

From: Tom Bunker

Subj:5-17-08 600K ride report: DNS and DNF

To Randonneurs these acronyms have special meanings. "DNS" stands for Did Not Start and "DNF" stands for Did Not Finish. This past weekend Earl and I set out to ride a 600K Brevet in less than 40 hours. Our official posting on the results list will be "DNF." What follows is my report of the ride and some thoughts about how this result applies to us.

Why would anyone try to ride over 375 miles in 40 hours? Most of our families, friends, and fellow bikers simply think we are crazy. There may be a little of that in us, but I think that there's another larger component to the thought process. These rides are social events, not races. While there are many faster riders, everyone is pulling for and encouraging everyone else. The idea is to have fun and overcome whatever unforeseen problems arise. The same route may change drastically depending on the weather and the winds, you may get flats, you may have mechanical problems, you may get lost and confused in the dark, and you have to overcome many emotional effects on your performance.

My motivation to attempt these rides is take on a challenge and complete a task that I never expected I could complete. After many years of riding, hill climbing, centuries, etc., I wonder just how much can I safely do? Where is the limit of what I can achieve? As the fat kid in school, who never excelled at any sport and was always picked last for teams, I have reached a better level of strength and endurance than I ever thought I could. The successful completion of 300K and 400K events are things that I can look at and think, "I did it!" That is an enormous ego boost. It's always nice to hear other congratulations, but the personal sense of accomplishment far outweighs all the praise. I have learned something about myself on every ride.

Now for the ride, it started at 4:15 AM in Ventura. The first major challenge was to climb Hwy 33 from Ojai to Pine Mountain. On our way up, we started getting passed by groups of riders hammering their way along on the Sea to The Summit Ride. We continued at a relaxed pace and enjoyed the views and weather. We knew that we couldn't expend too much energy so early in the ride.

An E-ticket ride (if you're old enough to know what an E-ticket was) from the summit put us in mostly flat, very hot terrain. After several monotonous miles, we reached a mile stone. We turned left from Hwy 33 onto Hwy 162. Now the temperature really started to climb. We reached one of our control points, a market in New Cuyama (voted 2 to 1 over Old Cuyama in AAA surveys). When we left this market, we were in 118 degree heat, with not a tree in sight.

We continued to pace ourselves, that kind of heat is serious. We drank lots of water and maintained a steady, manageable speed. The heat and the long stretch of empty road can be really mentally draining. At approximately 100 miles, we came upon a support van with ice and water. Cold water never tasted so good. My water had been warm enough to make tea. At the same place were two younger men who were in distress and could not continue. We still felt strong and revitalized by the physical and emotional lift from the cold water.

I knew that we were running behind the pace, but we couldn't push too hard in the heat. We would make up the time later. I was dreaming of an ice cold soda and kept focused on reaching the end of this seemingly endless road. At the top of one several "rollers" we stopped to have a drink of hot water when a car pulled up. It was Randy, one of the control point volunteers who we met on the 300K and 400K rides. He was on his way to Cambria to open his station and decided to sweep the route on his way.

Once again we had ice and cold water. What a tremendous lift! That seemed to be the story of the entire ride. Every time I started to get emotionally drained, someone would show up with cold drinks, eats, and encouragement. I can't even describe how much of a boost these acts gave me.

Revitalized, we pushed on, feeling strong. When we reached the turn towards Nipomo, we let out a shout. We were off that road and the temperature had been dropping.

We stopped in Nipomo, at a bus bench within sight of Jocko's. There we made calls home and had to put on our jackets because the temperature was still dropping. While we were taking this break, we had another visitor. It was David, another volunteer with water, snacks, and encouragement.

As the sunset, we were on smooth pavement and had very comfortable temperatures as we pressed on to Shell Beach. We were feeling good and nearing a shower and food, when Earl had a flat. At least there was a bus bench there for us as he changed the flat in the dark.

Flat repaired, we continued to Shell Beach, where a warm reception, shower, and hot food (thanks, Wendy) gave us another much needed boost. We departed for Cambria at 10:30 PM, feeling rested and ready to go. It was hard to believe that we were over 18 hours into the ride. It was a beautiful full moon night.

The trip to Cambria was event filled, with missed turns, missing street signs, and confusion. We muddled through and reached the control station at 4:00 AM. Randy was there to greet us with food and drink and we also had turkey sandwiches (thanks again, Wendy). I noted the temperature, did a little arithmetic, and realized that the temperature had dropped a full 66 degrees. It was 4:00 AM and 42 degrees. We were at the turning point, approximately 198 miles into the ride. We were reading 5 miles over that from our misadventures in the dark.

On the road again, 45 miles to the condo, we started talking about what time we would have to leave the condo. The night was cold and we were making pretty good progress. After one of our rest stops, Earl shouts, "And down goes Frazer!" He had taken a tumble while starting out and said that he was not hurt. But something was wrong with the bike. Of course, it was dark and cold. Adjustments were made and on we pressed. The problem returned a couple times, without falls. We puzzled about it and finally Earl found that his rear wheel was not properly set in the dropouts. The problem was solved. This was just another of the things like heat, wind, flats, and getting lost that you have to deal with on one of these rides.

The rest of trip back to Shell Beach was non-eventful. The sun rose before we reached our first turn and we could now read all the signs and route slip. We also followed the same basic route back, so it was familiar.

Now we had another shower and clean clothes. We decided that we had to leave by 10:00 AM. The problem was that it was already past 9:00. Here we made our **DNS** decision. We **Did Not Sleep**. That's right, 30 hours and 243 miles into the ride, we decided that we would rather eat and relax and then press on without sleeping. Here's where you may think I am a little crazy, but I was still wide awake. A combination of endorphins, caffeine, and the desire to continue kept me going.

We quickly went through the beach cities. Then the hills started again, followed by a long flat, hot stretch of road to Guadalupe. The next major objective was to reach Lompoc. Unfortunately, 100 degree heat and some extreme climbing stood in our way. It was becoming clear that our chances of finishing in under 40 hours were slipping away. We still had the determination to pedal back to Ventura, regardless of what time we would finish.

Many of these hills were not what you think of when you hear the word hill. Unlike the gentle climbing on mountain roads, these were steep, it was hot, and there was little shade to be found. The sight of each of these was so emotionally draining. We pushed on and finally made it to Lompoc.

One thing that I yet to mention is that my eyes had been bothering me all day. I thought that I may have gotten sunscreen in them and had been rinsing them and applying wet napkins frequently.

In Lompoc we were at about 300 miles and knew that we would not finish in less than 40 hours. We decided to take a longer break indoors and have something to eat. What better place than a Foster's Freeze. I washed my face and held cold napkins to my eyes. I also had the best burger and large chocolate chip milk shake ever.

When we left the Foster Freeze, I had food in me and my eyes felt good. I had started doing some estimations of how much longer it would take to finish. It was no longer possible to complete the ride in 40 hours. The remainder of the route was straight forward. We didn't really need a route slip and time didn't matter. So I took off my watch, folded my route slip so that I couldn't see the mileage at the turns, and set my odometer to max speed. I was still determined to finish, and could visualize the next turn and just concentrate on reaching it.

Shortly after leaving Lompoc, we had a real nice downhill run. My eye problem came back with a vengeance. Earl and I discussed it and I wanted to press on. Despite my protests, Earl finally convinced me withdraw from the ride. He called for David to come to pick us up and we found a shade tree and waited. We were 38 hours and 300 miles and change into the ride.

Earl stayed with me and also withdrew. That made both of us DNF. In hindsight, I think of our DNF as **Did Not Fail**. We didn't complete the ride, but we gave it our best effort and it just wasn't our day. Other days will come and knowing when to stop is critical. My mind was set on continuing, but Earl convinced me how dangerous it could be to continue with impaired vision.

### **What did I learn?**

When it's hot, or cold, or dark; when you're lost and confused; when you're sleep deprived; you need to have another person who can help get you through it. You have to know when a problem can be solved with an hours rest and you need to when it can't. I'm fortunate to have Earl and his experiences to help me make the right decisions.

Oh, and a big shout-out to Bobbi and all the PCH Randonneurs who make these rides possible and enjoyable.

You haven't seen the last of us.

Tom