

600 Kilometer (371 Mile) Ride Report

June 7 – 8, 2003

This was my second, and final attempt to complete not only the 600-kilometer brevet, but to complete the final ride in the series for the year. If I completed this ride within the published time of 40 hours, and stayed ahead of each checkpoint's published closing times, I would have fulfilled my goals set back in November of last year. I wanted to finish, and I wanted to finish within the rules.

I woke a few minutes before the 1:50 AM alarm and turned it off before it could wake my wife, Rose Ann. I was dressed and out the door by 2:30AM.

After filling out the appropriate paperwork and paying our ride fee, ten to twelve riders pulled out of the commuter parking lot in Edwardsville at 4:00 AM. The day started with temperatures around 55 degrees, and a thick fog that would last for the next five plus hours.

My friend Jeff Weible, who finished the 600-kilometer brevet two weeks ago in less than 24 hours, told me he was going to ride with me. Jeff would be there for moral support and to kick my butt when or if I had thoughts of quitting. This was a special treat as we had ridden together many times, but never rode a brevet together as our average riding speeds are a few miles per hour apart.

I also rode with Deeanna Shidler from Pana Illinois. We rode together earlier this spring on a 300-kilometer ride. Bill Voss of Springfield Illinois also started with us and had planned on riding together. Somewhere in the early dark foggy miles Bill became separated and we didn't notice he wasn't there.

We rode through the early morning fog with a husband and wife from Cape Girardeau Missouri, Renata and Jim DeBlois. As our paces varied, we dropped them after a few miles, but would see them off and on at various checkpoints.

We picked up another rider, Phillip Von Burg from San Francisco just north of Breese Illinois. He was on the side of the road with a broken spoke on his rear wheel. Jeff said something that reminded me that I had a "Kevlar Fiber Fix Emergency Spoke" in my trunk bag. I had never used one, but the instructions were inside the tube. After giving the emergency spoke to Phillip, Jeff, Deeanna and I rolled on down the road.

By the time we reached Breese, mile 41, a local sheriff pulled along side and told us we should not be out riding as the visibility was so poor. There was wisdom in his words, but quitting was not an option today. In Breese the visibility was only a few blocks at best. However out of town the visibility may have been as good as a quarter mile.

We met Phillip again at the checkpoint in Breese. Phillip decided not to use the Kevlar spoke. He decided to adjust the spoke tension on the rear wheel to bring it back into true. Around 9:30 AM, ten miles past Okawville and five miles away from Hoyleton and 78 miles from the starting point, Phillip was at the front of our group when we all heard "pop, pop, pop". The pace line of four cyclist scattered. Phillip broke three more spokes and his wheel looked like a folded taco.

You could see right away there was no way the wheel was fixable, let alone riding it another foot. Phillip pulled out the Fiber-Fix emergency spoke and began reading the directions. With a total of four broken spokes, it was just too late. After twenty minutes or so, Bill Voss' wife Dara pulled up to offer assistance. She offered to take him back to Edwardsville. Phillip was apparently not a quitter. After looking at a map, it was discovered that Mount Vernon wasn't too far away; Dara located a bicycle shop and dropped him off. Phillip made it back onto the route and continued riding. I think Phillip had plans to go to Paris.

Jeff, Deeanna and I managed to cover the first 130 miles to Belle Rive with a riding average riding speed of 17.5 mph. But when we reached the hills in the early afternoon, I was beginning to pay for my early speed. My legs weren't handling the hills as well as they did two weeks earlier.

By mid afternoon the temperature hit 80 degrees, something the St. Louis area hadn't seen much of this year. According to the weather data, the average daily high for this June had been 66 degrees, and for the whole month of May the average high was 74 degrees. I had ridden and trained in temperatures ranging from the mid-twenties to the low 70's. My body had not acclimated to anything resembling heat.

With my speed dropping and the heat bothering me, my attitude took a dive. While I don't remember saying anything, Jeff could read my mind and my face. He said "don't you even think about quitting." He went on to remind me how hard I had worked, how many miles I'd ridden and how close I was to achieving my goals. I knew I would probably go through some mental hard times on this ride. I hadn't expected them to be so early nor last so long. I knew I needed to keep eating, keep drinking and keep the pedals turning.

I had my first mechanical problem of the year late in the afternoon. Luckily it was just a flat tire. After nearly 3,000 miles, I had worn completely through the rubber and down through the thread casing. As anal-retentive as I am, I had packed a spare tire, but it was in my drop bag. "Saint Jeff" had a spare tire, a nice new Continental Grand Prix 3000. While the blue sidewall didn't match my red and black handlebar tape, or my purple and bronze spokes, it would have to do. We found a nice shady spot to handle the tire and tube change and were back on the road in 20 minutes.

We reached the 220-mile mark in the town of Anna Illinois around 9:15 PM with a riding average speed of 16.7 mile per hour and a rolling speed of 12.75 mph. I needed solid food, water, a shower and some sleep.

The alarm went off at 3:00 AM. The only thing standing in our way of finishing was the 150 miles back to Edwardsville. We pulled out of the Super 8 parking lot with Renata and Jim DeBlois but again our paces differed and we ended up seeing each other off and on throughout the morning at various quickie marts.

We would have to deal with 80 miles of hills, which would begin with the Shawnee National Forest and the long climb up Alto Pass, before finding the flat to rolling terrain again. The higher the sun rose during the day, the harder the wind blew. We would have to deal with 100 miles of nasty 15-25 mph headwinds.

We ran into a little light rain early in the morning between Ava and Sparta, but it didn't amount to much. We could see ahead of us clearing skies, so we knew, or at least hoped we wouldn't get too wet.

It was along this stretch of road we saw four Amish buggies coming towards us, carrying their families to Sunday morning services. Dressed in cycling shorts, jerseys and riding fairly high end bicycles, we probably looked as out of place to the Amish as they looked to us in their black garb. We offered a "good morning" greeting as we rode by. The sound of the horses hooves striking the pavement was the only sound we heard. We did receive a polite wave from several of the occupants.

After a short stop at a checkpoint in Coulterville, mile 303, we headed north out of town and came to a dead stop. A train was blocking the road. Renate and Jim said they had been there a few minutes. I decided it was naptime. Everyone else assumed a similar horizontal position. Fifteen to twenty minutes later, the train was rolling and we were on our way again.

We pulled into Edwardsville at 5:20 PM Sunday afternoon. Our overall average "riding" speed for the 371 miles was 15.5 miles per hour. My maximum speed hit 40.9 mph on the downside of Alto Pass in the wee hours of the morning. With breaks for food, mechanical failures, food, checkpoints, food, flat tires, food, sleep, food, stopped trains, and more food, it took 37 hours 20 minutes for a rolling speed of just about ten miles per hour.

By finishing the brevet series I've met my riding goals for the year. As of right now, I have 3,315 miles since

January 1st. As of right now, I can't feel three toes on my left foot. As of right now, my right knee is very sore and swollen. As of right now, I wish I couldn't feel my rear end it too is sore and swollen! As of right now, I can't see straight. And finally, as of right now, I am a "Super Randonneur".