



Press Release
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Cox recalls controversial incident

Two-time champion Stephen Cox is probably the only rider that can lay claim to being involved in a police chase while competing in the Tour of Southland.

In 1985, the Waikato rider featured in one of the race's more controversial incidents when he refused to stop for police during a stage from Invercargill to Bluff – a tale recalled when Cox joined eight-time winner Brian Fowler as guests at last night's Tour of Southland Legend's Dinner.

For Cox, it highlighted just how much the race had changed.

"They stopped the race that day because the guys were crossing over the white line but I'm looking today and here are all the police cars on the wrong side of the road," he said.

It was tour director Bruce Ross' first year at the helm of the Tour and police had agreed to turn off traffic lights to allow the field to ride the first section of the stage down Invercargill's main street.

"I briefed them at Lorneville and they were instructed to stay together until the Crescent, then they could race on," Ross recalled.

"Stephen literally stormed out of the blocks and, in an attempt to catch him, the whole field were fishtailing all over the highway. The police were going berserk; I was yelling into the loudspeaker ... I can still see this little lady in a green Morris Oxford car disappear into the grass on the side of the road in an attempt to avoid the peloton."

In an attempt to halt Cox, a policeman soared ahead and stood – arms outstretched – on the road.

"Cox proceeded to ride around him and on his merry way ... he was finally stopped at Greenhills but the rest of the riders were already sitting down in protest in the middle of State Highway 1 at Woodend ... that was my baptism of fire," Ross said.

Cox remains steadfast.

"They reckon they told me to stop and I'm adamant they didn't tell me to stop," Cox said.

"I kept going and rode pretty much all the way to Bluff before they convinced me to stop. The rest of the field stopped just out of Invercargill and there was a bit of a stand-off for an hour or so then they finally brought all the riders down to me at Bluff.

"They started me off a bit earlier but the guys just chased me down ... I had been riding my absolute butt off and doing it quite successfully before they stopped me.

"In hindsight, I do feel Bruce made the right decision for the race. Whether the decision they arrived at was fair to me, in the end didn't matter because it only affected one person instead of the entire field. If anything, it's probably made me a way better friend of Bruce's."

Winning the Tour in 1981 and 1982 remained highlights of his extensive sporting career.

“I never came here to start with in the early part of my career. I always used to think it wasn’t hard enough.”

Thanks to Southland’s notorious weather, Cox soon discovered the contrary.

“One year I won it, a stage got called off because of snow. But the weather is what makes it the Southland tour – it’s all part of the challenge,” he said.

“I’ve got lots of fond memories of racing down here. It’s simple. It’s the best bike race in New Zealand and has been for at least 30 years.

“It’s just so overwhelming to see the support of the local people. If we could get this sort of support in other places around the country, it would be wonderful – it makes the race what it is.”

Ends