# 2006 Vaude Highland Fling

The weekend of the Vaude Highland Fling began on the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month with an 11 minute dash around the township of Bundanoon. This race was definitely short and also turned out to be sweet for me. After a flat 5 k, the course turned nasty, finishing with a 300 metre almost 'vertical' wall. A good crowd watched from the top in a 'V' formation and this helped to squeeze the last out of all the riders. The 'roadie' tactics my team mate Nick Both and I adopted worked to perfection, taking a 1-2 double start to the weekend

In just its second year, the 'Fling', as it is more affectionately known, attracted over 1200 riders across all categories, with 700 'brave souls' attempting the 109 km Full Fling. This race is pretty much a home event for me, having lived in the area for six out of the last seven years. As I took to the start line, grey clouds started to build over the Southern Highlands of NSW, so much for the 30°C and sunshine predicted....

The Elite category started at 8am, along with the half flingers, giving the rest of the Full Flingers a half hour head start on the first stage of three. The race was pretty much 'on' from the gun and it was not long before four of us (Aiden Lefmann, Matt Fleming, Dirk the 'Dutchy' and myself) were in a break and leading the race. As we passed through the Penrose Pine Forest we started to catch some of the earlier starters. Coming over a crest we found ourselves calling 'Track' on a tandem of all things. The first two passed with no fuss, but as last wheel in the bunch I found myself travelling three wide, down a fire road that I believe was made for two bikes at the most! The tandem hit a sandy corner at the bottom of the hill.... I didn't hear the girl on the back scream, but maybe she was too captivated by the scenery to realise she was going sideways.... Somehow we all survived and the four of us continued on our merry way, through Check Point 1 together and onto Stage two.

This was definitely the toughest stage, where last year I lost the leaders on the steep climbs midway around this loop. The four of us shared the turns at the front until we hit the single track, new for this year's event. The track was soft top soil, mainly climbing and very loose corners. Keeping it upright in the single track wasn't easy and as such, the four of us soon became three, emerging back onto the fire roads with a gap on Dirk the Dutchy. From here, we were quickly onto the steepest climbs of the day and as the race was now over 2 hours old, everyone looked to be feeling it.

We came across the Gu20 water station 1 hour 30 minutes into this stage. Aido was dying of thirst, but since last years split was 1 hr 40 odd, I thought our support crews were just around a few corners and therefore wasn't stopping for anyone. Sorry mate...

These hills kept coming and I could sense the two guys were starting to suffer. I kept the pace solid on the flats to keep the Dutchy away, and even lifted it slightly on the climbs. On two consecutive hills Aiden and then Matt dropped off the pace....

From here it was open, windy fire roads to the second check point and with the legs feeling good, it was time to try and get a time gap. The occasional look back showed Matt was still in sight, but the gap looked to be growing which gave me more motivation.

Two hours after commencing the stage, I finally arrived at Check Point 2. I had a good gap of over a minute on Matt, and Aido was nowhere in sight. My support crew were pretty excited to see me up front and telling me I had it covered, but with 30 ks to go the race was far from over.

Matt and I left transition together, giving me a time advantage, and we rode with each other until the hills started again. I escaped Matt again and it was solo journey through my old favourite single tracks at Penrose Forest to the finish....

I crossed the line 4 hours and 18 minutes after the bagpipes first sang out across the Southern Highlands, and 4 and half minutes clear of Matt. 533 of the 700 odd starters completed the entire 100 k course, the high attrition rate definitely showing the tough course, especially stage 2. For me, this was my 6<sup>th</sup> 100 k race in the last two years and after three 2<sup>nd</sup> places, a 3<sup>rd</sup> place, two flat tires and a wrong turn, I could finally claim a 100 k victory. (And a phat winners check!)

Thanks to my support crew for the day, all the volunteers and organisers for making the race happen oh so smoothly.

Photo courtesy of [www.johnfraserphotography.com](http://www.johnfraserphotography.com)

