

Double Trouble

Terrible Two

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Where: Santa Rosa, CA

Event: Terrible Two (<http://www.srcc.com/tt.html>)

Before last weekend I never knew anyone who tried to do the 208 mile, 17,000 foot, Terrible Two (TT) bicycle "ride." Though it was called a "ride" everyone at the event seemed to be calling it a "race". It turned out only to be as much of a race as two marines would create over a case of Tequila. Like the marines, I figured since it's "there" I may as well do it. Besides, if I could complete the TT (only about 75% who start it complete it and fewer do so by the 10pm cut off time,) my first California Triple Crown series (<http://www.caltriplecrown.com/schedule.htm#elevationgain>) would be done early in the year. If I did not finish (DNF) there would be a few easier doubles later in the year I could handle. So I set out on Friday night to camp in the parking lot with a handful of other idiots at a school in rural Santa Rosa.

At 3:45am with about 5 hours of actual sleep under my belt the local rooster decided it was time to get up. It wasn't such a bad thing because it allowed me to continue the hydration and eating processes I had started the night before and experience successful lower intestinal evacuation prior to setting out on my journey into a different kind of brotherhood.

I believe the first clue that most normal people and even most die-hard bicycles don't belong on the TT came when the pre-race (I mean, pre-ride) meeting included mention that 50% of the field was first timers. Quick math gives a lot of probability that only around half of the new comers weren't going to complete the race. (Not many people who DNF would be crazy enough to show up the next year, right?) About that time the pace car left, so I returned my thoughts to the foundations of success and slipped into a mantra of "eat, drink, and pedal" in one rhythm or another for the next 14 hours and 35 minutes.

For me the TT would be like combining the two most hill climbing rides I had ever done into a single 208 mile ride. The first 100 miles would climb 7000 feet or about 3000 feet more than a typical 100 miler and roughly equivalent to the total climbing of May's double century in Davis or March's double century in Solvang. The second 100 miles would be a different story. The second 100 miles would climb 10,000 feet of pavement and reveal the secrets of the TT brotherhood.

The first time I had ever done 10,000 was on "THE WORLDS TOUGHEST CENTURY!" and the only other time was when I re-road the course used on "T.H.E W.O.R.L.D.S T.O.U.G.H.E.S.T C.E.N.T.U.R.Y." Prior to the TT my legs had never done more than 10,000 feet in a single day, let alone immediately following 7 hours climbing 7000 feet on the first 100 miles!

Prior to the TT the longest I'd ever been on my bike before was 11 continuous hours. I will likely now stop talking about "THE WORLDS TOUGHEST CENTURY" in respect of the TT.

The TT course (<http://www.srcc.com/tt.html#course>) is beautiful (from it's rolling Napa vineyards to the peaks above Sonoma to the Pacific Ocean views north of Fort Ross), spectacular (from the natural spas in Calistoga residence's front yards to Sierra like peacefulness in the Gualala River valley,) fast on the downhill, slow while struggling to keep from falling over climbing inland from Fort Ross on a +10% grade after having ridden 170 miles, and of course quite long. The rest stops were all fantastically staffed and stocked with great food. The most deliciously interesting treat was golf-ball sized baked red potatoes. (These went very well with the boiled eggs I had brought along to supply a bit of protein.) Probably the only thing that could have made the rest stops more convenient is if one had magically popped up on the hairpin corner in the decent off Trinity Grade, where I caught my first and only flat. But that would have only made me worry severely about what kind of satanic brotherhood I was joining.

Following the flat tire at about mile 30 I saw no benefit in stopping again before mile 50. So, my first actual rest was at mile 80 where I refilled water, ate a potato, an egg, a piece of fruit, some peanut M&Ms, and shoved a few cookies in my pocket then rode onward. If memory serves me correct, that 80 mile stop was about 1km from where the ride departed the fog at the top of a 9 mile 6-7mph climb. Following that rest stop was the first dry road decent and the first opportunity to let some speed happen. Unfortunately speed wasn't a good thing for everyone.

Just after the steep parts of the decent and before the road began to roll tamely through a river valley I saw the TT's first casualties. Two big guys on a borrowed tandem (Few tandems have ever finished the TT) decided after blowing a tire and cleaning some pavement with their bike jerseys that it would be prudent to cry uncle. Nowadays it pays to have two or three redundant breaks on a tandem to avoid overheating the rims, especially when there is about 500 lbs of meat and bone on the bike. The choice those guys made was a good one because there were a lot more descents like the one that got them before the day was over.

The psychological benefit of having a flat so early in the ride was that I would be riding by people all day long. (At least on the flats and downhill anyway.) The negative effect, on the other hand, was that I was frequently pulling an echelon of cycles down the road while they all spent less energy than me. The result was that no more than one or two people who passed me on the road, after I replaced my flat, stayed ahead of me the whole day. In fact after the Camp Gualala rest stop at mile 140 no one passed me (and YES I did see people as I rode passed them!) At the time, I figured I was either at the back of the race and didn't have much hope of finishing before dark or I was getting stronger as the day melted away.

In retrospect, I guess I was getting stronger as the ride unfolded. I say this because the conversions I heard on the first hills included people talking about previous failed

TT attempts. On the other hand, I finished the TT riding with a guy named Paul, who I believe is the "Safety Engineer" for the Davis Bike Club. Paul and the people he knew at the finish line who had completed the TT just ahead of us have all done Paris-Breast-Paris and the California Gold Rush, both of which are 750 mile timed events without support vehicles allowed. One of the guys who were less than a half hour ahead of us had even qualified for the Race Across America (RAAM).

I think I failed to mention one of the driving forces behind my 8:05pm finishing time. It's really quite simple: Darkness. I forgot my light. So, while others may have gotten their free "I DID IT!" TT T-shirt as long as they finished by 10pm, I would have been disqualified at 9pm without a light. In all seriousness, it was the eating and hydrating that contributed the most to my success. Believe it or not, even after being in the saddle for 14+ hours I was not "finished" in the decrepit sense; not at all. In fact as I sat at the finish line eating the delicious food and listening to the guys from the Davis Bike Club, besides thinking about how I need to come back and shoot for 12 hours on the TT, I seriously started thinking about bigger things. Maybe not doing RAAM, but owning a qualification plaque would be really cool.