

Ride Across Indiana (RAIN) Ride Report

July 14, 2001

If you were to get in your car, drive along Interstate 70 from the Illinois – Indiana state line near Terre Haute, and drive east into the rising sun you would reach the Ohio state line near Richmond in about two and a half hours and would add around 160 miles on your car's odometer. I've driven my car along this road many times.

Parallel to I-70 is a much older road, U.S. Highway 40 that connects the small towns of central Indiana. If you had driven your car on this road Saturday July 14th, you would have shared it with 660 bicyclists and almost as many support vehicles.

This year's Ride Across Indiana was the 15th annual bicycle ride that crosses the state, west to east in a single day. To be an official finisher, each rider would have to cover the 162 miles in 14 hours or less under their own power.

Brent Lucas, who had crewed for me last year for the Bicycle Across Missouri race (BAM), agreed to crew for me for this event. A friend, Anna Kleinsorge also decided to test her endurance and join me for the ride as well.

Our day began at 4:30 AM with a wake up call from the front desk. I drank a can of Ensure, ate a banana and jumped in the shower while Brent made final inspections of our equipment, filled my camelback with ice and water, and bottles with a mixture of Sustained Energy and Hammer Gel. Then before dressing I pinned my fanny flag on my jersey which displayed my rider number, 300.

Not being a morning person, I called Anna's room to make sure she was up. She was already to go. After loading our bikes on the car, we drove west to the state line along with a caravan of other cars. We had been warned that we would have to park along highway 40 and ride to the start line. Sure enough, we pulled in behind the car in front of us, unloaded our bicycles, donned our helmets, took pictures and headed off to the start line a half a mile or so up the road.

The weather folks had forecasted the morning temperatures to be 59-60 degrees. Amazingly, they were right on. The winds were coming out of the north, northeast so gently, the trees barely stirred. The forecast for the day would be a high of around 80 with the winds continuing out of the north, northeast at around seven to ten miles per hour. What a lovely day for a cross state bicycle ride.

As we began to ride, the morning air immediately chilled Anna and me, but we knew we would warm up as the sun rose ahead of us. We also noticed that crew and family members were already walking back towards their cars. The riders had already begun their journey. This was a bit anticlimactic as we wanted to see what nearly seven hundred riders all lined up looked like, but this proved safer as there would be much less chance of a mass crash.

The early miles were for warming up the body, convincing ourselves we would finish strong and deciding what we would eat for dinner. I can judge each ride by what food sounds good as we near the end. I would use this technique during the ride to measure how I felt. My all time favorite, a bratwurst with sauerkraut and mustard sounded great as did fried rice. The other riders around Anna and me were shaking their heads as we discussed food so early in the morning.

The early miles are also the hardest to control. It's early in the ride and you're feeling good so you want to keep up with the riders who are passing you. It's important to keep in mind that it's 162 miles across the state. If you push too fast early on, you'll pay for your error later in the ride. Anna and I kept our pace to around 16 to 17 mph. I think this was even harder for Anna, she is just 18 years old, and she is a fast cyclist.

A rider on a recumbent, one of those Barco-loungers with wheels was keeping pace with us for the first 30 miles or so. We began talking with our new companion, Mark Oliver who had a ham radio hooked up to his bike so he could communicate with his support team. Very handy! We enjoyed our conversation with Mark and would see him off and on throughout the first 100 miles, then again after the end of the ride. There not being a lot of these recumbents around, it was fun trying to spot him up the road. We just looked for an antenna sticking up from behind his seat.

Being on a recumbent, you're not all hunched over straining your neck, the saddle is more comfortable and the hands, and rear don't get near as numb! The down side is that in the morning and afternoon, the sun hits you squarely in the eyes. I would look in my rearview mirror to see Mark riding with one hand on his handlebar and the other shading his eyes from the rising sun.

Around the 32-mile mark we began climbing an incline and could see flashing lights from police and ambulance. My heart sank thinking about BAM last year. Slowly a line of cyclists passed the ambulance. I couldn't see anyone lying on the road; there was no broken bike or helmet so I wasn't sure what had happened. Information would make it up the road that a rider in a pace line hit a pothole and caused a crash of five riders, one of which broke his arm and a total of three were injured. Thank God, there was not a car involved!

We planned on meeting Brent at the first rest stop near Putnamville at the 40-mile mark. Thinking ahead I called Brent's cell phone and told him we were a few miles away. He was waiting for us with cold drinks, and advised that the gas station on the corner had bathrooms. I was impressed with the rest stop. It was well marked and at a major intersection so it was hard to miss. The rest stop also had plenty of bananas, cookies, water and drink mixes. I stopped for twenty minutes, long enough to eat a peach, refill my bottles, make a pit stop, relube and stretch out a little.

For the next 25 miles, Brent would be able to leap frog us along the route. I liked this, as I didn't have to carry extra weight like a camelback full of 72 ounces of water. I could just have one water bottle and one bottle of Sustained Energy. Brent would drive by every ten minutes or so and I could just hold up an empty bottle and get a nice cold refill in a matter of minutes.

The next rest stop was at Plainfield's city park, the 65-mile mark around 10:30 AM. Again, it was well staffed and well stocked. Brent flagged us down and we pulled over for refills. Checking my computer, we were still maintaining an average speed of 16.4 mph, a bit higher than my target, but my heart rate monitor wasn't complaining.

From this point until the lunch stop at the 100 mile mark we would have to support ourselves as the riders looped to the south around Indianapolis. Brent refilled my camelback with ice-cold water and gave me another bottle of Sustained Energy.

Twenty-three minutes later Anna and I pulled out of Plainfield and headed south along the route. As it turned out the route was so well marked, I didn't have to look at the map once. We looped south of Indianapolis until we turned north again to our lunch stop at Paul Ruster Park on the east side of town. We arrived just around 1:00 PM. We had covered the first 100 miles in 6 hours 5 minutes for an average (on bike speed of 16.4 mph) with 55 minutes of off bike time. We lost around 12 minutes to stop lights, but it did allow my heart rate to recover a bit from time to time.

It was time for solid food and rest. The rest stop here was even better. They had premade peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, ham, turkey, salad, fruit, and plenty of Gatorade. I grabbed one PB&J and one banana. After sitting in the shade and eating we wiped off with a cold wet towel, reapplied sunscreen, and got ready to remount our bikes.

Brent met John Koehler a cyclist from Ohio on a Colnago road bike. I've seen pictures of Colnago bikes, but this was the first I had seen up close. It was definitely a work of art. The Italian craftsmanship was apparent in the hand painted steel frame. Anyway, John decided his backside needed a break and wanted a lift to the next rest stop. We were happy to oblige. As it turned out, he knew Jeff Weible, a St. Louis ultra-cyclist who I've ridden with this year. It didn't dawn on me until later that not everyone who crosses the finish line in Richmond rides the entire way. Like this guy, some take a ride up the road then get back on their bikes and finish. It bothered me a bit, but then I knew that I would ride the entire way.

After we remounted our bikes in Indianapolis, we again began looping around heading east again toward Greenville where we would meet Brent at the 119-mile mark along highway 40. I dumped the camelback again in favor of two water bottles. Brent would be able to leap frog Anna and I through to the end of the ride.

We arrived at the final official rest stop at the fire station in Dunreith, mile 127 around 4:00 PM as Mark was pulling out. The highlight of this rest stop was a lady with a hose who would spray the riders down. It wasn't really hot, only around 80 degrees or so, but the cold water sure felt refreshing. We rested for about a half hour before remounting our bikes for the final 35 miles. With luck, we would be done in about two hours.

Anna and I talked about turning this ride into a double century, (two hundred miles). After all, we had already invested hard work in the ride and would only have another 38 miles to ride to reach the 200-mile mark. The problem came as I did the math. We wouldn't reach the finish line in Richmond until at least 6:30 PM and my pace was beginning to drop. It would be well after dark before we would finish a 200 miler and we didn't have lighting for such an endeavor, besides my rear end was beginning to complain. Oh well, not this time anyway.

Highway 40 is a great road. It doesn't have any real hills. I would call them flat inclines, long up hills that aren't steep; they just tax your body, especially after 150 miles or so. One such incline had my heart rate up to 160 so I was definitely in the lower end of being anaerobic. At the top of the hill a construction zone had the road narrowed down to a single lane. I decided to take a break. As Brent was right behind us, he pulled over, came up to Anna and me, and said he would run interference while we were in the construction zone. No sense getting hit by a car this close to the finish.

As I was resting on the side of the road, we all stopped and began laughing. I'm not sure what the owners of the house did for a living, but I knew how they entertained themselves. The smell of pot was overwhelming even with the house at least 100 feet off the road.

Once rested, the heart rate back down and in a better mood, wonder why, we got back on the bikes, continued through the construction zone, and further down the road.

Once we reached the east side of Centerville, we only had about five miles left. I told Anna that if she wanted to sprint in the last

miles to feel free. She was already pulling out front, as she said, "Are you sure?" I told her I would see her at the finish. Off she went. She picked her speed up and was gone. I was hoping that the maps were still right and we only had a few miles left. I decided to pick my pace up and give it all I had until the finish.

As we entered into Richmond, traffic had definitely picked up. Brent stayed behind me and several other riders, which provided nice interference from the other cars along this four-lane road. Brent pulled along side to tell me that the finish at Earlham College was just up the road. I'm glad he said something, as I wasn't paying any attention, I was in a zone where all I was doing was pedaling. I made the final right turn and pulled up to the finish. The official asked for my rider number. I told her it was number 300. She recorded my number and time. I crossed the finish line with a total elapsed time of 12 hours 35 minutes and was the 499th rider to cross so far. Anna crossed the finish three minutes ahead of me in 493rd place. 710 riders representing 15 states plus the United Kingdom had registered for the ride, 94 people did not finish (or cross the finish in the allotted time), and 34 riders who registered, did not start. 573 riders did finish.

Remember back to the early miles when Anna and I were talking about food? We talked about food the entire way across the state. While fried rice and a bratwurst still sounded good, the sauerkraut didn't. After taking a long hot shower, we found a Pizza Hut and a Baskin Robins Ice Cream next to the hotel. I polished off two personal pan pizzas (one supreme, one cheese), a scoop of butter pecan ice cream and a 32-ounce lemonade. Life was good.

I'm very happy with the results. I rode faster than I had planned but kept an eye on the heart rate monitor, which stayed around the 140 mark for most of the ride. I stayed fed, hydrated and kept a good attitude. The Sustained Energy worked very well. However, I must admit that like water, it goes down best when it's nice and cold. I ate three banana's, one PB&J, drank two can's of Ensure Plus, six bottles of Sustained Energy mixed with Hammer Gel and around one and a half gallons of water. According to the calorie calculator, I burned around 9,600 calories. My time of 10:05:20 gave me a riding average speed of 16.066 mph with a total off bike time of 2:29:40. My randoneuring / elapsed average speed was 12.874 mph.

The Mississippi Valley 24 Hour Challenge is my last scheduled event for the year. The ride will begin at 6:00 AM, Saturday August 11th. How far can I ride in 24 hours? I don't know. Can I stay awake for 24 hours? I don't know. I do know I'm doing it for fun so I may get some sleep. Sounds like fun doesn't it?