

Greetings and Happy February to my family.

This is my first ride report of the year. I wanted to share this one with you because it shows just how "unique" your brother (and uncle) is. Please do not use any of this information against me in my upcoming sanity hearing.

I've already logged around 375 miles since January 1st, and all but 15 of those miles have been outdoors. Since the first of the year I've ridden in everything from 15 degrees to 65 degrees. I've had calm days and days where the wind practically blew me off the road. Last night was my "craziest" ride so far this year. Last night after work I was to meet my friend Jeff at Babler State Park, in west St. Louis County. Babler is where I am doing my hill training this year. There are two loops in the park. The first loop is just over four miles long and has a little over 600 feet of climbing, and another 600 feet of descending. The second loop is also around four miles but has around 800 feet of climbing and descending.

To picture 600 feet, visualize the St. Louis Arch. It's 600 feet tall. I have to climb it every four miles on the short loop, and more on the second loop. I can coast down the hills at 45 miles per hour and climb the other side at around five miles per hour with my heart rate pounding at 185 beats per minute. Got the picture?

Last night I was to meet Jeff at the park around 4:15 PM. Jeff told me he may be late and to go ahead and start my first lap. He would ride the course backwards and meet me. I started off with light snow flurries falling and temperatures in the mid 30's. Around the one-mile mark in the ride I started down the first big hill (40 mph) when the light flurries were replaced by sleet driven by 20 mph winds. Those little ice pellets felt like needles sting my face. I had to slow the bike down as the road was being covered with white ice pellets. I met Jeff just before the first climb and my rear tire was slipping a little.

I was thinking... "I guess we could finish this loop, and head home." Then it hit me... "This is great training!" Jeff isn't much better, he was saying "You're going to look back on this in August when the black top is melting and wish it was like this."

By the time we finished the first loop, I had a layer of white covering my helmet, jacket and gloves. The ice stopped, but it was still lightly snowing. We took off on the second loop. I had to take the first downhill a little slower as I didn't want to leave any DNA samples on the road.

Jeff and I finished our third loop and were thinking about a fourth loop when we were passed by ten to twelve park rangers in SUV's. So we decided to turn around and see where they were going. We lost sight of them for a few moments, then a few more park rangers passed us and we saw a side road we hadn't explored yet.

At the top of the road was one of those signs with a truck pointing down a steep hill, so I'm thinking "Oh, joy, we are going to take this thing to the bottom, then I'm going to have to climb back up." Yup, that's what we did; we coasted down the hill and found the rangers at a building in the valley below. Curiosity satiated we turned and started back up the hill.

Jill, you've got to try these hills. You asked me once if the training you are getting in the spinning classes is doing you any good. My answer is YES. On these hills you will be in and out of the saddle climbing. On the rolling sections, you will be spinning your pedals trying to get over the tops of the smaller hills without losing too much speed. On the descents you will have to trust your bike and hang on for dear life. Fast downhills are better than any roller coaster I've been on. The adrenaline really flows when you hit 50 mph! Do you really need all those gears on the bike? NO, you only need the little ones that let you climb the hills, you can coast down the other side while your heart rate comes back down. Then again, you can use those BIG gears for racing down those hills at 55 mph!

Love to all.