



Media release for immediate publication

Cycle Classic Geared Up to Go

April 24, 2024

The 63rd 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 27th and Sunday 28th April. While the NRS men will tackle the traditional 228km course as a standalone race - followed by a criterium on Sunday, the NRS women will combine their road race and criterium into a two-day Sapphire Tour.

Men's NRS Route

The Grafton to Inverell (G2I) is the second-longest race of the NRS, behind the Melbourne to Warrnambool. The G2I is notorious for its elevation - 3,380 vertical metres, including the ascent of Gibraltar Range.

Starting bright and early in Grafton at 7.15am, the race follows the Gwydir Highway westwards on its long journey to Inverell.

There's one categorised climb after 25km, Cattle Creek (2.1km, 5.5%), but it's just a teaser before the peloton hits the Gibraltar Range after 72km. At 16.3km (5.7% average), this climb is a sustained effort of over 40 minutes. It peaks with 140km remaining, so it's not decisive, but the contenders will be near the front. You can't win the race on the Range but you sure can lose it, as the cliché goes.

Over the top of the Range, the roads keep rolling up and down, but there are only two more categorised climbs - Waterloo Range (1.9km, 5%) and Wire Gully (1.3km, 5%), the latter peaking with 20km to go. These climbs are often the catalyst for a race-winning selection.

The final kilometres are a fast downhill to the finish line on Vivian Street, Inverell.

Women's NRS Route

The two-day Women's NRS Sapphire Tour features a road race on Saturday (Stage 1) and a circuit race (criterium) on Sunday (Stage 2).

Stage 1 (109km) takes the peloton from Mount Mitchell to Inverell, following the latter half of the Men's NRS route. It's the same concept as the former Gibraltar to Inverell, raced in the inaugural Women's NRS event in 2021 ([won that year by Ruby Roseman-Gannon](#)).



The new route cuts out the Gibraltar Range but keeps the Waterloo Range and Wire Gully climbs, plus a late uphill pinch when the race returns to the highway with 5km remaining. Race contenders aiming to make the race hard will need to maximise their effort on these climbs.

Stage 2 (42km) is the Lake Inverell Circuit Race on the town's purpose-built, off-road criterium course. The 1.4-kilometre circuit is fast and flowy with sweeping bends and plenty of undulations.

Men's NRS Key Riders

The Men's NRS field includes many in-form riders who have tasted success recently, both here and overseas.

NRS leader Graeme Frislie (CCACHE x Par Küp) will be on the start line, backing up from his recent [Tour de Brisbane victory](#). Alongside him on the CCACHE team will be [last year's runner-up](#) Max Campbell, the only rider who arrived at the line with winner Zac Marriage.

The team also has Alastair Christie-Johnston, who sprinted to fourth in Brisbane, not to mention Bentley Niquet-Olden, winner of a hilly stage at the UCI-level Tour de Taiwan last month. It's a very solid line-up.

Speaking of stage winners in Taiwan, Carter Bettles (Cobra9 Leigh Surveying Racing) did the same. He will race alongside Irish national Jesse Ewart (Cobra9 Leigh Surveying Racing), who won a stage at the Tour of Thailand with a similarly selective profile as the Grafton to Inverell.

Kiwi Boris Clark (St George Continental) finished in the top-10 overall in both Taiwan and Thailand, so his shape looks good for a tough course like the G2I.

Also in the race will be Luke Burns (Team BridgeLane), who won the King of the Mountain jersey at the Santos Tour Down Under.

Along with Burns, Team BridgeLane brings multiple options such as Ben Metcalfe (fourth at the Oceania Championships), Bailey McDonald (third at last year's Melbourne to Warrnambool) and former Under-23 national champion Sam Jenner.

Former WorldTour pro Alex Evans (St George Continental) will also be on the start line as well as perennial strongmen such as Brendon Green (Cycling Development Foundation), Ben Carman (St George Continental) and Torben Partridge-Madsen (Blackshaw Racing).

Women's NRS Key Riders

As you would expect, Team BridgeLane has a stacked women's team for the Sapphire Tour. There's Elite and Under-23 Oceania champions Katelyn Nicholson and Keely Bennett; Melbourne to Warrnambool medallist Amanda Poulsen; [Tour de Brisbane runner-up](#) Gina Ricardo; Australian junior representatives Nicole Duncan and Talia Appleton; and mountain biker Lillie Pollock.

Among these riders, BridgeLane brings a combination of powerful engines and fast finishers that can win from almost any scenario, making them the team to beat.



The Tour will see the return of Alexandra Martin-Wallace (Butterfields Racing), a former winner of the Gibraltar to Inverell. The Queenslander hasn't recently hit the form that saw her win in 2022 but she can't be disregarded as a potential.

Martin-Wallace will be riding alongside Summer Nordmeyer (Butterfields Racing), who placed fifth at the Tour de Brisbane.

Also in action are Sophia Sammons (Cycling Development Foundation), who is the Under-23 Oceania time trial champion; alongside Nicole Wilson and Savannah Coupland, who both pack a strong sprint.

Also throw young Belinda Bailey (Team Hydraplay Femme) into the mix of potential winners. She was sixth place in Brisbane last week, thanks to her fast-finishing track background.

Support Events

The NRS races on Saturday will be supported by the Grafton to Inverell Open, Grafton to Inverell Pairs Relay, and the Mt Mitchell to Inverell Open. These events will feature competitive male and female cyclists from throughout Australia as they take on the challenge of participating in the toughest race in the country. Among the starters will be 78 year old Mick Patton from the Sunshine Coast who will be striving to be the oldest finisher in the 228km Open.

The Lake Inverell Open Circuit Race on Sunday is a new addition to the race, that enables riders to test their tired legs over 24 laps of the 1.4km off-road circuit at Lake Inverell to conclude a great weekend of racing.

How to Follow

Saturday's race is broadcast live on radio station STA FM 91.9 and has commentators assigned to the Men's NRS, Women's NRS and Grafton to Inverell Open. Follow the race throughout the day at <https://stafm.com.au>.

The event finish in Victoria Park, Inverell will broadcast the live radio coverage along with the festivities from 10.00am.

AusCycling will have all the wrap-up afterwards, with highlights on their [YouTube channel](#).

You can also follow the event's [Facebook page](#).

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