

Saturday, April 12, 2003

300 Kilometer Brevet

Oh the joys of riding without sleet, hail, rain or massive headwinds. The weather forecasters got it right, or at least pretty close this time.

Friday afternoon I pulled my tires off my bike and did a close inspection. I pulled out a half dozen small shards of glass that may have eventually lead to a flat tire. The last thing I want on a long ride is a flat tire, so this was time well spent.

Saturday morning, 4:00 AM - My alarm goes off. I actually slept right up until the alarm. Not bad. I would start the day with about six solid hours of sleep. I was dressed and out door by 4:30 AM heading to Edwardsville. Unfortunately, as Rose Ann told me later, I forgot to lock the door into the house and forgot to close the garage door. Oops!

5:30 AM – After a quick stop at a quickie-mart for a bathroom break, I arrived at the parking lot where several other riders had already arrived. I checked in, paid my ride fee, signed the obligatory waiver form and got my bicycle ready to go.

Bill Voss of Springfield Illinois was just a few parking spaces over from me, along with his Litespeed Blue Ridge bicycle. I know, “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbors wife, nor his oxen, nor his really nice bicycle.” It’s not the right size anyway, I asked. We chatted and found we both were shooting for finishing before 9:00 PM. Bill introduced me to his friend Deeanna Shidler from Pana Illinois. It was looking like the three of us would be riding together, at least to start.

By the time Aaron Rumble, the Regional Brevet Administer held the pre-ride briefing, it looked like 25 riders, or so had shown up for what was looking like a near perfect day of cycling.

6:00 AM – The morning sun was not scheduled to appear for another 29 minutes, so most of the riders had their rear lights on. A good warning to traffic approaching from behind. Some of the riders had their front lights on, but with the dawn approaching, they really weren’t needed.

We were on the same route as the ride from two weeks ago. One of the nice things about riding a familiar route is knowing where the turns were going to be. The need for paying close attention to a route sheet was lessened. Not that a route sheet was really needed as Aaron had done a great job of marking each turn. The route held no unknowns, and if you know me, that is just the way I like it. I don’t like surprises, I don’t like getting lost, and I don’t like getting flat tires. However, I do like to know where all of the food stops are along the way.

6:30 AM – The sky was as clear as you can imagine and the sun was rising directly ahead of us. The colors began with pale pinks and deepened into many shades of red and yellows as the sun rose. It was the beginning of a beautiful day.

7:30 AM – The three of us rolled through Pocahontas on a very empty road. Still no other riders in sight, but it really didn’t matter. We would have probably tried to chase them, and as much fun as that is, 186 miles is too long to spend extra energy chasing. I would rather save that energy for the last couple of miles.

After following old highway 40 further east, we reached the little town of Stubblefield at the 30 mile mark. We made a right turn crossing Interstate 70 and began our journey south on County Road 17.

After a six mile jaunt, we turned west on Route 143. Two weeks ago we faced a nasty headwind here, today, the wind along this stretch was very mild, perhaps five to ten miles per hour, out of the northwest.

9:10 AM. We pulled into the first checkpoint at the Casey's General Store in Breese, mile 51. There were a half dozen other riders here. We weren't too far off the back, just ten or fifteen minutes.

I saw Rich Frost from last year's 300 kilometer brevet. Rich and I fought the wind together down to Okawville. Last year I quit, leaving Rich to continue on alone. We talked for a minute or two before he saddled up and headed out of town. It felt good to be able to look Rich in the eye, knowing I wasn't quitting this year.

We had our brevet cards signed. I purchased a pint of chocolate milk and a bottle of water. After making another bottle of Sustained Energy, downing the chocolate milk and taking some electrolytes, I shed my jacket and the three of us rolled out 17 minutes later.

I "discovered" chocolate milk as a great drink by reading other people's ride reports. The author had been drinking it because it contained everything necessary for fueling endurance events like cycling, and the proportions of carbohydrates, fat and protein were nearly perfect. Other advantages include 1) it is inexpensive, 2) it seems to be readily available at quickie marts and 3) it tastes good, after all it's chocolate!

As the checkpoints are spread out, I was mixing my bottle of Sustained Energy to provide around 600 calories, which should keep me going for around two hours. I also had some mini Snickers bars and Hammer Gel in my jersey pocket. My trunk also had a couple boxes of raisins and a few Power Bars.

10:57 AM - After making many turns we arrived in Okawville, mile 78 our second checkpoint. There were perhaps ten riders here when we arrived, half of which were already straddling their bicycles ready to continue.

First things first, I had my card signed, purchased another pint of chocolate milk and a large bottle of water. I mixed another bottle of Sustained Energy and called home to let Rose Ann know how I was doing. I was already 37 minutes ahead of my previous ride, and ahead of my plans for today.

I pulled off my tights, long sleeve jersey and switched to my short finger gloves. The temperature was 64 degrees, and would continue to warm throughout the day. For the first time in 2003, I pulled out my sunscreen, and applied it to my face, ears, neck, arms and legs. I also took a much needed bathroom break.

"Peeing" is very important in long distance riding. If you aren't going to the bathroom every few hours, you aren't drinking enough and are in danger of dehydration. Conversely, drinking too much is also a problem because it can dilute your electrolytes and cause "hyponatremia" also know as "water intoxication" which can lead to death, and that would ruin an otherwise good ride.

11:25 AM – All of the other riders had pulled out. Bill, Deeanna and I got back on our bicycles and continued as well. There would be no service, or stores until we reached Oakdale, some 43 miles down the road.

Deeanna had been suffering from the flu earlier in the week and still wasn't feeling 100 percent. She wasn't drinking or eating nearly enough, but her stomach just wouldn't cooperate. I was concerned that this would catch up with her later in the ride. From the stories she told about her rides last year, the word "quit" isn't in her cycling vocabulary. Okay, she did quit on her Kentucky 300 last year, but she had been bitten by a dog, had seven or eight puncture wounds, was bleeding, and had to ride another 38 miles to the next checkpoint before she called it a day. That's hard core!

12:50 PM - We reached the one hundred mile mark! We covered the first one hundred miles in six hours, four minutes of actual riding time, plus 45 minutes off the bicycle for a riding average speed of 16.4 mph.

As we reached the southern most point of the route, our pace began to fall as we faced the wind. It was nothing like two weeks ago where we faced sustained winds near 20 mph and gusts of over 30 mph, it was just a ten mile per hour or so wind. Our pace dropped perhaps two miles per hour.

Oakdale Blacktop Road, would lead us into our third checkpoint, but not before beating us to death. It seemed that every thirty feet or so was a jarring dip in the road. It went the full width of the lane so you couldn't even ride around it. Every thirty feet or so our hands would get jarred, then our rear end's would get spanked. Over and over for two and a half miles. I stood and rode a lot on this section.

2:20 PM – We arrived in Oakdale, mile 121 and found a large contingent of riders. They kept fifteen minutes or so ahead of us, but it was a welcome site to see them. It reminded me that the three of us were not alone out here. We may be at the back, but we were not alone. I was now 40 minutes ahead of my previous ride.

The little town of Oakdale was holding it's annual Easter Egg Hunt and I think every car for twenty miles was here. The General Store was just about sold out of everything they had. I purchased two bottles of water and had my brevet card signed. I mixed another bottle of Sustained Energy and added the second bottle of water to my camelback.

Bill purchased a half gallon of orange juice and shared it with Deeanna and me. Deeanna bought a deli sandwich and ate a portion of it and shared the rest with Bill, her stomach still not feeling well. I pulled out a box of raisins and ate a couple of mini Snickers. I needed more calories. I was out of luck on the chocolate milk.

2:46 PM Not even 30 minutes after arriving, we were heading north. A 9:00 PM arrival back in Edwardsville was looking pretty realistic.

The section to New Baden would mostly take us northwest and we would face a cross head wind most of the way as the wind had shifted to the northeast. Again, not a major problem, but our pace did slow a bit and we all took turns at the front breaking the wind and sharing the work.

4:55 PM – New Baden, the 150 mile mark. Only 36 more miles to go, and I was more than a full hour ahead of schedule. Yep, we would definitely arrive before 9:00 PM.

This break came just in time. I was beginning to bonk (run out of gas). I purchased a pint of chocolate milk and a large bottle of water. I took more electrolytes, refueled, rested and was feeling pretty good by the time I called home again. This time, there was no offers of a ride back north. I would finish this ride with hours and energy to spare.

Since the ride two weeks ago, we went to Daylight Savings Time. This meant that there would be an additional hour of daylight. Being an hour ahead of schedule also meant we may have one hour of darkness to deal with instead of three.

As usual, the other riders who were here had already gone, except one rider, Mark McAndrews of Des Moines Iowa. He had ridden the last section from Oakdale alone and welcomed the idea of joining us for the last 36 miles.

5:20 PM – The four of us head west through New Baden then turn north on Clinton County Road as we head back into the farm fields.

Wait a minute. It's 5:20 PM, and we are already heading back on the last 36 mile section. It's no longer looking like a 9:00 PM finish. It's looking like somewhere around 8:15 to 8:30 PM if we make a short stop in either St. Jacob or Marine. The only reason we wouldn't get back until 9:00 PM would be if we had a problem or took an unusually long break. I hoped neither would occur.

The only challenge as we headed north were the rolling hills. I would stand and climb, which gives me a bit more power, and it gave my rear end a break. Mark was a good climber and stayed at the front most of the time. Deeanna stayed on my wheel and Bill would climb one hill out front then take it easy on the next. All in all

we stayed together.

6:55 PM – We arrived in Marine IL, mile 171. We pulled over at the side of the road. No one said they “needed” to make a stop at the quickie mart, so we turned on our tail lights and Deeanna donned her windbreaker. The local police officer rolled down his window and said we had picked a great day to be out for a ride. After several nasty weather rides, I’m sure he had no idea how right he was.

Sunset was scheduled for 7:34 PM, and while we couldn’t get back before sundown, we could still make it before it was dark. My mind began fixating on this idea. Beat the darkness, beat the darkness. I went to the front and picked up the pace. We kept adjusting the pace so we would remain together.

With about seven miles left, Deeanna pulled to a stop. She dropped her chain while shifting gears. It was a good time to turn on the headlights. While there was still enough twilight to see the road, we wanted to make sure the drivers could see us. No sense getting hit this close to the finish.

The last highway overpass approached. Two weeks ago it felt harder, today, it was only an annoyance. I could “smell the barn”, it was only five miles back as we made our left turn on Pin Oak. Mark and I began to pull away from Bill and Deeanna. We kept going. The end was right there, just up the road. I could feel the gravity pulling me towards the finish.

Two last climbs to conquer. The first one wasn’t steep, just about a quarter mile of slight uphill. My legs, however, reminded me to be play nice. I stood and slowly climbed.

We made the right turn on Route 143 and had a wonderful 30 mph downhill. This was followed by the last climb, which is steep, at least it feels that way after all of these miles. I stayed in my center chain ring, but downshifted into my second gear in back. Mark climbed ahead of me. Only a few more turns.

7:57 PM – Mark and I pulled our bicycles onto the sidewalk as we stopped in front of the Edwardsville Police station, our final checkpoint. Deeanna and Bill pulled in about one minute behind.

We sat inside and filled out our brevet cards and signed the arrival sheet. What a wonderful day for a long ride.

Deeanna really impressed me. Not feeling well, and not taking in enough calories throughout the day, I was very impressed she didn’t bonk, held a good pace and finished with a good time. I don’t think I could hang with her when she is having a good day.

As I’m a numbers kind of guy, On Bike Time: 12:05:26, Off Bike Time: 1:51:34 Total Elapsed Time: 13:57:00. Ride Average Speed: 15.39 mph, Rolling Average Speed: 13.34 mph.

I could not have done this ride at this pace without such good companions who kept pushing the pace and kept the breaks short. This was significantly faster than my earlier 300 kilometer ride, and faster than either of my shorter 200 kilometer rides, and in a few days, my knees will be happy again.

As I sat at my van after the ride, I asked myself, “The first 400 is two weeks away. Do you have another 100 kilometers in your legs?” My immediate answer was no. After drinking an Ensure, and a Gatorade, I thought about it again. Yeah, I think I can do another 100 k, just slower, especially if the weather is this nice.

St. Louis is offering two 400 kilometer brevets. That’s just about 250 miles. The cutoff is 27 hours, so I should have plenty of time in hand to finish. However, I feel I’ve suffered on two of these rides with snow, sleet, rain and nasty headwinds and I don’t look forward to riding 250 miles in difficult weather. I’m going to try and pick wisely which 400 kilometer ride I do.