

2007 Tour of Coleraine – A Grade Report

By David Tozer

Stage 1 – 119km

The 2007 edition of the Great Doherty Coleraine Cycle Tour had the weight of expectation on its shoulders. The previous three editions of the race had progressively improved as far as depth of fields and standards of racing. However the race organisers would be content with the knowledge that this year's race was the biggest and best ever.

There was no question that the 250 plus riders entered ensured that numerically, this edition was superior but the introduction of a revised race format also added to the stature of the event. The four stages comprised the Queen stage of 120 kilometres and numerous categorised and non categorised climbs, a short four kilometre hill climb Individual Time Trial, a hilly 93 kilometre road stage and a 37 kilometre (25 lap) criterium.

It may have been that the hill climb time trial was introduced in order to separate the placegetters but this was not the case as the battle for the overall victory once again came down to intermediate sprints in the final stage criterium.

Pre race favourite and current Australian Open Champion Darren Laphorne had a strong Drapac Porsche team to assist in his efforts to continue his stellar year. His main competitors were seen to be Jason Hegert (FRF Couriers), who was trying to score back to back victories. Craig McCartney and Wil Dickeson (Savings & Loans) would also be looking to put a cat amongst the pigeons with the help of the well drilled team. Other contenders were; Pat Shaw and Nick Walker (Victorian Institute of Sport), Sean Finning (South Australia.com) and Mark O'Brien, the 2005 Tour winner.

The course profile of stage 1 did not truly reflect the amount of climbing that was squeezed into the 119.3 kilometres. The peloton took a circumspect approach with attacks being covered by the riders from VIS, Drapac and Savings & Loans. Most riders were aware that eventually the right mix of riders would form a working party that would be given latitude by the peloton. This selection occurred at around 15 kilometres into the race. Pat Shaw (VIS) and Mark O'Brien (Drapac) lead a brave bunch in pursuit of a tour winning time gap. Also in the break were Nathan Wise (SHM), Tom Middleton (Norwood) and Andrew Ward (Ballarat City Cycles).

The group quickly raced out to a two minute gap, attacks off the front of the peloton were well controlled by the VIS and Drapac squads. Laphorne and McCartney were lively in their efforts to get across to the break away but the rest of the peloton knew that if these two escaped it would be the end of the tour for the rest.

The warm northerly breeze started to play a part in the race as the stage progressed. It was as if the increase in temperature related directly to the dwindling number of riders in the main peloton. However the main pack was obliterated during the second ascension of the major climb of the stage (this climb had to be made four times during the stage). Whilst for most any thoughts of a high stage or overall finish had disintegrated a small group including Laphorne, McCartney and Walker set off in an attempt to catch the breakaway.

In the end the break managed to maintain a solid one minute and 20 second advantage of the chasers, Pat Shaw won a last gasp sprint ahead of Mark O'Brien

with Nathan Wise scoring a gutsy third place. The question was, would that time gap be enough to protect over the next three stages.

Stage 2 – 3.5km ITT

The Individual Time Trial involved about 1.5 kilometres of flat riding and then 2.5 kilometres of climbing. The hill wasn't steep but riders needed to dose their efforts to ensure that the dreaded mushroom cloud doesn't appear three quarters of the way up the climb. Three riders managed to complete the stage in under seven minutes. Darren Laphorne blitzed the field in a time of 6.36, Nick Walker was next best with 6.49 and Mark O'Brien consolidated his second place overall with third best time of 6.56. Pat Shaw was able to retain the yellow jersey with a solid 7.00 flat.

Stage 3 – 93km

Sunday morning brought cooler conditions but the racing remained white hot. With the National Champion moving into 3rd overall thanks to his amazing time trial efforts, there was an air of expectation that Drapac would dominate proceedings with two riders chasing the vulnerable Pat Shaw in the race for overall honours.

Once again a small group managed to gap the field in the early part of the stage, included in the group were; Sean Finning, Kyle Marwood (Decked Out Coaching), Will Dickeson and Damian Turner (Ballarat City Cycles). Rather than having a representative in the break, Drapac and VIS decided to control proceedings with the help of some tempo riding from the SHM team who were protecting Nathan Wise's strong overall standing. None of the riders in the break posed a serious threat to overall.

It was with around 20 kilometres to travel that the most dramatic event of the tour took place. While attempting to escape the peleton a group of four riders were driving hard at around 45 kilometres per hour when a touch of wheels caused Darren Laphorne to hit the bitumen. Fortunately chasing riders had a few seconds to avoid the Green and gold clad Laphorne but the speed at which the crash occurred and the delay in Laphorne getting up off the road sent a shiver of concern through the A Grade bunch. As is customary, racing was neutralised by the peleton to allow Laphorne to re-integrate. Unfortunately a message was conveyed that the Australian Champ was unable to continue and the race would have to continue without him.

After a couple of minutes of confusion racing resumed with riders from SHM and VIS moving to the front and set about the task of reeling in the break. Their efforts were rewarded as the small escape pack came into view in the last five kilometres. Mark O'Brien had attempted several late attacks to try to shake loose from the ever watchful Pat Shaw. The battle between the two young guns was entertaining both riders seem to enjoy the Tour of Coleraine and neither was willing to relent. At this late stage in the Tour only 1 second separated the two champions.

The riders protecting the GC seemed to shut down the chase for the breakaway as the peleton sped into Coleraine. Their job had been done. This allowed the sprinters in the breakaway to fight it out. Kyle Marwood and Sean Finning have probably had many opportunities to go head to head. Both riders grew up in the Bendigo-Castlemaine region. This time it was the more experienced Finning who took line honours in front of Marwood with all rounder Will Dickeson taking third.

Stage 4 – 46km criterium

By Paul Logan

The race entered the final stage with only 1 second separating VIS rider Pat Shaw, who had held the yellow jersey since the opening stage and the ever gallant O'Brien who burst onto the scene as a J19 superstar of the future in 2005 by winning the Tour. In 3rd place sat Nathan Wise, with Middleton (Savings & Loans and 2006 B grade winner), Ward (Ballarat City Cycles) and Walker only a few more seconds back. Nick Walker, brother of Rabobank professional, Will has had a great history with this Tour by being D grade victor in 2004, B grade victor in 2005, a nail biting 3rd in A grade in 2006 and now sitting only seconds off another podium place in 2007.

At the beginning of the criterium there was an air of expectation hanging in the cool and overcast air. The criterium was held on a 1.85km super fast street circuit with wide sweeping bends and a huge crowd lining the front straight. With a total of 55sec of time bonuses up for grabs GC could still be turned right around. O'Brien would be desperate to grab just a few seconds back from Shaw to put himself in the lead. Shaw was no doubt relying on his VIS team to control things and keep himself safe. To O'Brien's detriment he had now lost all but one team mate which would make life difficult for him.

The race headed off at 3.45pm and straight away Marcus Wettenhall seemed to have had instructions to go off the front by his Ballarat City Cycles team to protect Ward's 5th place on GC. However, it wasn't long until the peleton were back together. At the first sprint after 5 laps the bunch were still together and in a frantic dash to the line McCartney (Savings & Loans) grabbed the 10sec, followed closely by Shaw and O'Brien in 3rd. This now put Shaw 3 seconds up on O'Brien. Even without any team mates O'Brien would show a never say die attitude. With this sprint McCartney lifted himself from 8th to 7th on GC.

Shortly after the sprint a break of 7 managed to get a gap on the peleton and with no one out in front in danger to the GC the pace slackened, while the break opened up the gap and the peleton looked at each other with the odd attack going but being closed down almost straight away.

One rider in the break was Hamilton's own Brendan Schultz, who has had a fantastic year on the track and was now getting some airtime out in front for his Hamilton cycling club. Meanwhile back in the peleton Marcus Wettenhall once again decided that he would try and bridge the gap to the break and he took the ever consistent David Tozer, who has finished every tour since 2004 riding A grade with the best result being a 9th in 2004. These two riders pushed the pace for a number of laps until Tozer blew and then shortly after with no support Wettenhall was back in the peleton.

The break now at only 5 laps to go had blown out to 39 seconds and were nearly out of sight in the long, wide McConochie Street finishing straight. However, the peleton had now decided that they still wanted to have a go at the win and give the crowd some final entertainment. The gap within only a couple of laps was reduced to 29sec, then 16sec with 2 laps to go. At the bell it was all back together again and looked like a furious final sprint that could decide 1st and 2nd on GC. In the dash to the line Gill (Team O'Grady) won it convincingly, followed by Hegert and in 3rd place a jubilant Shaw followed by O'Brien and Finning. Shaw managed to hang onto the win by a mere 5 seconds over O'Brien and Wise.

General Classification

1	5	Shaw, Patrick	Ballarat-Sebastopol CC	6:52:48	
2	3	O'Brien, Mark	Horsham CC	6:52:53	0:00:05
3	37	Wise, Nathan	Caulfield-Carnegie CC	6:53:49	0:01:01
4	46	Middleton, Tom	Norwood CC	6:54:13	0:01:25
5	24	Ward, Andrew	Ballarat-Sebastopol CC	6:54:28	0:01:40
6	4	Walker, Nicholas	Brunswick CC	6:54:33	0:01:45
7	6	McCartney, Craig	Geelong CC	6:55:14	0:02:26
8	15	Lovelock, Jonathan	Hawthorn CC	6:55:18	0:02:30
9	31	Gallagher, Michael	Caulfield-Carnegie CC	6:55:50	0:03:02
10	10	Stewart, Lachlan	Ararat & Districts CC	6:56:38	0:03:50
11	39	Kah, Danny	Caulfield-Carnegie CC	7:00:32	0:07:45
12	8	Finning, Sean	Castlemaine CC	7:06:31	0:13:44
13	1	Hegert, Jason	Ballarat-Sebastopol CC	7:06:44	0:13:57
14	26	Turner, Damien	Ballarat-Sebastopol CC	7:07:00	0:14:12
15	21	Phillpotts, Jay	Hawthorn CC	7:07:15	0:14:27
16	27	Marwood, Kyle	Bendigo & District CC	7:07:24	0:14:36
17	33	McInerney, Aidan	Caulfield-Carnegie CC	7:07:30	0:14:42
18	42	Moody, Ryan	Geelong CC	7:08:05	0:15:17
19	23	Stevenson, Trent	Shepparton CC	7:08:06	0:15:19
20	43	Schultz, Brendan	Hamilton CC	7:09:57	0:17:10
21	30	Steffanoni, Chris	Sunbury & Hume Districts CC	7:10:09	0:17:22
22	28	Lea, Jacob	Bendigo & District CC	7:10:23	0:17:36
23	93	Juzwin, Benjamin	St Kilda CC	7:10:26	0:17:38
24	9	Tozer, David	Port Fairy CC	7:13:16	0:20:29
25	48	Machin, Alexander	Wangaratta CC	7:14:39	0:21:52
26	35	Smith, Peter	Caulfield-Carnegie CC	7:17:02	0:24:14
27	49	Perez, Brett	St Kilda CC	7:17:03	0:24:15
28	25	Wettenhall, Will	Ballarat-Sebastopol CC	7:19:27	0:26:39
29	38	Sherwin, Matthew	Caulfield-Carnegie CC	7:20:25	0:27:38
31	18	Pearson, Simon	Norwood CC	7:25:36	0:32:49
32	20	Gill, Russell	Norwood CC	7:26:50	0:34:02
33	7	Dickeson, Will	Sturt Holdfast Marion CC	7:27:21	0:34:33
34	47	Howard, Kym	Adelaide CC	7:35:19	0:42:31
35	13	Grinter, Pip	Bendigo & District CC	7:57:19	1:04:32
36	17	Wettenhall, Marcus	Geelong CC	8:00:10	1:07:22
	19	Norton, Bradley	Shepparton CC	8:04:04	1:11:16