

200 Kilometer (125 Mile) Brevet

March 15, 2003

A Better Day

After suffering through 125 miles along with snow, slush etc. two weeks ago, I was thrilled when the weather folks had been forecasting a day near 70 degrees for Saturday.

My friend Bill Carlson set this ride as his “goal” for the year. Not ever having ridden a brevet before he asked me to ride it with him. As I had already qualified two weeks earlier, I agreed to ride with him as long as he kept within the cut off.

Actually I had hoped to finish before sundown at 6:07 PM local time. This would be just over an 11 hour pace. Bill had ridden an 80 mile ride the week previous and based on that ride, it looked like he would finish in around 12 hours or so. Well within the cut off.

Bill and I drove to Edwardsville together and talked about the ride. The morning was foggy, but the forecasters had literally promised a wonderful day. Yeah, like I really believe them! The temperature gauge at the bank on the way into Edwardsville was reading 37 degrees. Wow, it was just about as warm as the high temperature for the ride two weeks ago.

Bill and I pulled into the commuter parking lot shortly after 6:00 AM, one of the first to arrive. We registered and talked briefly with the Brevet Administrator Aaron Rumble. He heard that the fog should burn off mid-morning and we should see the sun the rest of the day.

By the time the pre-ride briefing was held, some 30 riders had arrived. There would be no route changes as the roads were in good condition. I saw my friend Jeff Weible and greeted him and wished him a good ride. He would ride at the front the whole time and hoped to finish around 2:00 PM.

Seven o'clock arrived and off the group rolled. I love this part of cycling, a group of cyclists riding down the road together talking. Look to your left, there are cyclists. Look to your right and there are cyclists. In front and behind, cyclists. It feels like riding in a pro peloton. One guy on the ride was on a brand new bike. His frame broke a few days ago and had to quickly get a new bike. He had never used the Shimano Integrated Shifters which have been around for the last eight to ten years. His old bike still had the old fashioned “down tube” style shifters. Another rider gave him a lesson on shifting while we rolled down the road.

Several riders managed to make the stop light on the way out of town. Most of us stopped and waited. By the time the group arrived on Pin Oak Road, mile 1.5, the group was already spreading out. Through the morning fog, you could see taillights up the road until they, along with their rider disappeared into the gray-white mist.

It wasn't long before Bill and I saw several riders pulled over fixing a flat. Not my idea of a great way to start a 125 mile bicycle ride, but I guess it beats having one at mile 124! They had everything under control as far as changing out the tube, so Bill and I continued down the road at a very reasonable pace.

For the next ten miles or so we would pass a rider stopping to adjust something, or got passed by riders who were picking up their pace. It wasn't long before we were at the back of the pack. There is no reward for getting back first, or for getting back last. Every person who finishes within the thirteen and a half hour cutoff time receives the same finisher's medal.

Bill and I stopped several times for a butt break between Edwardsville and the first checkpoint in Breese IL at mile 41. I was pleased to see John Prindable at the checkpoint. We talked a few minutes before he headed

out and back down the road. I was also surprised to see Jim Amelung who I would have thought would have been up with the fast group. He told me he was taking his time on this ride.

After having our brevet cards signed and purchasing water, I made another bottle of Sustained Energy. Over the last year or so I've been trying to use this drink mix on my long rides. I find that if I mix at least three or four scoops into the bottle, it's thick enough and tastes better than when I mix it with less than three scoops.

The temperatures were still low as the fog had not yet burned off. I put my gloves and helmet back on and decided to leave my red rear taillight on for "safety". Bill and I headed out in about 15 minutes. A very good turn around. No wasted time.

It was around 11:00 AM when Bill and I arrived in the little town of Albers which sits near the 50 mile mark. It was here that I looked up and could actually see the outline of the sun behind a thick layer of clouds.

Twenty minutes later we were pedaling along Airport Road when we saw our first shadows on the road. In what felt like minutes, the fog was gone as were the low clouds. Large patches of blue were appearing in the sky above us. I told Bill that the sun was definitely picking up my spirits and improving my outlook. I opened my jacket a little and removed my cotton hat and ear bands.

After a brief break along Highway 177 on the way into Okawville, we picked up a third rider, Don Ware who is a 70 year old rider. He had been riding with John Prindable and Jim Amelung, but started getting leg cramps. He had slowed his pace and we rode together chatting for awhile.

Nature was calling and I needed to get into Okawville to use the bathroom. I told Don and Bill I would see them in town at the checkpoint. I quickly picked up the pace and arrived at the checkpoint at 12:55 PM.

After having my brevet card signed, I headed to the bathroom. Upon my return I found Don and Bill had arrived. I purchased a large water, mixed another bottle of Sustained Energy, took a few electrolyte supplements and called home to tell my wife, Rose Ann, where we were on the route.

With the arrival of the sun, the temperatures were definitely feeling warmer. I opted to remove my jacket and just keep my mid-weight long sleeve jersey on. I kept my lightweight tights on, but switched to short finger gloves. It was warmer, but wasn't "warm".

Bill finished his check-in procedures, ate some food and was ready to head out. John Prindable and Don headed out just behind us. The bank on the south end of town was reading 55 degrees. I don't think this was accurate as it seems to read five to eight degrees warmer. Either that, or I feel five to eight degrees colder.

For the first time during the ride you could also feel the breeze beginning to blow. Just for an afternoon blessing, the wind was out of the south, a nice gentle tailwind to help us on the way back north to Edwardsville.

Bill, John, Don and I were pretty much together when we arrived at Elkhorn Road, our first turn to the north. John and Don stopped, Bill and I kept riding. Up to now our riding pace had been around 12.5 miles per hour, well within the cutoff. It looked like our arrival back into Edwardsville would be around 6:30 PM. I was hoping that with the light tailwind we would be able to pick up the pace a little and finish before sundown.

We arrived in New Baden, mile 90, around 3:15 PM. I decided it was a good time to take a short break. We pulled over at a quickie mart in town. I called Rose Ann again and told her it looked like we would get back around 6:30 or so. I purchased another water, mixed another bottle of Sustained Energy and ate some Hammer Gel.

I saw a rider pass along Hanover Street while we were still getting ready to head out. When Bill and I reached Pfeiffer Road we caught up with Don. John Prindable must have passed us while we were inside the quickie

mart. The three of us rode together most of the way back north.

After a couple short breaks along the way, I arrived in Marine around 5:15 PM, just a few minutes ahead of Don and Bill. I decided to call Rose Ann one more time. Bill only stopped long enough to check directions and kept riding north along Marine Road. Don and I pulled out a minute or two behind.

We caught Bill near Fruit Road. Only twelve more miles to go. I kept looking at the sky. The sun was getting closer to the horizon. My mind fixated on wanting to finish before sundown.

Don and I were riding together and Bill was a few hundred feet off the back. Bill pulled over. This time Don and I kept going. Don's map was useless as it had become so water logged with sweat. I offered him my map as I knew the way. He said he would try to keep me in sight. There were only a few turns to get back. There was a left on Blackburn Road, just after the highway overpass. Next is a right turn on Pin Oak, followed by a right turn on Highway 143. This would take you back into town.

The sun was getting lower. I picked up my pace. I lost Don on a slight hill. I put it into time trial mode. My goal was to beat the sunset. Luckily there were only two short hills to climb back into town. I made it to the Edwardsville police station at 6:08 PM, one minute after sunset.

After riding down the street to the van, I talked with John Prindable who had made it back some twenty minutes earlier. He asked about how Don was doing and how far back he was. I told him, Don was only a few miles behind me and should be in soon.

I loaded my bicycle, drank an Ensure, and changed out of my bicycling clothes and into sweats.

Missing the turn on Blackburn, Bill got turned around coming into town and didn't make it back to the police station until 7:10 PM. He had finished well within the cutoff and had earned his first brevet medal. A job well done.

I must say that riding at an easier pace did make the ride more enjoyable and I certainly didn't feel wiped out after the ride. I'm looking forward to the 300 kilometer (186 mile) brevet on March 29th. I'm going to have to think about pacing during the 300 and see what I can do. All in all, my numbers were: Ride time: 9:43, Off Bike: 1:45 for a total time of 11:08. My riding average speed was 12.87 mph. Oh yeah, remember that "promised" 70 degrees? It turned out to be a high of 62 degrees. Gee, they missed it again.