

AAP TODAY

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AAP news direct to the seat of power

AAP has won a contract to supply a news service direct to the nation's seat of power – the new parliament house.

The service, beamed by satellite to Canberra and relayed to the offices of every member and senator, began operating last month.

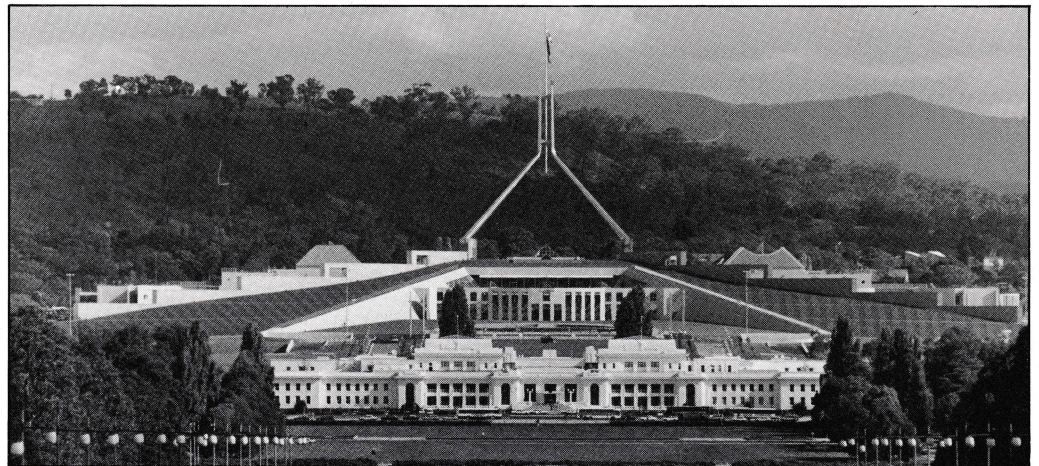
All federal MPs are equipped with their own personal computers in the new parliament, and can use them at any time to call up AAP's around-the-clock news feed.

They are now seeing the news on their desk-top terminals at the same time as it is transmitted by AAP to the Australian media.

This makes the Australian parliament perhaps one of the best informed in the world on current news.

The three-year contract was signed by AAP and the Parliamentary Information Systems Office (PISO), a department within the new parliament.

AAP and PISO devised a new software program that distributes the feed to 300 screen



Australia's parliament ... one of the best informed in the world on current news.

users – members and parliamentary staff – in the new building.

The parliamentary recipients have access to a composite wire which provides the major Australian and overseas general, sporting and financial news, as well as horse racing information.

MPs can gain access to the news by use of simple search words, in a similar fashion to

AAP's Newstrak service.

"Each member and senator has a multi-purpose personal computer terminal," said Commercial Services manager Rex Mitchell.

"At any time they can use them to switch in to the AAP feed.

"It has taken off very well. Initial reaction has been excellent."

The service is transmitted

by satellite and received by a two metre dish on top of the east block of the old parliament house.

From there it is relayed to offices throughout the new parliament.

AAP hopes to receive permission to relocate the dish on the new building.

Mitchell said it was AAP's biggest commercial services contract to date and opened a new area in news communication.

The system was believed to have a significant application commercially, to search both news and other data streams.

The company had sole and exclusive rights to market the software in conjunction with other AAP news feeds.

"The PISO work fits in very well with our own development program and provides a key to scale economies in delivering news by electronic means," he said.

**Still more
from AAP's
wild world
of sports**

ON HIS BIKE! P7



UNDER ATTACK! P6



... AND OFF THEIR ROCKERS! PAGE 3

Comco expanding in New Zealand

COMCO, AAP's communications subsidiary, has expanded its New Zealand operations ahead of the planned deregulation of that country's telecommunications industry next year.

Comco's New Zealand representative, Richard Lawrence, set up base in Wellington at the start of 1987.

Technician Stewart Baird was recruited locally and now Frank Pollard is joining the staff with a view to opening an office in Auckland.

Frank, recruited in New Zealand, has been working for the company in Perth.

"He was part of the New Zealand brain drain," said Richard, "but now we're putting it back."

Their main brief in New Zealand is to look for new business. Most activity so far has been in voice messaging.

Mobil Oil proved a big corporate sale for the company's ASPEN voice messaging system.

ASPEN also has been sold



Comco crew ... from left, Frank Pollard, Stewart Baird and Richard Lawrence.

to New Zealand Telecom.

"Telecom is operating the voice messaging bureau attached to their mobile cellular phone system.

"This means ASPEN users have the added advantage of using our system on their mobile phones.

"So we'll be looking for a lot of repeat orders from Telecom."

Richard predicts a big expansion when New Zealand's telecommunications industry is deregulated in April, 1989.

"The minister has been pretty open about it," he said. "It looks like deregulation in this case will mean no regulation.

"Telecom will cease to be a monopoly. Anyone will be able to compete as a carrier.

"Basically companies will be able to do what they want, with whom they want, where they want.

"The opportunities in telecommunications will be superb, and we hope to make the most of them."

Richard and Stewart are working out of the New Zealand Press Association (NZPA) building in Wellington.

Besides installing and maintaining ASPEN systems, Stewart also takes care of NZPA's video editing system.

Richard, who worked with Telecom in England, came to Australia in 1985 for a holiday, worked as a casual technician for AAP, and ended up staying.

The following year he went into the marketing side of the business and hasn't looked back.

He says New Zealand is the ideal place for a young family. "It's very family oriented, very pretty and we're loving it."

SYDNEY Newsdesk staff spotted the keyword of the month on an incoming world wire story: **OBIT - LAZARUS.**

No news is good news ...

A RECENT news feature from the Adelaide office warning of local flooding recalled the mass panic that set in there 12 years ago following a Doomsday prediction that the city would be hit by an earthquake and flooded by a tidal wave.

It also revived memories of one of the finest intros to grace an AAP story.

The panic sent hundreds of families, heeding the warning of house painter John Nash, heading for high ground, many selling their homes.

It was so widespread that then Premier Don Dunstan intervened. He wandered down to the Glenelg foreshore on the day of doom to reassure concerned folk sheltering in the Adelaide Hills, and to mingle with a huge crowd of other non-believers.

History has shown the earthquake and tidal wave never occurred. There wasn't so much as a tremor or a ripple.

Later that evening the duty editor-in-charge, the late Rick Paris, concocted a nightlead that began: "Adelaide, Jan 19 AAP - Nothing happened here today."

In brief ...

LIZ CORNELISSEN, Adelaide, is appointed local manager for AAP Information Services, assuming responsibility for all company operations there except editorial.

NICK HUGHES, Sydney, becomes technical development manager, reporting to assistant general manager John Lowing.

WENDY COOMBES, Melbourne, becomes commercial services sales manager for Victoria and Tasmania.



London's Coyotes

LONDON bureau staff were all smiles when they took delivery of their first two Coyote video editing terminals, which they use to file stories to Sydney via the Reuter system. Pictured here with the first of the Coyotes are, left to right, John Coomber, Wendy Bannister, Andrew Stokes, Marg McDonald and Mike Hedge.

OAP a splash in Lithuania

OSTREILIAN Asosieited Pres (sic) is big news in Lithuania, where a recent visit by Ly Makejus and Dzonas Kumberis was reported on the front page, with a picture, of the Vilnius evening newspaper *Vakarines naujienos*.

The two reporters, alias financial services editor Leigh Mackay and chief London correspondent John Coomber, were also interviewed – in English – on the Lithuanian television current affairs program *Panorama*.

Makejus and Kumberis (sorry, Mackay and Coomber) were the pioneers of an exchange agreement between AAP and the Soviet official news agency TASS, signed by editor Peter Brown in Moscow last December.

They visited Moscow, Leningrad, Tallinn (Estonia) and the Lithuanian cities of Vilnius and Kaunas during a 15-day reporting trip as guests of TASS.

Both were impressed by the willingness of people, including Communist Party officials, to talk about the positive and negative aspects of Soviet life, and by the great generosity of their hosts.

Mikhail Gorbachev's anti-



AAP's visitors to the Soviet Union meet the rector of Vilnius University in Lithuania.

alcohol campaign meant vodka was in short supply, but they managed to try some of the bathtub bootleg Samogon, the taste and effect of which is not readily described in polite company.

Mackay, who turns out to be something of an expert in oriental carpets, spent a morning at the Ethnographic Museum in Leningrad examining rare and seldom-displayed 18th and 19th century rugs from Soviet Central Asia with one of the world's foremost authorities, Elena Tsareva, whose work he was familiar with in Australia.

Coomber particularly remembers a brisk sail on the Gulf of Finland with a Scandinavian beauty or two, a midnight walk through Red Square and the singular spectacle of the AAP financial services editor being beaten with juniper bushes by a naked Estonian egg farmer called Ants in a sauna outside Tallinn.

The trip gave Coomber, a fancier of exotic cars, a rare opportunity to be photographed leaning on a pre-war black Mercedes while its owner wasn't looking, and to finger the black-and-chrome beauty



Makejus and Kumberis in Red Square.

of the official-looking Soviet ZIM.

Mackay and Coomber met not only officials, writers, journalists and Australian diplomats but average people, many of whom publicly and privately expressed their complaints, hopes and fears with surprising candour.

They were struck by the number of outspoken young women who complained that having to work full-time did not always mean they got help from their husbands in coping with child-rearing and house-keeping. Some things never change.

The crawl of the Light Brigade

By Alfred, Lord Tennyson

INTO the valley of Heffron Park rode the valiant All-Stars. Talent left of them, talent right of them.

But was there a man dismayed?

When AAP Sydney's depleted All-Stars soccer side clashed against the might of the *Daily Mirror*, comparisons with the Battle of Balaklava were irresistible.

The prize seemed as remote as it was for the British cavalry in the Crimea in 1854.

And like the British, the All-Stars made a gallant but tragically useless attack on a strong position.

Little did Lord Tennyson realise he would be pressed into service as a sports reporter when he penned the words: "Not though the soldier knew 'Someone had blundered.'"

The All-Stars were without

their captain, their top goal scorer and two others who had actually played the game before.

It was hell out there.

But with nary a flinch, out trooped the AAP Light Brigade – light on numbers, light on tactics, light on talent. But heavy on commitment.

When the smoke of battle had cleared, the two teams were separated by heaps of ability but just one goal.

The All-Stars actually led 1-0 at half-time, before succumbing courageously 2-1.

Once the *Mirror* scored its second goal, it could truly be said of the All-Stars:

"Theirs not to make reply,

"Theirs not to reason why,

"Theirs but to do and die."

Footnote: The All-Stars made amends by defeating the *Daily Telegraph*, for the second time this year, 1-0.



The Light Brigade, from left to right: Greg Truman, Derek Richardson, Mike Koslowski, Doug Conway, Tim Gossage, Mike Osborne, Ian Telford, Giles Parkinson, Hugo Uribe, John Pilkington and Ted Simmons. Candidates for the AAP team of tomorrow are Mark Richardson, James Conway, Alice and Alexander Uribe, and Andrew Simmons.

TWENTY YEARS ON ... COMCO'S DINH RELIVES THE

WHILE Saigon was in a festive mood to usher in the 1968 Lunar New Year, Pham Ngoc Dinh was one of the few who knew his beloved city was about to become a bloody battleground.

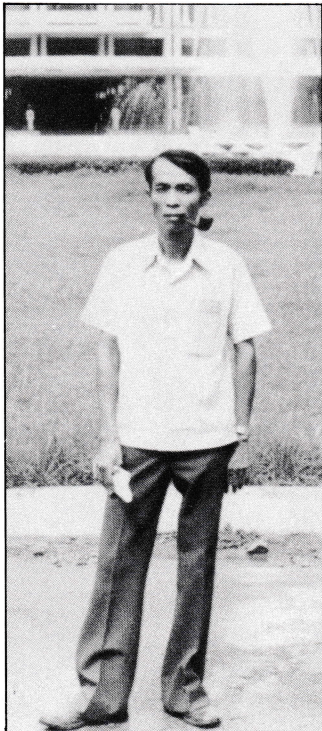
Dinh, then a tough, street-wise reporter for the local Reuter bureau, is now a storekeeper at Comco headquarters in Sydney.

He was one of a handful among Saigon's four million people forewarned of the Vietcong guerrilla "Tet offensive" that sealed the fate of South Vietnam and made him a refugee in a foreign land.

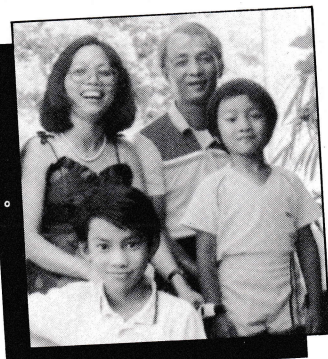
FRANCIS DANIEL, Reuter correspondent in Sydney, filed this report on the 20th anniversary of the Tet offensive.

TODAY, far removed from his homeland, Dinh, his wife, Vye and two sons are celebrating Tet in the tranquil setting of their suburban home in Sydney.

But Dinh's thoughts are very much on that fateful night when the Vietcong stunned the world with the sheer audacity of their attack that heralded the biggest US military debacle in modern history.



Then: Dinh in the newly-renamed Ho Chi Minh City in 1975.



Now: Dinh at home with wife Vye and sons Vu and Huy.

"It was a nightmare I never forget. I knew the offensive many hours before it happened. No one believe me. I didn't go to US military because I am a reporter not informer," says Dinh, who taught himself English with a dictionary.

Dinh, now 50, was informed of the impending guerrilla action by a Vietnamese newsman who had sources within the Vietcong hierarchy.

Dinh had several times come close to death during the 1968 offensive during which Vietcong hit more than 30 provincial capitals and held ground in key areas against overwhelming odds for several days.

"Saigon street fighting worse than covering war in jungle," says Dinh, whose brand of English has been christened by his colleagues as "Dinglish".

He recalls an occasion when he and Reuter bureau chief James Pringle came under Vietcong rocket attack while traveling in a car. They jumped out before the Volkswagen crashed into a tree.

"I think I die. I think I never to see my children again. I cry and cry. We crawl to nearby house but the woman inside refuse to open door. After many hours we reach office."

Tet, celebrated over a four-day period, is the most important festival in the Vietnamese calendar. It provided an ideal opportunity for the com-



American soldiers examine the bodies of two Vietcong killed in the battle.

Battle that a war – an

munists to launch a surprise attack, hoodwinking the vast US intelligence network.

US marine brigadier General John Chaisson summed up the offensive to journalists in Saigon in these words: "I must confess the VC (Vietcong) surprised us with the sheer panorama of their attack, it was surprisingly impressive and

launched with a surprising amount of audacity."

Hundreds of Vietcong cadres were well entrenched in Saigon long before the 1968 Lunar offensive. The guerrillas had smuggled 10 to 15 battalions, some 4500 men, into the city from outlying areas.

Captured Vietcong guerrillas were quoted as saying the

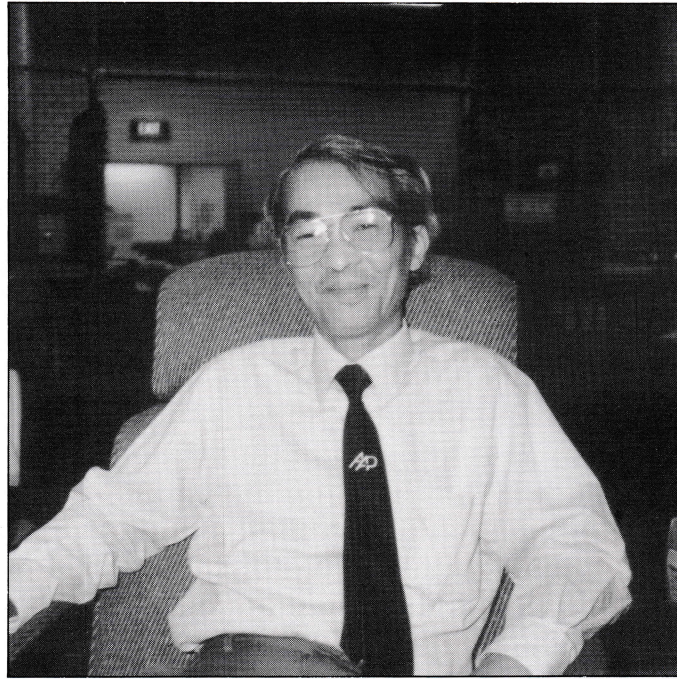


Flashback to 1968: US marines advance near the citadel Hue, South Vietnam, during the Tet offensive.

HORROR OF VIETNAM'S TET OFFENSIVE



the US Embassy compound.



Dinh on the job at Comco headquarters in Sydney.

changed d my life

they had detoured more than 50km to skirt the American and Vietnamese military cordon.

US military later found arms stored in places such as a big brewery in suburban Cholon, the Saigon racetrack and a new factory complex near Saigon airport.

Vietcong forces also attacked the Presidential Palace in the heart of Saigon but were driven back. But the most damaging to the US military might was the assault on the American Embassy, which had been turned into a fortress.

Dinh says when he arrived at the scene he saw US marines, many still in pyjamas, training their guns at their own embassy.

Vietcong guerrillas had taken over several floors in the building – the first time that the communists had managed to grab a slice of American territory.

"The VC capture Pentagon East," says Dinh.

An American soldier who rushed hurling abuse and firing a machinegun from his hip was cut down and lay dead only a few metres in front of the building.

Dinh saw a Vietnamese slumped in a military jeep and two bodies were lying across the embassy grounds. After several hours of fighting the Americans got their fortress back. The 19 Vietcong inside had been killed or captured.

During the height of the battle, Dinh says an American soldier swung his rifle at him yelling: "OK Charlie".

"I shouted I not Vietcong. I number one anti-communist," Dinh recalls his terrifying experience. "The soldier put his gun down and I thank God."

Dinh believes Tet was the turning point in the war. Almost every journalist covering the war now saw no light at the end of the tunnel.

In an editorial then on the Tet offensive, *The Australian*

newspaper said: "These events have torn to shreds the officially propagated myth of security ... if the American Embassy, the Presidential Palace, the Danang airbase, and all the rest of the Vietcong target areas are not secure then nothing was."

The Vietcong launched a second wave of attack on Saigon three months later when Reuter correspondents Ron Laramy and Bruce Piggot were killed by guerrillas.

Dinh marched into the battle zone alone to find the bodies. He was confronted by an armed guerrilla. Dinh says he had to force himself not to cry and pretend to be a Vietcong sympathiser.

Seven years later on April 30, 1975, South Vietnam fell to the communists. Dinh tried to leave on the last day, but the evacuation bus could not make it to the airport.

Dinh says he managed to keep Reuters Saigon office open for five years before he was allowed to leave the country for Bangkok as a refugee.

"I could not contact Bangkok Reuter office from refugee centre because I had old telephone number. I was helpless. Then the miracle.

"Bangkok Reuter chief Bernard Melunsky approached me with open arms saying: 'Come back to Reuter family'.

"I knew then Vietnam finished for me."

James lets off steam

WHEN there's 14 tonnes of coal to shovel into an 80 centimetre opening, the trick is not to load too much on each shovel full.

That was the lesson Adelaide reporter James Grubel learned when he found himself doing more than just taking notes while covering the Great Bicentennial Steam Train Race in May.

James, a train lover since childhood, fulfilled a life-long ambition when he found himself on the footplate of the Bicentennial Steam Train, the 204-tonne 3801.

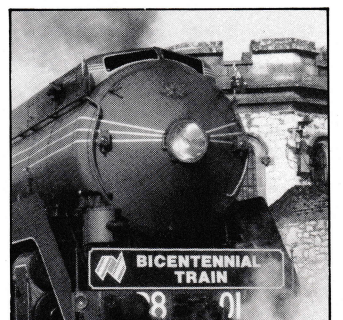
The 3801, which used to rule the rails with the high speed trains on southern NSW routes from 1943 to the 1960s, was in Adelaide to match its power against South Australia's light Pacific-class 621 Duke of Edinburgh.

On the return journey, the 3801's 300 passengers found themselves with 20 minutes to spare at a siding about 100 kilometres north of Adelaide while waiting for the Ghan from Alice Springs to pass.

James took the opportunity to grab some quotes from the driver, but when the Ghan arrived a few minutes early 3801's crew decided to put AAP's intrepid reporter to work as the train moved out for Adelaide.

Shovelling coal into the firebox of an engine as it rocks about at almost 90 kilometres per hour was not an easy task.

James worked for about 15 minutes but was relieved of his duties when the fireman noticed more coal had fallen on the footplate than was thrown into the fire.



Bicentennial Steam Train. Pic: The News, Adelaide.

All Star treated to the best

WHEN Steve Dettre suffered a grievous injury playing for AAP All-Stars soccer team, little did he imagine he would end up getting free medical treatment from the finest in the land.

A tardy tackle dumped Steve heavily during a 1-0 victory over Sydney's *Daily Telegraph*, putting paid to his afternoon and his knee.

"The knee went up like a

balloon," Steve said, "It was killing me."

The next day Steve went on assignment to Canberra, and while there he covered the final medical examination of Australian athletes heading for the Seoul Olympics.

At the Institute of Sport he bumped into Dr Brian Corrigan, long-time family friend, sports medicine specialist, and one of the doctors accompanying the team to Seoul.

"He saw me hobbling towards him and told me to come and see him," Steve said.

"Over the years he has looked after my dad's back, my mum's back, my sister's back and my back, so I don't suppose a Dettre leg was anything new to him.

"Except this one was black and blue from toe to hip."

Steve was examined by Dr Corrigan, colleague Dr Peter

Fricker and a resident AIS physiotherapist.

They diagnosed a bad tear in a muscle above the knee and prescribed a walking program and a course of exercises.

"I was really chuffed at getting probably the best treatment in the land," Steve said.

It took two weeks before he was able to walk without a limp, but it is likely to be considerably longer before he dons the All-Stars strip again.

The end for Corp. Report

AAP's Corporate Report service has ended and its remaining customers been converted to Newstrak (formerly Flak Fury) which supersedes it.

The Corporate Report broke new ground when it was launched and played a pivotal role in the company's communications development.

AAP was the first company in Australia to be granted a Multipoint Distribution System (MDS) licence, and Corporate Report was the first service to be transmitted by the MDS method.

The terms of the licence meant the company had to transmit an MDS service by a specific date, and Corporate Report was the stepping stone to an improved service using even more advanced technology.

Former Corporate Report clients are now using Newstrak.

The Newstrak name was introduced because, while Flak Fury was a memorable label, the company felt Newstrak more accurately reflected the nature of the product.

Newstrak is a computer software program that enables users to select news of their own choice.

By programming in their own keywords and phrases they can capture items of specific interest from the vast stream of data produced by AAP.



The motto of AAP Today's sports department is: "If it moves and perspires, we cover it." Fitting the bill here are the company's 1988 City-to-Surfers, bottom row: Ron Corben, Hugo Uribe, Reg Gratton, John Callan of NZPA. Middle: Richard Pullin, John Brock. At rear: Penny Doust, Kevin Ricketts.

A TEAM of seven hardy Sydney souls spent an hour or two, or three, carrying the company banner as they slogged through the streets, with 37,000 others, in the annual City-to-Surf race.

They may not have set any records but they negotiated 14 kilometres of the city's meanest bitumen, Heartbreak Hill and all, without losing a single runner.

Their times varied widely, but they had plenty in common when it was all over: blisters, weight loss, claustrophobia and an appetite for a decent refreshment.

Kevin Ricketts (82 minutes in 1985, downhill to 90 minutes in 1988) won the Toohey's - B&H Cup: first to light up a smoke and first to breast the bar at the Bondi Hotel.

He was closely followed by Hugo Uribe, who was nervously keeping a look-out for John Brock. Race sources made mention of a bet, but said it was Howard Northey who collected on it, as usual.

Ricketts was still at the bar by sunset, offering congratulations to anyone in footwear resembling a jogger.

The real hero of the

City to Surf? You've gotta be jogging!

marathon was Penny Doust, Sydney bureau's editorial assistant. She accepted a challenge to run in a moment of madness at the Criterion hotel - but bravely stuck to her brazen words in the clear light of day.

Penny returned a time of around 180 minutes then won the award for best post-run event, crashing a gourmet luncheon sponsored by a Dutch bank at which Heineken flowed like Staminade.

Richard Pullin (78 minutes 44 secs) set out to beat the hills on a first attempt at the distance.

He picked up the pace on Heartbreak Hill, improving his position by at least two or three dozen places out of 36,000 -

only to have two or three hundred smarter runners surge past him on the other side.

As a veteran of one previous City-to-Surf, Reg Gratton felt emboldened to say: "You've got to pace yourself.

"So I did, for 86 minutes. Which meant my faithful following never saw my true potential.

"There are many hazards. Wheelchairs are very dangerous coming down the hills. One occupant nearly ran me down. Nary a shout or a whistle."

And after it's all over who can forget the sweet mixture of sweat and liniment from a hundred bodies in a packed bus bound for Bondi Junction?

Techs slash response times

SUBSCRIBERS to AAP Reuters Economic Services make their livelihood from their screen trading information, so it follows that time is money when their equipment is out of action.

That explains their eagerness to see AAP technician on their doorstep the moment anything goes wrong.

It also explains their delight now that response times have been slashed.

No technician can be out of the blocks as quick as Ben Johnson, but thanks to a series of trials this year the average response time in getting to jobs has tumbled from an hour and a half to just 18 minutes.

Customer Services manager Cynthia Coleman said the only problem area in the country was Sydney, where most AAP-RES clients are.

"Because of the spread of the central business district, and because the field group technicians had to return to the Pitt Street office after seeing a client to get details of their next job, a lot of time and shoe leather was being wasted.

"So we conducted field trials in July and August with a new system.

"We put on an extra staff member to co-ordinate everything, and took over the administration and paperwork.

"Instead of going back to the office, the technicians simply called us to get their next jobs.

"The results have been so impressive that even the customers have been remarking about it when we make follow-up calls to check that everything is in order."

The response time is measured from the moment a subscriber reports a fault until a technician arrives to fix it.



John Sheed ... still in the saddle at 47. "Ah well, I'm only doing it to keep fit, not to race."

Official spokesman still in top gear ...

CYCLING is like smoking. No matter how many times you give up, somehow you end up back in the saddle.

Leg muscles start to twitch and nostrils flare and suddenly it's 6.30 on a cold, dark Sunday morning and you are entering the gates of Centennial Park to ride with "the bunch" to Waterfall and back - a mere 80 kilometres or so.

You might have put in a few hours training and you think you are pretty fit, but this is crunch time.

You stay with the bunch around Botany Bay, the little hills on the Kingsway at Cronulla cause only minor twitches and you hang on grimly through Sutherland.

But at Heathcote you realise that at 47 you are not the same rider who actually managed to win races a few years ago.

"Ah well," you say. "I'm only doing it to keep fit, not to race."

Then your riding mate, who is older than you but has been racing regularly, announces that he has entered you for a weekend of racing from Coonabarabran to Gunnedah and then from there to Tam-

BIKE riders should be taken out on their 30th birthday and have their kneecaps broken, says Sydney journalist John Sheed. Here John explains - almost - why he does what he does when not at work on the Sydney broadcast desk.

worth, and it's only three weeks away.

You know very well it isn't enough, but you start to train "seriously": 150 kilometre jaunts to Stanwell Park and back through the National Park, speed sessions at Centennial Park, and so on.

You arrange the weekend off, pack your gear and head for Coonabarabran, where you spend a freezing night in a caravan wearing a tracksuit inside a sleeping bag with the radiator going all night.

It's 50 degrees below zero the next morning and there you are in your skintight nicks and skimpy racing shirt pretending to be a big-time bike rider.

You have no idea what the course is like. Just a few undulations but mostly flat, you are told.

The first day is 107 kilometres to Gunnedah and soon you realise Mount Everest has been borrowed for the day as bunch after bunch spits you out the back.

You plug on, picking up

other crazy no-hopers like yourself and vow there is no way you will start tomorrow's stage.

After dinner that night at the Gunnedah RSL (two main courses) and a good sleep, your legs actually work next morning and you decide not to scratch, a decision helped by threats that you will have to walk back to Sydney if you do.

It's a graded scratch race which means you are riding with about 60 others - a great chance to sit on and not have to work too hard.

The idea works fine, but eventually the youngsters ride away, leaving you in a smaller bunch.

You are all well out of a place, but still you end up racing each other.

"Look at that young bloke on the blue bike ... no way I'll let him beat me," you gasp to yourself.

The line approaches and it's just you and the bloke on the blue bike.

You are both sprinting. Your legs are like lead but somehow they keep the pedals spinning and you are across the line a bike length in front.

That's it - for good this time. Or so you think. The Muswellbrook to Tamworth race is just a few weeks away and there you are, still out training.

Expo prize for Jan

BRISBANE journalist Jan Martin was among four winners in a media competition run by the Switzerland pavilion at World Expo '88.

Jan won the newspaper and magazine section for a series of stories on the six-month world fair.

Her prize was a Longine dress watch valued at \$850.

WHEN the VFL Swans moved from Melbourne in 1982, they were as new to Sydney as Ross Mullins was to the code.

But Ross quickly proved his adaptability and versatility by establishing himself as the Sydney Aussie Rules expert, one of the many sporting hats he wore until his retirement in August.

Others in that situation might have been content preparing to hang up their note books, but Ross saw it as a chance to show the sort of initiative that got him started in his craft in the Depression years.

At the age of 14 he was paid for a story in the illustrated *Sydney Mail* about the loss of the Stinson aircraft in 1937.

He wrote his first sports story for the *Sydney Morning Herald* about the same time and has written ever since, including editing his anti-aircraft unit's army journal, produced in Darwin under Japanese bombing and appropriately called *Salvo*.

After a long period at the SMH, Ross reported for trade journals, and worked in public relations for the Major Broadcasting Network and the NSW Trotting Club before starting with AAP in 1976.

He worked "eight days in seven" as a casual reporter until 1978 when he joined the regular staff.

He helped establish the turf desk and although he is remembered by many for his involvement with the Sydney Swans, or for leading the AAP team at Sydney's Royal Easter Show since 1979, his sporting specialities have always been cricket and rugby.

Swan song for Mr Versatile



Ross at his last rugby Test for AAP, the Wallabies versus the All Blacks at Concord. This was as close as any Australian got to the Bledisloe Cup.

He covered numerous rugby and cricket Test tours in Australia, and visited Pakistan in 1982 with Kim Hughes' Australian cricketers and New Zealand in 1985 with Allan Border's team.

"Pakistan was probably the most bizarre," said Ross, "but

it was an experience of 49 days I wouldn't have swapped for the comforts of home, in retrospect."

"Are you enjoying our climate?" President Zia asked him in Islamabad at a time of heightened civil unrest against the military dictatorship.

Ross recalled: "Remembering it was the same Zia who had been promoted by, and then hanged, the democratically elected PM Bhutto a short time before, I assured the General it was a lot like Sydney!"

Other adventures there included a nightmare ride by taxi across the north of Pakistan from Hyderabad to Lahore.

And he courted disaster when a motorised bike-taxi overturned in the dark on the way to the filing post office in Faisalabad.

"A length of rail used to prop up a street side came through the canvas roof in front of the passenger seat. It missed me by inches."

Ross believes cricket is our truly national sport.

He values his associations with some greats of recent times, including Ian and Greg Chappell, Imran Khan, Clive Lloyd, Mike Gatting, David Gower, Kim Hughes and Allan Border.

"I wouldn't swap them for gold."

Ross is a life member of the Lane Cove Cricket Club in Sydney and the Lane Cove Baseball Club.

He has an unusual claim to fame - that of presenting a boomerang in Yankee Stadium in 1959 to the Cleveland Indians from the Lane Cove Little League Indians.

One name on the boomerang was that of catcher Bob Radford, now executive director of the NSW Cricket Association.

Ross, like his father 27 years before him, came home from a world war and married the girl from the cashier's department at the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

His wife Yvonne, coincidentally, retired from the ABC at the same time as Ross did from AAP.

Their youngest son Tim also became a journalist. A former associate editor of the Illawarra Mercury, he is now sports editor at Sydney's *Sun Herald*.

Mad dog and an Englishman

BIZARRE reasons for absence from work come to light occasionally, but a gem from the past was unearthed recently during a spring clean of old files in the London office.

It was a telegram sent from Bombay in 1972 to Mick Connolly, then London bureau chief and now company secretary.

"Bitten by mad dog. Require leave extension nine days for taking

injections stop. Regret inconvenience."

It came from one of the locally-hired London teleprinter operators who had been holidaying in India.

The operator duly arrived for work some weeks later, by then apparently no worse for wear.

The telegram turned up during a visit to London by Duncan Hooper, AAP

general manager at the time it was sent.

Anyone who can go one better than this is invited to contact AAP Today.

• Footnote: Operators are a thing of the past in the London office, which has progressed from mad dogs to coyotes since those days. AAP London went onto VDU screens in 1983, and recently took delivery of Coyote terminals similar to those in Sydney.