

# **Bicycle Across Missouri (B.A.M.) Ride Report**

***September 1 – 4, 2000***

I had been talking about this ride for so long, I wanted to take the time to write down my impressions of what we accomplished. The hills we climbed, the heat and humidity we endured and the fun we had.

**Team Riders:** John Jost, Tom Cole, Keith Zesch and Randy Huth

**Support Crew:** Pam Huth, Anna Kleinsorge, Rob Sonnevill, Brent Lucas, Diane Doering

**Team Photographer:** David Doering

**Team Sponsors:** South County Cycles (entry fees, jerseys, tires, tubes, etc), Schwinn (lighting equipment), Pepsi All Sport (sports drinks), Gus' Pretzels (carbohydrates, salt)

First a recap of last year. I began thinking about BAM (Bicycle Across Missouri) and thought what a challenge this would be and what an accomplishment to be able to finish this race. Tom Cole and I talked about doing BAM as a team, but couldn't connect with others wanting to ride this and had difficulty getting volunteers who would crew for us.

In 1999 Tom and I ended up riding the BAM 100 mile "century" race. It covered the first 50 miles out and back for a full 100 miles. Last year I quit after 75 miles or so. I was so tired, drained physically and emotionally. As they say, "I hit the wall". I had ridden only one other 100 mile ride which was flat. I wasn't prepared for such a grueling hilly ride. I was defeated, but wanted to try again in 2000.

I began talking with Keith Zesch, who also worked at Maritz and discovered he wanted to ride Team BAM in 1999 but couldn't find a team. We joined forces and ended up with a great team and great crew. Thus, Team South County Cyclery was born.

Tom and I spent almost every Saturday from late March until September riding. We began with easy 20 and 30 mile rides and worked up to 50 and 60 mile rides and threw in some 80 to 120 mile days. I've ridden over 2,000 miles on my bike this year (2000) so far. You would think I would weigh somewhere around 175 pounds with all this exercise, oh well, it's all muscle. I also rode with Keith and Randy on occasion. However, I don't think the four of us ever all rode together until BAM.

The evening before the ride Randy, Keith, Tom and I meet to discuss our final strategies. Our plan was to break the riding up pretty evenly across the "official 575" miles riding approximately 30 to 40 mile segments; then switching riders.

Saturday, September 02, 2000 6:15 AM. Our team arrived at the Doubletree Hotel in Chesterfield MO. Randy is our lead out rider, strongest hill climber, eldest member of our team and by far the lightest of the bunch. Randy is the only member of our team under 200 pounds and can he climb! He will take the first leg of the race from Chesterfield to Union. It's now 6:25 AM by my watch. Randy rides toward the starting line and the race begins before he gets there. The other racers were already pulling out of the hotel parking lot as Randy swings around and joins the back of the pack. We all cheer as the solo and team riders head out of the parking lot.

Apparently Randy didn't stay in last place for long. He worked his way through the pack and found some fast riders to hang with. He stayed with them the whole way.

According to the rules, our support vehicles could not be on the route for the first 80 or 90 miles as the roads are too narrow. So we had to wait for the rider to make it to us. The only allowance to this rule was in two spots along the route before Hermann.

While Randy was on his bike, the Personal Support Vehicle "PSV" with Keith, Pam, Diane and Anna head out for a little breakfast, then would drive to Union MO to meet Randy and switch riders. Tom, Rob and I head for breakfast then drove to Dissen, MO a small town between Union and Hermann to meet up with the other van and wait for Keith who would be heading our way cranking out his first leg.

Keith shows up and we talk a few minutes and he is back on the road. The hills have already been nasty, but there are a lot more to come. Keith had some mechanical problems (a flat tire) along the route and was helped by one of the race officials. He also went through all of his water and had to refill just to make it the first twenty miles.

We take off for Hermann where I would begin my first leg. It is now a waiting game. I drink and eat to top off my fuel tank and sit in the shade. Dang it's hot! I drink some more. Keith scales the last of the hills into Hermann. Keith checks in and I take off for my 38.6 mile leg into Fulton.

How lucky can I be? The first 10 miles are FLAT as I cross the bridge out of Hermann and follow Highway 94 along the river. Highway 94 has something in common with the weather. It's also 94 degrees outside, in the shade! I get my speed up to around 20

mph. I started out with a full camelback, but at the first opportunity gave it back to my support crew. It was just too heavy and now that the support crew can leap frog around me, I will never be riding without water close by.

After taking a hand off of a full bottle from my support crew, I hear a loud ping! I broke a spoke. I pull over and wave to the crew and tell them I need a replacement wheel. A simple change of a wheel that would take around one minute to accomplish turned into a five minute break. We couldn't get the wheel to mount in the dropouts. Tom ran back and pulled his rear wheel off and mounted it on my bike. It turned out I had one of the springs backwards.

I don't know about the other van, but we had fun. I was carrying two bottles. One bottle contained Gatorade and the other bottle contained plain ice water. During one of the water bottle handoffs we began the "water bottle" fights, spraying each other. This actually felt great since it was so hot. I would carry two bottles on my bike. Each bottle was a different color. One would contain water, the other would contain our favorite sports drink. The van had pulled over along the side of the road and Anna was standing there with a full water bottle. I pulled out my water bottle and it looked like I was going to toss it down so I could take a fresh one from Anna. I opened the top of the bottle and sprayed her as I rode by. She never saw it coming, what a rookie. The crew got me back good. It cooled me off for a few miles and provided plenty of laughs.

Oh yes, then there are the farm dogs. I love dogs, I have a dog, but for some reason, dogs like to chase people on bicycles. They like to bark, they like to run into the road, they are a pain. I wished I had my pepper spray, but forgot to carry it on this section. I had it the rest of the ride, but didn't need it. Murphy's Law #699: "You only need to mace a dog when you aren't carrying mace." I would like to conduct a government sponsored million dollar study as to why dogs chase cyclists.

With about five miles left on my first section, the crew gave me one last water bottle then drove ahead to get Tom ready to ride. That is when I hit a BIG hill. I was climbing so slow, I fell over due to lack of momentum. I ended up walking the rest of the hill. Shortly after I got back on my bike I saw one rider sitting along the road under a tree. He was waiting for his support crew to show up. He didn't look too good.

Funny thing... after the next hill was a billboard saying "Jesus has a plan for your life." I think His plan was for us to climb hills on one of the hottest days of the year.

I finally show up in Fulton. Tom takes off down the road as I check in. Tom's first leg was about 40 miles. Within a few miles of his start in Fulton is where we crossed the path of the "accident". Tom originally thought this might be a "sobriety checkpoint", but after seeing Mike Brady's glasses, helmet, shoe, etc, we knew what happened. What we didn't know for several hours is how bad the accident was. News slowly followed through the checkpoints that Mike had died from a pickup truck running him down.

When we met up with Keith, Randy and crew we met to discuss what to do. We were all shaken and more than a little bit freaked out. We decided to break the rules about using the PSV to "pace" the rider. We met up with a race official and told them what we were going to do. We told them they could disqualify (DQ) us if they wanted to but rider safety was paramount. They said to do what we had to do to protect the rider. The rest of the ride our PSV's were rarely more than 100 feet from the rider.

News made it forward that a rider was taken to the hospital for heat exhaustion and dehydration. While sitting in the hospital getting an IV he was asking a race official about getting back on his bike and finishing the race. His wife, there by his side, put an end to that discussion. He was done.

After Tom and I finished our first legs we drove 130 miles ahead to Kansas City (Grain Valley). Each of us had now ridden one leg and covered around 160 miles. Our plan was to have Randy and Keith pull double shifts on the bike and ride into Grain Valley. On the way back, Tom and I would pull double shifts allowing Keith and Randy an opportunity to get some sleep.

Tom and I, along with our crew, Brent and Rob ate dinner, checked into a hotel (thank you Brent!), showered, and tried to get a few hours of sleep before we would have to begin riding back to St. Louis.

I don't think anyone slept very well, but at least we rested before checking in at the Grain Valley Middle School checkpoint and waiting for Keith and Randy and their support crew.

Waiting is the hard part of the ride. Missouri is so hilly, cellular phone service is sporadic at best and impossible most of the time. We were unable to reach the other van to check their status, so we just had to wait.

Keith and Randy both had mechanical difficulties with their Schwinn MOD-4 lights. A screw vibrated loose causing it to fall apart. They also got lost. Poor Keith had to ride some extra miles on the hills trying to find the correct roads. The turns on the roads were marked, but in the dark it was VERY difficult to see and easy to pass up. It didn't help that construction crews had also marked the roads in the same area, so it was confusing.

Sunday September 03 4:00 AM: Randy arrives in Grain Valley and I take off and begin the return portion. We take the warning about the difficulty in seeing the road markings to heart and my crew keeps me on course.

The next 120-130 miles are up to Tom and me as Keith, Randy and their crew check into a hotel and get some rest. We saw lightning off to the east and a cool front was beginning to move through. The temperatures dropped into the lower 70's and for the first time and it feels GOOD. We run into a few spot showers and, thank God, a tail wind for the next six hours or so as we head east.

Late Sunday afternoon after several more rider switches I got the same leg from Fulton to Hermann. I was looking forward to this since it would give me 10 miles of flats after all the hills. Unfortunately I was spent, tired and riding pretty slow. I told Tom he could have the flats back into Hermann because he could do them a lot faster. I picked a nasty uphill on which to change riders so Tom had to climb a few hills for a couple of miles BEFORE reaching the flats. Thanks for jumping in there Tom.

I fell asleep in the van and didn't wake up until we had reached Hermann. Tom and I were both exhausted. Our crew, and the volunteers at the Hermann checkpoint fed us. We both lay down for almost an hour before getting up. It was again into the mid 90's and we had both bonked.

Tom and I both talk. Tom said he has about ten percent left. I estimate my ability at three percent. It was going to be a long 47 miles back to Union where Randy would pull the final leg back into Chesterfield.

Tom got on his bike and starts back. I got in the van and followed along with the crew. Immediately Tom made a left hand turn up State Route H and begins the first hill on the way back. In the first mile the road climbed over 400 feet. It took Tom a half hour to get up the hill, but he made it. The next mile or so is downhill and he covers it around 40 mph or so. We were glad to see he could still make the turns and not end up going straight off into the trees or corn fields. Then came the next hill and the next. Around mile seven or eight I got on my bike and began riding. After all Tom switched with me on the hills and fair is fair.

I prayed "God, I have only three percent left, I need another 97 percent to finish this." Believe me, God answers prayer. I rode like I was fresh all the way back into Union.

About eight miles out from Union, Keith and David were driving the route backwards to find out where we were. We held a brief meeting to discuss what we were going to do. Everyone was tired, exhausted, spent, sore and just plain tuckered. We talked about several options. BAM allows a total of 63 hours to complete the ride. We discussed quitting for about two seconds. Tom and I were adamant that no matter what we would finish the race even if we had to walk or crawl across the finish line. It was only one option. We discussed getting some sleep and starting the final leg in the morning. We discussed just pushing through and getting it over with. I voted for getting it over with or starting fresh in the morning.

I rode the last eight miles into Union and checked in around 11:30 PM. We still had the last 40 miles to go. Randy was getting dressed and ready to ride. Keith and Randy decided to push through and get the race over with.

I went into the bathroom, dumped a bunch of water over me to "clean me up" then changed out of my cycling clothes and jumped in our support van and headed back to Chesterfield to await Randy's arrival. I'm not sure how Rob Sonnevillie managed it, but he stayed awake the whole time and did all the driving in our van.

To be honest I don't remember much after that. Tom and I were so worn out we crashed in one of the hotel's conference rooms on the floor. Brent, Anna and Rob drove home. According to the records, Randy arrived back in Chesterfield at 2:34 AM. We finished the 590 miles in 44 hours 4 minutes. This put us in 3<sup>rd</sup> place for the team division and 6<sup>th</sup> overall. With the breaks, for meetings, checkpoint procedures and mechanical breakdowns, unscheduled rest stops and getting lost in the dark we averaged around 13.5 mph for the entire route. According to the results almost half the people who started the race did not finish. The hills, heat and humidity took their toll.

At the hotel I vaguely remember someone saying "we're back" but that was about it. Tom and I got up around 5:30 AM and drove home.

My personal ride statistics were 167 miles in 11 hours 9 minutes which is an average of 14.97 miles per hour.

Was it worth the pain, suffering through the heat and hills, and pushing to finish? A resounding YES. I could not bear having to tell anyone we quit. I couldn't do it. We are already talking about what we could do better for next year. We felt we could knock off at least four hours just by streamlining our breaks and not getting lost.

A final note. There is no way I could have done any of this without the support of my wife Rose Ann who knew how much I wanted to train for this event.

I could not have done it without the support of my friends who sacrificed a weekend of sleep and air conditioning. They endured driving at 15 -17 mph on the flats (both of them), 40 mph downhill and 4 mph uphill and endured nasty Missouri heat and humidity. Your encouragement got me up a lot of those hills. How could I quit with you clapping and whooping it up. That million candlepower

spotlight you used to light my way allowed me to go a lot faster on the down hills in the middle of the night and I felt safe knowing you were there right behind me.

I could not have done this without our sponsors. This was an expensive undertaking. South County Cyclery, Schwinn, Pepsi and Gus' Pretzels made it possible.

Finally, the prayers for our safety were greatly appreciated. I am very thankful God chose to keep us safe from harm and serious injury. I pray and ask you to pray for Michael Brady's family as they lay his body to rest this week.