



REGULAR

An Unwanted Birthday Present

A lot has happened since my first column. The track season is well and truly upon us. By the time these words are published, all of the World Cups and National titles will be run and won and selections will have been made for the World Championships.

Being home in Tasmania for Christmas was really special. Each time I return to Tasmania I notice more and more about it. I think when you live there you take it all for granted. Not wanting to sound like a preacher but it really is gorgeous. The air is clean and fresh and the roads are almost traffic free. What more could a cyclist ask for really. My time in Tasmania began with the annual Tasmanian Institute of Sport (TIS) training camp just outside of Ulverstone. The TIS has been such a huge part of my career and it was really nice to feel like I still belonged there, even though I'm based in Melbourne.

My next race in Tasmania was the Launceston Criterium, a 90 minute, men's race, which included some of the biggest names in the pro peloton. It was Matt's (Matt Gilmore – my coach), idea that I also would start the race. At first I laughed, thinking he was joking but soon realised he was serious and after starting the race and listening to his reasoning for me doing it, I too thought it was a good idea. Racing with the pro men was such a great experience, it's not every day that you get to race against some of the world's best male cyclist in your home state. And let me tell you, it was on from the start. The pace that the men go through the corners is certainly not something to be understated. I found myself having to remind myself if they can get through the corner at this pace and stay on their bike, then so can I!

Needless to say I didn't finish the whole 90 minutes, but we did get from it what we had planned – a solid, very high intensity 45 minutes of effort, which is just over the time that a points race normally takes on the track.

If you are a keen cycling enthusiast, I'm sure you would all be aware of one of the 'lows' of cycling – crashing. I was unlucky enough to have two in just over a week. Both in races, with the first on the track and the second on the road. Each time I crash I ponder why sometimes you fall and can get straight up, dust yourself off and keep going while other times you fall hard and don't get up. My crash on the road during the Jayco Bay Series was kind of like the later. When I fell, I instantly felt pain in my hip and thigh. I couldn't bend my right leg, which scared me a little because I'd never been in that situation. I was taken back to my team tent where my crew from Pitcher Partners were fantastic in getting me the best care in the least possible time. Within three hours of crashing, I had been to a doctor, had X-rays and been



Warming up for the Jayco Bay Crits, little realising how the day would end. Photo • Simon Hayes

booked in for an MRI. The following morning, which happened to be my birthday, was spent having an MRI and then subsequently waiting for the results.

Luckily, they returned with the best possible scenario— some impingement in my hip and just a big 'corkie' in my thigh muscle. The hip turned out to be an existing injury that had been aggravated and the 'corkie' would hopefully settle down within the week.

After realising that I wouldn't be starting the last day of the Bay Series my thoughts went straight to the following week of racing, the Beijing World Cup. Beijing was a race that I was really targeting for the season and wanted to have a strong result at.

During the next few days we were unsure whether or not I would even make the flight with the team but with some great support from my doctors and physios, I was able to compete. Going into the World Cup I was really nervous, not knowing how my body was going to react after getting back on the bike only six days out

from racing. Nevertheless I had to put this out of my mind and focus on the positives. I had just had a week off the bike so perhaps this is what my body needed and I will go into the race fresh!

Results wise I finished third in the scratch race and fourth in the points race. At first I was disappointed with my result in the points race but after considering I could hardly walk the previous week, I was satisfied with the result.

I think crashing so close to competition did have an impact on my performance. I found myself making silly mistakes in terms of positioning during the points race. I can only put this down to a lack of confidence in not knowing exactly how my body was going to perform. In hindsight I should have had more trust in the training that I had previously done and also in my body's ability to heal itself.

I always like to take something away from each race and in Beijing I did nothing less.

Happy training and enjoy the summer sun!
Belinda 🚴