

Ride Report for June 30, 2001

Ever since publishing my question about boredom on the ultra-cycling web group, I've had more people to ride with. This week's ride was posted by Zubin Chandran a member of the Ultra Marathon Cycling Association (UMCA). The route would be a 103.5 mile loop beginning at the metro link station by Belleville Area College.

Anna Kleinsorge and I planned on car pooling over to the ride start. I told her she needed to be at my house by 6:00 AM and I would be pulling out of my driveway by 6:05 with her or without her. Anna showed up about 5 minutes early and was all ready to go. This would be Anna's second ride of over 100 miles. Her first was back in March of this year when she rode the Edwardsville 200 kilometer (125 miles) brevet. That is a story she should tell. It would involve cold weather, rain and headwinds and a few extra miles.

This would be my third century ride of this year, and my last long ride before the July 14th Ride Across Indiana (165 miles). My goal was to have fun, finish strong and build confidence.

As this ride was advertised as "ride at your own pace", everyone could pretty much ride as they pleased. There was no pressure to ride together or maintain a pace that was either too fast or too slow. The advantage is that you can set a pace that is comfortable for you, stop when you want for as long as you want. The downside of this is that you can get dropped by faster riders and end up riding alone. I really don't like riding alone, so I was determined to hang in on whatever the pace was for as long as I could.

A total of six riders showed up in time to receive a map, get briefing instructions which really was a warning about "Shadow" the dog from a few weeks ago that bit another rider, and a review of where the food was. The posted departure time for the ride was 7:00 AM. We rolled out of the parking lot pretty close to the top of the hour. Zubin decided to wait ten or fifteen minutes to see if anyone showed up late before heading out on his bike. The morning was perfect with temperatures in the upper sixties with a light wind out of the south.

As we depart we begin checking out our fellow riders and start the introductions. I met Kevin, who was riding an older Cannondale road bike, Dave Rose riding his brand new Fuji Aloha Triathlon bike, and Roland riding an older Trek road bike. Anna was riding her new LeMond Zurich road bike and I was riding my Litespeed Classic. Kevin, Dave and Roland all ride with the cycling club on Scott Air Force Base and were wearing their Air Force cycling jerseys.

Unfortunately out in "God's Country" someone must decide it's time to gravel perfectly good roads. After a wonderful beginning, we ran into around five miles of fresh gravel as we traveled north from Summerfield toward St. Jacob. The gravel was loose, but was beginning to pack down. It made for a very bumpy and noisy ride.

After the first 25 miles the five of us were still together. Dave and Kevin would ride up the road a few hundred yards then slowly come back to the group. In St. Jacob it was time for the first pit stop. Roland wanted to top off his supply of water and grab a Snickers. Dave and Anna also went into the gas station and bought something. Kevin and I had enough supplies for the moment so we waited outside by the bikes. Kevin decided that he really wanted to keep riding so he took off with map in hand. In less than ten minutes the remaining four of us were heading north again.

After reaching the northern most portion of our route, we turned east toward Alhambra on Route 140. The wind had been out of the south and very mild so far and we had plenty of energy. Again, Dave went out front and was setting a pretty high pace of around 20-23 mph on this nice section of blacktop. Anna, Roland and I were close behind enjoying drafting as much as possible. On the short climb into Alhambra, Roland dropped off the back of the group as we continued east.

Dave asked Anna what her goals for this ride were. Anna decided she would like to break six hours for the first 100 miles. That is a pretty ambitious goal for only your second century, but then again, Anna is 18 and youth is on her side. Well that became our goal... a sub six hour century. We would have to maintain at least 16.6 mph for the whole ride. We only count actual ride time and not the breaks along the way. We looked at our computers and we were already averaging 17.3, and had wiggle room, and decided it was a realistic goal. The three of us decided to trade off in a pace line to keep the pace up. We also knew that once we turned south at Old Ripley, around the 51 mile mark, the wind would be in our face for the next 30 miles. There was one stretch of road we were cruising at 27 mph on the flats. I knew I couldn't keep that pace too long or I would not make it back, except in the back of some farmer's truck.

As we turned south towards Pocahontas on Pokey Rd, the winds indeed was blowing in our face and gone was the nice flat smooth blacktop. In Pocahontas we stopped for ten to fifteen minutes at the Mobile gas station to purchase some food and hoped that Roland would catch us. While Dave and I were inside, Anna saw Roland ride by, but he either didn't see us or didn't want to stop. We all felt confident that we would catch up to Roland in the next few miles.

Back on the bike we continued south towards Breese and my favorite stop at the local Burger King. I know fast food doesn't make great cycling food, but the manager, Mary Ping and the staff have always been friendly and treated me, and the other riders with me very well. It is the one stop on the ride I look forward to. Sure enough we pull in just before noon and the first thing I hear as we

come through the door is "You're late" from one of the staff. You know... it just puts a smile on your face. Technically I was late because this stop is usually at around mile 35 or so, but today it was mile 70. I ordered French Toast sticks and a lemonade. Mary came over and talked with us for a few minutes. Her store recently was recognized as one of the top 50 or so stores out of over 3000. I can definitely see why! If they treat smelly cyclists this good, they probably treat everyone good.

We refilled our camelbacks and bottles, reapplied sunscreen and got back on the road. Our pace was still holding at around 17 mph and we only had 33 miles left to go and we would be turning west shortly and hopefully out of the wind. We were still on track for a sub six hour ride.

At about the 80 mile mark we made our last turn south near Albers and Dave recognized the road we were on. He said this is one of the roads on which he normally trains. He began picking up his pace. Anna and I are trying to keep up, but Dave is going around 20 mph into the wind. I ride up along side and tell him, he is more than welcome to keep riding at this pace, but Anna and I would have to drop off the back. He told me "he would rather enjoy the company and conversation than ride alone, ...oh and thanks for the compliment about the fast pace!"

It's about this point in a ride that nothing is comfortable. It's getting hot, you've been pedaling hard for five hours, the saddle isn't comfortable anymore, your legs are tired, your back hurts, the water you have been drinking isn't nice and cold anymore and ... well my stomach was starting to complain. I had been drinking water and eating Powergel to keep the fuel coming in, but it wasn't sitting well. Our pace was falling. Each little hill was slow torture and my legs were complaining about the added strain. Conversation had died. As Dave put it, we each had entered our own personal hell and we each had to ride through it.

At around the 90 mile mark I asked if anyone would mind pulling over for a rest. The three of us pulled off to the side. Almost immediately a car slows down and asks if we are alright. We were fine.. really... just resting is the response we gave. The car drove on. That was nice.

Anna's shoulders were tired and sore. I stood holding Anna's bike while Dave gave her a shoulder rub. I finally had to lay both Anna's bike, my bike and myself down. I was getting dizzy and sick to my stomach. I think we sat for 20 minutes or so, drinking, and resting while Dave and Anna watched the color return to my face. I think I was overheated and exhausted.

Decision time. Less than ten miles remained for the 100 miles and 13 miles remained in the ride. Our pace was still pretty close to 17 mph and we could finish in under six hours of riding. Do we go for it? Silly question, of course we go for it. We remount our bikes and continue west back toward Belleville.

A little later Anna looks at her computer and sees that she had passed the 96 mile mark and wanted to push as hard as she could for the next few miles and see how well she could do on time. Anna and Dave take off and I decide to ride my own pace at that point. I pick my pace up to 18 but Dave and Anna are increasing their gap.

Highway 161 runs along the south border of Scott Air Force Base. The holiday air show was going on. Fighter jets buzzed through the air with crowds parked along the road watching. Our route led us west along Highway 161 and we passed by all the parked cars and people watching the show. I felt like the spectators were all there to cheer me on. I got into my aerobars and picked the pace up as fast as I could. I heard one kid telling his parents..... "look at the bicycle" The jets were probably more interesting, and definitely traveling faster than me, but I rode by at around 19-20 mph giving it all I had.

Just up the road I saw Anna and Dave pulled over. I looked at my computer and knew that they had reached the 100 mile mark. I kept spinning my legs and passed them by as my computer only read 99.98. I had to reach 100 miles on my computer. So 100 feet later I pull over and look down for the results. I covered the first 100 miles in 5 hours 52 minutes 45 seconds. That equates to 17.009 mph average. Anna had managed to finish her 100 miles in 5:51:19 for an average speed of 17.079 mph.

After the 'high fives', Dave, Anna and I didn't stand around too long, we still had another three and a half miles to get back to the metro link station and our cars. Dave pulled out in front and Anna and I were just spinning the pedals. I would like to say we were using the final miles to recover, cool down, stretch out and get the lactic acid out of our legs but the truth is we, or at least I was toast. Dave continued to pull away.

The college campus was up the road on the left and the first buildings came into view. I told Anna, if she had anything left, now was the time to use it. She takes off and sprints in the final half mile. I just keep spinning, slowly.

Today's ride was a personal best for me. Previously my fastest century was 6:09 so I was able to knock off a little more than sixteen minutes of riding time from my fastest century and around 33 minutes off my ride time from just a few weeks ago. It may not sound like much, but it felt really good to finish this strong. I have better confidence in my fitness level and my ability to ride long rides. I know I can push my body a little harder than I thought for a little longer than I thought.

I spoke with Zubin after the ride. No one else showed up so he headed out of the start around 7:20 and rode solo most the ride. He did manage to keep a 16 mph pace all the way to Pocahontas with only 5 minutes off bike time. He ended up catching Roland

around Breese and rode most of the last 33 miles together.

At the finish of the ride the temperatures had climbed into the upper eighties and the wind had pick up a little and continued out of the south. Rain began shortly after we finished.

It was time for a shower and dinner!