



# Media release for immediate publication

## Cycle Classic Geared Up to Go

April 24, 2023

The 62<sup>nd</sup> edition of the Squadron Energy Grafton to Inverell Cycle Classic is ready to cement its reputation as Australia's toughest cycling race when it takes to the road from Grafton this weekend. The iconic race between Grafton and Inverell will provide some additional challenges for the 300 plus riders entered in this year's event.

### New Event Format

This year, the AusCycling National Road Series (NRS) event will be conducted over two days on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> April. Saturday will feature the Men's NRS Grafton to Inverell (228km) race, the Women's NRS Grafton to Mt Mitchell (119km) race, and the Non-NRS Grafton to Inverell (228km) race. On Sunday, Inverell will host circuit racing for the NRS Men and Women at the Lake Inverell purpose built cycling circuit.

The third year of the Women's NRS race includes a challenging course modification for the country's leading female riders. The 119km journey from Grafton to Mount Mitchell now features the iconic 16km climb of the Gibraltar Range and close to 2500m of climbing over the full course.

"The introduction of a new course for the Women's NRS will see a different dynamic of racing from previous editions that finished in Inverell," said Mr Thompson. "The climb of the Gibraltar Range will play a key role in deciding the outcome of the race as the summit is only 32km from the finish."

"We don't expect to see a large group of riders sprinting for the finish as it will be more of a race of attrition."

There have also been some changes to the support events. The previous Division 2, Division 3 and Challenge categories are merged into one **non-NRS** race. The results will focus on overall, age category and team classifications for both men and women.

"We expect to see riders competing for the prestige of being the leading rider in their age category," said Mr Thompson. "The team's classification has also attracted riding groups and clubs looking to take on the challenge with the support of their team-mates."

### Riders to Watch

The race is never one to follow a script and the Men's NRS race promises to be one of the most open editions for many years. Inverell local, Dylan Sunderland (St George Continental) will be looking for redemption from 2019 when he finished 2<sup>nd</sup>. He is in good shape after recently winning a climbing stage at the Tour of Thailand. The 2019 winner, Will Hodges from Bathurst will also be back, hoping to repeat the victory that broke the hearts of the partisan local crowd.



The powerful Team Bridgelane based in Tasmania, are the defending champions and have again assembled a super strong team of riders. Their main contenders will include Rhys Robotham who won the Tour of Tasmania last year with some brilliant climbing and Zac Marriage who, despite being a young rider at 19 years of age, has already won a National Road Series race last year.

Sam Hill (Onyva Racing) from Tamworth has finished 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> in the last two editions of the race and will be looking to finally get to the top of the podium this year. His brother Ben (Blackshaw Racing) from Canberra has also demonstrated he can go the distance and always does well in the 269km Melbourne to Warrnambool race. He has been branching out in triathlon but still has an amazing engine and fast finish. He recently won the NSW State Gravel Championship at Tenterfield.

Brendon Davids (CCACHE x Par Kup) from South Africa is an attacking rider who always animates the races. Look for him trying to set a furious pace up the formidable climb of the Gibraltar Range to sort out the field and perhaps set up victory for his team-mate Marcus Culey from Sydney.

The Women's NRS will also feature a very strong Team Bridgelane, who are a new women's team for 2023. They have several contenders including Haylee Fuller from Dubbo who recently won the Tour de Brisbane and Felicity Wilson-Haffenden from Hobart, a young sensation at 18 years of age, who is having a breakthrough year with dual national junior titles and the junior Oceania time trial title. Talia Appleton from Mansfield, Victoria is another talented junior who recently won the Oceania Road race championship and along with Emily Watts from Lithgow near Bathurst, a stage winner of the Tour Down Under, provide other options for Team Bridgelane.

Mackenzie Coupland (Cycling Development Foundation) is another junior who was climbing sensationally at Tour of Tasmania last year. The Gibraltar Range is within her capabilities despite her youth. Her team-mate Lucie Fityus from the Hunter region in NSW will be hard to beat in a sprint if she can get over Gibraltar in the front group.

Ella Sibley and Courtney Sherwell (DRG Knights Liv) both finished in the top-10 at the women's Melbourne to Warrnambool race and could also be contenders for the win.

### **Local Flavour**

The field will feature several local riders from both Grafton and Inverell who are taking on the challenge of completing the course in 2023. Representing Grafton Cycle Club will be Alex Beedie, Garry Reardon, Jye Reardon, Blake Cullen, Ben Smith, Peter Eggleton and Dion Poy. Not to be outdone, Inverell Cycle Club will be represented by Darren Wilkins, Darren Haliday, Alwyn Miller, Peter Horwood, Dan Wilks, Paul Wilks and Dustin Wilks.

Team Wilks will be a team to watch with father Dan, cousin Paul and son Dustin looking to take out the Open Teams Classification in the Non-NRS race. Paul has been a previous winner of Division 2 and Dan has finished on the podium in the same division. It will be testing initiation for Dustin who will be competing in the event for the first time.



### **How to Follow**

The event finish in Victoria Park, Inverell will feature a big screen that will display live footage of the last 40km of the Men's NRS race and highlights of the Women's NRS race. Festivities will commence from 12pm.

Live commentary of all divisions of the race will be broadcast on Sta FM 91.9 Inverell.

For live race updates follow @NationalRoadSeries and @graftontoinverell on Facebook, @AusCyclingAus and @G2Irace on Twitter, and AusCyclingAus and G2Irace on Instagram.

<https://www.graftontoinverell.com.au/>