

2016 TOUR OF THE GREAT SOUTH COAST August 10 – 14



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CHRIS WELL IN THE GREAT SOUTH COAST RACE

It's not every young cyclist who gets to ride in a trade team sponsored by his parents. Such is the good fortune bestowed upon the emerging South Australian Chris Harper.

The engaging Harper, 21, was a talented summer tennis player and winter footballer as a budding sportsman in Adelaide, but a family holiday to Melbourne some five years ago saw him breeze into a local cycling store and buy a bike.

"I'd been watching the Tour de France and other endurance events on television, and it's something I thought I'd like to have a go at," he recalls.

From starting out as a recreational rider, Harper soon re-developed his competitive urge and joined the Norwood Cycling Club, one of Adelaide's most historically famous bike riding institutions.

The impressive improvement in his performances on the national stage, coupled with his overall cycling prowess, has resulted in Harper being touted as a possible winner of the Lakes Oil-Fulton Hogan Tour of the Great South Coast, a tough five-day trek over spectacular terrain, to be raced in South Australia and Victoria from August 10-14.

It would be a huge result for Harper to win the 511-kilometre tour, which is one of the prime events on Cycling Australia's Subaru National Road Series calendar, but his list of credentials are growing.

He is the reigning South Australian Under 23 road and time trial champion, and earlier this year held the King of the Mountains and Most Aggressive Rider jerseys in the Herald Sun Tour – following on from an eye-catching solo breakaway performance, which netted him sixth place in the Australian Under 23 road championship at Buninyong.

Harper will ride for the six-man Swiss Wellness team in the seven-stage Great South Coast Tour, and will no doubt receive the best of attention. The team is owned by his parents Melinda and Rick who are making a tremendous contribution to Australian cycling through the practical sponsorship of young riders.

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- 2 -

The Harpers, along with daughter Stephanie and Melinda's brother Grant, run the Swiss Wellness Health and Beauty Spa in Adelaide, plus a nearby skin care manufacturing business.

They have sponsored a cycling team for five years, first as Veneziano Blefari, then Swiss Wellness since 2014. The other riders in the Great South Coast line-up are Marcus Culey (Sydney), Lachie Holliday and Nicholas Leonard (Melbourne), Justin Tomlinson (Mittagong), and Gerald Wild (Albury-Wodonga).

The team received a substantial boost this year when the international pro tour icon BMC outfitted the squad with bikes.

It's on his gleaming BMC machine that Chris Harper hopes to have a decisive influence on two of the tour's most demanding stages – the 137.6-kilometre Port MacDonnell slog through the District Council of Grant on Thursday, August 11, and the stunning 121.4km Cape Bridgewater road race in Glenelg Shire on Saturday, August 13.

"I like it tough, and those stages should suit me," Harper says.

The tour, organised and promoted by Cycling Victoria and the event's founder Caribou Publications, will start with closed-circuit criterium racing in Mount Gambier's Vansittart Park on Wednesday, August 10, and finish with another crit on Portland's waterfront on Sunday, August 14.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Kipp Kaufmann
Cycling Victoria
0430-303577

John Craven
Caribou Publications and Events
0408-558469

