

# 300 Kilometer Brevet

**May 11, 2001**

Not all rides begin or end the way you hope. I had been watching the forecasts most of the preceding week in an attempt to determine the weather for this year's 300 kilometer (193 mile) brevet.

Admittedly, I'm more of a fair weather rider. I much prefer temperatures between 75 and 90 degrees, gentle breezes, clear skies and the feeling of the sun warming me as I ride. This was not to be the case this weekend. St. Louis had been experiencing a long period of "unstable" weather and the professional weather guessers were forecasting morning temperatures in the mid 50's and highs in the low 70's with more rain, thunderstorms and strong winds from the south-southeast most of the day.

I arose around 4:00 AM, showered, ate a light breakfast and filled my two insulated water bottles. After kissing my wife Rose Ann good bye, I headed out the door and began my drive to Edwardsville. While heading north along Interstate 255, I could see lightning flashes ahead of me. This is never a good sign. Having already agreed with Rose Ann that I would either not ride, or at least delay starting my ride if there was lightning, I figured I would be starting late.

I arrived at the commuter parking lot behind the Edwardsville courthouse to find another half dozen or so riders already preparing for the long day in the saddle. I unloaded my bicycle, and got everything in order.

Aaron Rumble, the ride coordinator arrived and we began the registration process. We filled out the appropriate paperwork, provided an emergency contact telephone number, paid our four dollars and received our brevet card and ride map. The rain finally caught up with the thunder and lightning. Everyone retreated to their vehicles to wait the storm out. About 6:20 AM the lightning stopped, and the downpour from a few minutes earlier had changed to a light rain. We emerged from our vehicles and gathered around Aaron's car to review the route. Several weeks of rain had caused the Kaskaskia River to overflow it's banks and bury Airport Road beneath several feet of water. Our ride had to be detoured along a busier, but higher road between Albers and New Baden.

Unlike the 200 kilometer brevet of last month, only one or two riders immediately set off at 6:30 AM. The rest of us lingered watching the skies. Riders started out by the ones and twos. After zipping my rain jacket, I walked over to John Prindable's car to find John working on a flat tire. He would be a few more minutes. John called to another rider, Rich Frost and told me to head out with him as he was going to be a little while.

While the rain had passed, we could feel the winds blowing as Rich and I headed out along with two other riders. I was prepared for the worst, or at least I packed my bicycle that way. I had packed three spare tubes, a spare folding tire, patch kit, tire pump, a supply of powered Sustained Energy drink mix, Hammer Gel and hourly doses of supplements to keep my electrolytes at the proper levels.

Just a few miles into the ride, the two other riders, had pulled off the road to deal with an equipment issue. Rich and I continued down the road. We made our left hand turn in Marine at the ten mile mark and I could see the two riders behind us by just a few hundred yards. We turned northeast onto Pocahontas Rd and could no longer see the riders behind us, and I couldn't see anyone else in front of us. If it wasn't for Rich, it would have been a lonely ride from the start.

The winds were coming out of the south-southeast hard enough to kick our bicycles around. I looked over my handlebars at my front wheel and could only see the left hand side of the wheel. The wind had us leaning into the wind. If the wind speed held constant at 15 mph, it wouldn't have been too bad, but the wind would gust to around 30 mph, then calm down to 10-15 mph again, then gust again. The only consistent part was the direction of the wind. It was a battle just to hold a straight line.

We covered the first 25 miles to Pocahontas in a little under two hours and turned south. The next 80 miles to Pinckneyville were going to be nothing but headwind, and we were managing around 13.5 miles per hour. At this rate it was going to be a very long day. Rich and I agreed that we would continue to ride at this pace and keep our off bike time to the bare minimum. Even so, it was apparent that we would not finish before sunset. We were estimating a finish time around 10:00 PM or later.

We arrived at the first checkpoint in Breese around 9:40 AM. I used the bathroom, purchased a bottle of water and had my brevet card signed by the quickie mart employee. After mixing two scoops of Sustained Energy powder and water into each bottle, I shed my rain pants and in approximately ten minutes we were back on our bicycles.

After another three mile stretch of heading into the wind, we turned west on Wesclin Road and had our first break from the wind. A cross tail wind was better than a headwind, so our speed was finally able to climb up above 14 to 15 miles per hour. At least for a few miles.

Turning south on Albers Road we again faced the wind before taking the detour along Route 161 west to New Baden avoiding the

flooded Airport road. This four mile section is heavily traveled by cars, trucks and semis moving along at over 60 miles per hour. Several of the vehicles didn't leave us much room as they passed. It didn't help that Route 161's shoulder is a foot wide patch of loose gravel, broken glass, and miscellaneous debris dropping off into the flooded farm fields.

Reaching New Baden we turned southeast for a 13 mile run into the wind heading to Okawville. Route 160 merges with Route 177 and crosses the Kaskaskia River about half way between these two towns. The river which is normally less than 100 yards across was now almost two miles across. Several people have built homes raised on stilts along this section of road. The homes and trailers look silly during the dry times being ten to twelve feet off the ground, but with the flooding, the homes were only a foot or two above the rising water. If we get much more rain, their homes will be ruined, but by the looks of the trailers and homes, it would only be a loss to the families living in them, I have a hard time thinking these structures have actual monetary value.

Rich and I reached Okawville (mile 68) at 11:45 AM and had our brevet cards signed. Two other riders were just finishing their lunch and preparing to head out. Rich and I purchased lunch and sat down for a break. We were hoping the riders behind us would catch up with us here before we headed out. The 32 mile ride to Pinckneyville was a combination of riding southeast and south, so more headwinds and several hours of hard work awaited.

Keeping the breaks short and maintaining our current average speed would result in a finish time around 11:00 PM and another eleven hours or so in the saddle didn't sound like all that much fun. I decided Okawville was a good place to turn around and head back to Edwardsville.

After 30 minutes, no other riders showed up so Rich headed south. A few minutes later I turned my bicycle the opposite direction and headed towards New Baden. Backtracking along the route I figured I would pass the remaining riders before I reached New Baden, but to my surprise, I didn't see any riders.

I arrived back in Edwardsville at 3:45 PM. Checking in at the police station, the final checkpoint of this ride, I noticed that three other riders had already checked in. The first rider back followed the 200 kilometer route back to Edwardsville and the other two riders cut back upon reaching New Baden giving them around 100 miles each.

It's not the way I would prefer to finish, but cycling is supposed to be fun, and the thought of another 75 miles of pedaling, half of which would have been into the wind, didn't sound like fun. On the positive side of the equation, I did finish 116.35 miles in 7:59 for an average speed of 14.5 mph and only spent 1:05 off bike. My riding speed is about one mile per hour slower than the 200 kilometer ride last month, but the winds more than account for this. I'm very happy with decreasing my off bike time from 2 ½ hours to just over one hour.

By not finishing the 300 kilometer brevet, I don't qualify to ride the remaining brevets this year. It's a little disappointing, but it sure won't stop me from riding my bicycle the rest of the year. Once the weather clears up and I get a few more miles under my belt, I will find a nice warm weekend to ride this course again.