

Riding Tandem

By: Steve Ward

I looked out the window from my home office at about 3:00pm and said to myself: "What a beautiful looking day - I think I'll head out for a ride". Being Tuesday, it was a hill climb day for me so I geared up, sun screened up and headed out toward the Alexandria Hill Climb route.

I was riding along Iron Point, having a conversation with myself about the Cycle Folsom forum and, in particular, the Beatty Hill Climb discussion occurring under the Musings category.

I know every inch of that climb; I've ridden it numerous times. So I mentally worked my way up that climb putting together speed and time estimates and eventually convinced myself that - theoretically - I could knock a fair chunk of time off the best time posted on the forum.

I knew it wouldn't be easy with strong riders such as Curtis T, Scott W, and Mark F posting times of 5:40, 5:17 and 5:05 respectively.

It was hot, a bit over 100 degrees and just as I was deciding to make a run at the record I wavered, thinking it's too hot, the air quality isn't that good, etc. I saw that I was beginning to crack mentally before I even reached the hill. So I sandbagged on the Costco Hill climb because I didn't want myself to know that I could see I was weak.

Again, I sandbagged on the long, gradual descent down the Sophia Parkway; just staying on my own wheel and "sitting in". I turned right on Alexandria, crested the small hill there and then descended to Beatty road.

I circled once, twice, three times - playing with my gearing, trying to figure out the best gear to be in for the start. I noticed I was a bit uncertain and used that to my advantage; I planned to attack early and often to keep the pressure on myself for the full .78 miles and 367 vertical feet of the Beatty Hill Climb challenge. That's 284.7 feet per mile; definitely a worthy challenge.

I pushed off from just west of the crosswalk giving myself enough time to get clipped-in and get the computer started before crossing the white stripe on the road. Then it was on!

I sprinted up to 22.4 mph very quickly, which put a lot of pressure on me; in fact I could already see that I was getting ahead of myself. As I approached the first pitch I got out of the saddle and down on the drops and hammered hard for about 100 yards to where the road eases before turning right and getting

really steep.

That's when I first felt like I was about to fall off the pace I was setting. A few seconds later I shifted down to my 42 tooth ring and 27 tooth gear, got up out of the saddle and back down on the drops and started smashing with everything I had.

About half way up the steepest part of that section of the climb I noticed I was starting to crack. I looked winded, I was bobbing up and down with shaky legs and my arms were burning. Well, if that's not an invitation to attack I don't know what is; as expected, I immediately attacked! I moved up quickly past myself and took a long gaze back in my direction to see if I was coming or not; you know, "The look", ala Lance Armstrong vs. the burger eating Kaiser.

Well that sort of pissed me off - I responded to the challenge, got on my wheel and put the pressure on. I stayed out of the saddle through the steepest part of the climb and then sat down for about 50 yards along the section about 2/3rds of the way up the climb (where the grade is less severe). I started wheezing audibly; I sounded asthmatic.

Hearing that, and knowing I was put into difficulty, I immediately jumped back up out of the saddle, shifted to the 21 tooth gear and made a huge move up onto the plateau (just before the last climb to the top); A magnificent attack made from a state of pure oxygen debt.

And oh man did that hurt bad. To make things worse, I responded to that attack with a counter-attack of my own and was right back all over my own wheel again. I threw everything at myself but no matter what I did, I just couldn't shake myself.

This was turning into an epic battle that would have had Paul Sherwin and Phil Liggett turning phrases like "...pushing that massive gear..", or "...he's really hurting now; his legs must be screaming out, 'No more, no more!'", followed by Bob Roll's unintelligible, over-excited, tongue-tied verbal spewing.

On the final climb to the finish I shifted back to the 27 gear and simply sold out; in terms of oxygen debt, this would have been considered Deficit Spending on a level only the U.S. government could be proud of. I'd been at my max heart rate since the 1/2 way point on the hill; I was looking for reserves that didn't exist. The well was empty and my tongue was dry.

Nonetheless, I was able to hold myself off until about 20 meters to the finish, at which point it was everyman for himself in an ugly bike slinging, leg stomping, elbow throwing, knockdown, and drag out, sprint for the line.

After all the effort, strategy and tactics it ended in a tie. I stopped the

computer and then blacked out about 3 bike lengths beyond the finish line and probably laid there for about 2 minutes after regaining consciousness. I must have earned my respect that day though, because for the first since I started racing against myself, I reached out a hand and helped myself up.

I rode about 50 circles around the monument in the middle of the road trying to get my breath back and while doing so checked my computer to see that my time was 4 minutes and 34 seconds, the new Cycle Folsom best time for that hill climb.

I think I can beat myself if I just train a little harder; I could lose the water bottles and seat bag next time, ride when it's cooler, perhaps earlier in the day and...

Here are my official numbers according to Mr. Garmin:

Distance:	0.78 miles
Time:	4:34
Avg Speed:	10.3 mph
Max Speed:	22.4 mph
Total Calories:	154
Avg Heart Rate:	180 bpm
Max Heart Rate:	185 bpm
Avg Cadence:	72rpm
Total Ascent:	367ft
Total Descent:	17ft