

200 Kilometer (125 Mile) Brevet

March 1, 2003

In the Beginning

My endurance training began back in November of last year. As I had not ridden much since September I decided to start at the very beginning. My endurance rides began with 20 miles and about one and a half hours of riding. Each week I increased my long ride time by about ten percent. Along with a few additional weekly workouts, I finished November with about 18 hours and 300 miles of riding with my longest ride being 27 miles long. December ended with almost 24 hours of riding and 375 miles. By the end of January I had an additional 31 hours and 455 miles in my legs.

In February I added an additional 447 miles and around 31 hours. With a little over 900 miles since January I felt I had done a good job getting ready. The only down side had been my long rides had not exceeded 80 miles. The first brevet would be 45 miles longer than my longest ride of the year.

And The Prophets Spoke

There are those who say they can foresee the future by looking into the heavens. They watch the sky and say what will happen a week or more into the future. These people are called "weather forecasters". Unfortunately, they are about as accurate as the phony psychic "Miss Cleo". Several of these clairvoyants had predicted temperatures in the low 40's and partly sunny skies. Even Friday night they were still saying with authority that Saturday would be around 38 degrees and partly cloudy.

Warning Signs

I had already packed up the van Friday night and had everything laid out for the forecasted morning temperatures in the mid twenties. I even managed to get to bed around 8:30 PM so I would be well rested when the alarm went off at 4:30 AM.

The telephone rang. It was my friend Jeff Weible. He just got home and it was snowing heavily in West St. Louis county, and the storm was moving east, north-east, heading directly for Edwardsville. I turned the television on and over to the nine o'clock news and weather.

The clairvoyants are now saying the northeastern sections of St. Louis, along with Edwardsville would be in for two or three inches of snow by morning with a good chance of freezing rain by mid afternoon. This sounded like a weather washout for the ride. But I've learned not to trust anything the weather folks say.

Back to bed.

Exodus

My alarm went off, I got up and looked out the window. I live twenty miles south of St. Louis and there wasn't anything on the roads. I decided I would drive to Edwardsville and see what was happening there.

The road conditions certainly changed as I drove north. Snow and slush was covering most of the roads. The temperature gauge on one the banks in Edwardsville read 27 degrees as I pulled into town around 6:15 AM.

Several riders along with the Brevet Administrator, Aaron Rumble, were there. The parking lot was nothing but a couple of inches of fresh white wet snow. The ride was still on for anyone who wanted to ride the 125 mile route. Six people decided to brave the weather and roads.

I paid my money, signed the waiver stating I wouldn't hold anyone liable when I froze to death and prepared myself for the ride.

During our pre-ride briefing Aaron announced a couple of route changes that would put us on more traveled roads which hopefully would be cleared, and off the lonely back roads that were still covered in snow. The mileage would end up about the same.

The departure time of 7:00 AM arrived and four of us literally slid out of the parking lot. Two riders, one from Memphis, Jeff Harris and Steve Clayton of Georgetown IL were still tinkering with their bikes and clothing choices and were going to be a few more minutes.

I headed off with the lead group.

Frozen Toes

Even though there was snow, slush, water and some ice on the roads the pace was around 17 miles per hour. I had no illusions of keeping this pace for the next 125 miles. I stayed with this group along the mostly flat roads until we arrived in Grantfork, some 15 miles to the east. I dropped off the back and let the gap open up.

At Pocahontas, 25 miles into the ride, the leading group of three riders had pulled over for a pee break. I continued on, knowing full well they would catch and pass me in the next few miles. They rode by in less than three miles.

I was wearing silk sock liners, a pair of thick wool socks, shoes and a pair of shoe covers. Unfortunately, my feet were completely soaked and had been for some time. My feet went from being wet, to being cold and wet. From there they went to numb and wet, to burning and wet. I figured there was nothing I could do at this point so I decided to keep riding to the first checkpoint in Breese IL at the 41 mile mark and deal with the problem there.

I pulled into the Casey's General Store to find the front runners just getting ready to pull out. Aaron was there to check us in and sign our official brevet cards. After telling him about my feet, he told me to grab a couple of donut bags and put them between my socks and shoes to keep out further water.

I peeled off the boot covers, shoes and both pairs of socks. I walked out into the cold and wrung them out. I came back into the store and grabbed some paper towels to dry the socks further. The young girl behind the counter asked me if I wanted to throw my wet clothing into the dryer in the back of the store. "Sure! Bless you". So I also peeled off my top jersey and tossed it, along with my socks and boot covers into the dryer.

I purchased and drank two bottles of orange juice while I waited. The other two riders pulled in. Jeff, from Memphis didn't hang around and decided to keep going. Steve from Danville waited around while I pulled my clothes out of the dryer. While the clothes weren't dry, they were steaming and warm. I put the plastic donut bags between my socks and headed out the door with Steve.

A Lonely Road

We headed further south through Germantown. Steve needed to pull over to change into thicker gloves but didn't want me to wait. I kept riding.

Following Aaron's route changes I turned west towards Albers along route 161. The roads down here were dry so thankfully I wasn't getting any additional water into my shoes. After a few turns and some additional miles I arrived at the southern most checkpoint in Okawville, mile 68. I saw Aaron's red Mazda Miata pass me a few miles before getting into town.

I purchased another orange juice and 32 ounce bottle of water. I sat down for a few minutes. Steve arrived just a few minutes behind me.

Steve was ready to head out before me and said he wanted to keep going. I finished dressing and got back on my bike, and headed south out of town. I couldn't see Steve anywhere. I couldn't figure how he could get down the road so far in a couple of minutes.

There he was. He was along side the road talking with Aaron. Steve had pulled back onto the road a couple hundred feet ahead of me. I picked up my pace a little hoping to ride together, but to no avail.

Steve paused at "County Road 6" which would take us toward the west. I signaled a right turn to Steve who was looking back towards me, and he took off, still only a few hundred feet in front of me. I just couldn't close the gap. I could see a second rider up the road, probably a half mile or so. It had to be Jeff Harris from Memphis. Steve was picking up his pace to catch Jeff.

Riding back along Highway 177 I could see Jeff and Steve about a mile up the road. But I lost sight of them both as I took the right turn on Highway 160 north to New Baden. It was a good straight section of road and could see a good two miles up the road, but I couldn't see either of the other riders.

I limited my break to just five minutes or so and wanted to keep riding before the "forecasted" rain began.

Mardi Gras

North of Summerfield, a large pickup truck slowed and pulled along side. As they rolled down the passenger side window, I glanced over to see two very large people looking over at me. The woman in the passenger seat was trying to hand me a couple sets of Mardi Gras necklaces, one green and one purple.

I took them and put over my helmet. I thanked them for their kindness, they drove off. Had they offered a ride, I probably would have taken them up on it. Fortunately, they didn't offer and I didn't ask.

Let There Be... Rain

My goal was to beat the forecasted rain. Unfortunately, I didn't know when the rain was coming. I kept riding and kept my breaks short. I was north of Marine IL with around ten miles left when I felt an occasional rain drop.

It was no longer of a matter of "would I finish". That question had been answered many hours earlier, I would finish no matter what. I was very cold and wasn't relishing the idea of cold rain finishing off the day. I kept pedaling.

Once I entered Edwardsville, I had to check in at the local police department and sign the final list with my name and time of arrival. Jeff and Steve were still talking by the front door when I pulled up at 5:25 PM. They had arrived a few minutes before. They missed a turn back near New Baden and got off course.

I rode the final quarter mile back to my van. I opened the rear hatch and loaded my filthy bicycle. I grabbed my cell phone and called home. The sky opened up and the rain fell in earnest.

"Honey, I'm finished. See you in about an hour or so." I planned on draining the hot water heater of every last drop when I got home.

As this had been my longest ride since August of last year, I had hoped I had prepared well and ridden to the best of my abilities. My actual time on the bike was 8:48 (14.4 mph) with 1:37 off the bike, drying clothes, eating, etc. for a total of 10 hours, 25 minutes.

Now I have the option of riding a second 200 kilometer brevet on March 15th, or staying home in bed. It will all depend on the weather. If it's as cold as it was on this ride, I'm pulling the covers up over my head. Well, at least that's my plan right now.

