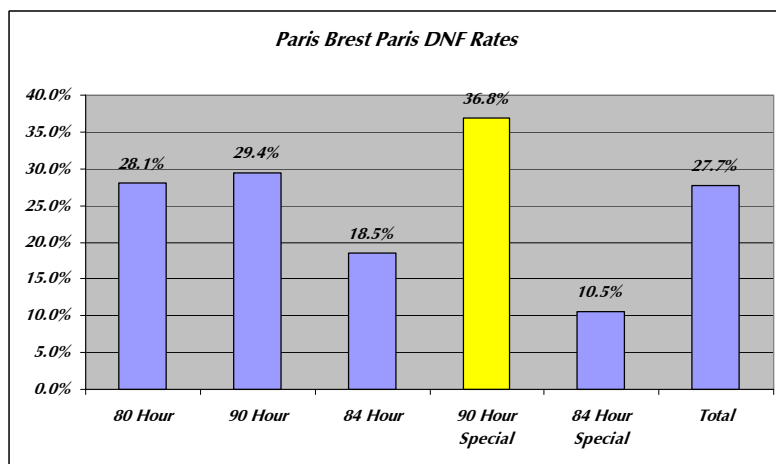


# PBP on a Tandem –

This is a story of a married couple riding Paris Brest Paris 2007 (PBP) on a tandem. I am putting it down as I hope it to be helpful for others in their attempt at this ride. PBP provides a sense of accomplishment and a feeling of satisfaction that no wine tasting tour can touch – not that there is anything wrong with a nice wine tasting tour. I must warn you however, as our new friend from Texas, Dan Driscoll is fond of saying, “the higher the highs – the lower the lows”. While the price of admission to the PBP finishers club is steep, its benefits are great and the lessons learned can be applied to areas far beyond cycling. Lisa and I hope to be there again in 2011. It truly is, as Paul Johnson says, the most fun you can have on a bike.

As first time PBPers we really did not know what to expect. I read the ride reports. I had cycle toured through France and several other countries one summer while in school some 25 years ago. While this helped some, I believe the major factors in our finishing included things like Lisa and I being relatively adventurous travelers. Probably the single most significant factor given that we were riding a tandem, was our shared experience of dealing with a yours, mine, and ours family populated with teenagers and toddlers (5 boys), the youngest of which had bleeding ulcers that made it very difficult for him to sleep for his first two years. This experience had required us to make collaborative decisions, while under duress, when each of us had a strong position to argue from – that we were emotionally attached to, while sleep deprived. Collaborative decision making on PBP was a cakewalk in comparison – there were no trips to the hospital to have our infant operated on while simultaneously trying to get the rebellious teenager to do his homework. It was just a bike ride after all. This does not mean in anyway that we agreed on everything as I will illustrate later.



Another factor that I believe is a strong predictor of finishing is your ability to endure and adapt in the face of constantly changing adversity. This produces an immense feeling of satisfaction when accomplished. I imagine that this taps into some primal instinct of ours, possibly when one’s

ability to endure and adapt in the face of constantly changing adversity was the best predictor of staying alive.

It is best to accept the fact that there is no way that you can account for all factors that will significantly impact your ride. There will be small problems that will lead to severe consequences. Some French mathematician dude named Poincare said something about

this and the need for an increasing amount of precision the more complicated the dynamics – to the point that you will eventually require infinite precision. He was talking about celestial bodies – which unlike the bodies that you will be riding with on PBP – can't change their minds and/or direction for no apparent reason, and believe me, PBP can get complicated. Therefore, read as many other ride reports as you can stand, prepare as best you can, but unless you are capable of infinite precision be ready to throw it all away for plan B, C, or Z. We lost the most time under our control by deciding to stick with a plan that had outlived its usefulness.

I would like to point out a couple of tandem specific issues that those of you on a single bike may not be aware of. One – jokes about one or the other not pedaling are not welcome from passers by. We have heard just about all of the possible variations of the joke before – it is no longer funny. Statements made by either captain or stoker that the other is not trying hard enough are --- well --- them's be fighten words.

Lisa, a former college track star, did not want anyone thinking that she needed me to help her finish. More than one person has expressed surprise when they discovered that we were riding together. Most make the assumption that I am riding and she is coming along to go shopping or something. Other PBP hopefuls on the plane and in Saint Quentin En Yvelines (SQY) who expressed amazement that she was riding too do not likely realize how close to death they had just come.



Because of this, Lisa was very resistant to riding the tandem on PBP, as she wanted everyone to know that SHE was able to finish PBP on her own. Believe me; she could have done it on a single bike. We choose to ride the tandem as equals riding together.

I overcame her resistance by getting her to try the tandem on the first PBP qualifier. The Arizona 200 kilometer course was very tandem friendly and we finished with a personal best time – wow that was fun. Want to ride with your wife – make sure it is more fun for her than it is for you and you won't ride alone again. This works for me – I get to do what I want to and I always have a friend to do it with. This works with kids too.

We completed our PBP qualifiers with the rest of the early season tandem friendly series in Arizona. It was great to know that you were qualified by the end of March; however, this left us without much in the way of hill climbing training.

Rather than risk injury with a bunch of long hilly rides we elected to do some short hard rides -- the King of the Mountain Century series put on by Planet Ultra -- to increase speed, fitness and hill climbing ability. At this point our prior long distance experience

included two Super Randonneur (SR) series and a very wet 1,000 kilometer ride on Vancouver Island BC, in addition to 15 or so Double Centuries on single bikes and our final SR series on the tandem. I had also completed the Gold Rush Randonnée on my own. On the Gold Rush I decided that I prefer riding with Lisa.

I mention this as I believe experience is important in knowing that you can ride together and probably more important is that you want to. Also, long distance experience is invaluable at any time while on the ride if you become doubtful of your ability to finish. Knowing you can is priceless.



Personally, I believe riding one SR series in 2010 with a 1,000k, followed by the 2011 qualifiers and a number of challenging Centuries or 200ks with a Fleche thrown in for good measure is the best way to prepare for PBP.



Another thing I would like to mention to any PBP hopeful is that if it is at all possible, get to Paris early. The pre-rides in around SQY with people that you have corresponded with over the internet, or heard about or from other countries, or all of the above at the same time is just too much fun to pass up. The evening before the ride, Lisa and I were joking to each other... who needs to do the ride – we have already had so

much fun that we can call this a successful vacation.

For our part, meeting and riding with randonneuring legends Dan Driscoll and Pam Wright in the Rambouillet Forest, going to the Rambouillet bird show and having lunch at a quaint French café in the countryside are experiences that can not be bought. The instantly gained camaraderie is earned by qualifying for and then taking on the challenge of PBP.

# The Start

Before PBP I did not really understand why the organizers have all the specials start together. I know now, it is to put all of the nut cases in one place so they can run into each other rather than hurt any of the comparatively sane people. Those of you that think that being in a surging group of riders with widely varying experience levels is dangerous don't have a clue as to how terrifying it is to add widely varying turning radii, braking speeds and the inability of some machines to actually go around a



To this mess was added rain, cobblestones and concrete/stone traffic calming (slowing) infrastructure that has a bad habit of popping out of the darkness in unexpected places. One recumbent rider fell on the first turn, less than 50 yards into the ride – which proved to be a harbinger of things to come. I remember one instance where I had a tricycle just to the right of me when I realized, in the dark, that his rear wheel was not behind him but to his side and practically engaging my foot. At that moment it took on the appearance of a wheel on one of those Roman gladiator chariots – you know, the ones with the knives sticking out.



After several crashes combined with the subsequent emergency braking on slick cobble stone streets and yells of *Attention!* with accents ranging from Japanese to French, my stoker seemed to have poured about four gallons of adrenaline into her system and was putting it to good use in her legs. We keep moving up through the pack, through the crashes, toward the front – where it is supposedly safer. There is no negotiation on this issue as the command from behind is to go forward at all costs. Damn the pacing! Full steam ahead!

Finally the group seems to be stringing out a little and we are out in the countryside where it is very dark. At this point I realize that there are very few riders in front of us. This is not as impressive as it might sound when you think that only 150 or so specials started with us so the total numbers are relatively low, but I was impressed with our position as we are typically a couple of back of the



packers. At this moment I am somewhat disappointed by the fact that I will miss the long string of red lights that is so fondly talked about in the write ups from those riding single bikes. I don't have much time to ponder this as about this time an HPV<sup>1</sup> is trying to take advantage of a downhill section and pass in the left lane. I hear him in his rumbling machine and then I see him in my peripheral vision. When he gets the nose of his machine to about my stoker's handlebars, a turn to the right appears out of the darkness. Less than a moment later a raised median of cobblestones appears between us. Rather than round the corner on the wrong side of the road he slows and then, I assume, tries to pull in behind us. Crossing over the raised median of wet cobblestones in the dark at around 25 mph on a faired tricycle is not something I would want to try, but I suppose it was better than betting ones life that a car would not appear going the other way. The next thing I heard was bad. I did not see it but it sounded like one of those Tour de France crashes on the final turn into a sprint finish where the entire peleton goes down. Our friend Ron Smith who was riding a recumbent just behind us when this happened reported that "everyone got up and got back on their bikes". All were unhappy, but appeared unhurt.

After this crash no one was behind us. We thinned out to eight or ten tandems and were starting to calm down as much as one could in this situation. We were running through towns that looked like they had prepared for an invasion of bicycles, but no other bicycles were there and none of us were stopping. It was an amazing feeling to know that we were the tip of the spear, and the response from the French people on the roadside was an amazing, unforgettable experience.

With all the excitement we had no clue as to where we were. Directions from my navigator consisted of follow those guys and look for arrows. About the time that I was asking her if she had seen an arrow recently, the tandem that we were all following pulled over and pulled out what appeared to me to be a map or route sheet. At this point Lisa and I start negotiating what to do. We have not seen any lights behind us for about a half hour – no help there. Only one bike stopped, the rest were continuing on downhill through town. We rode on debating the issue, trying to keep the tandems in front of us in view, while looking for verification from someone from behind. The route sheet would not have made less sense to us if it had been written in Sanskrit, especially since we did not look at it and less so since we did not even know which town we had just blown through or what road we were on. We finally ended up on a steep, very dark descent. At this point I am very concerned that we don't see any lights behind us – especially those of the tandem that stopped. If we are going the wrong way, we are going the wrong way fast and it will be difficult to get back to the correct route. We decide to turn around and go back up the hill figuring that someone would show up soon if we were on course and if not, at least we are cutting our losses in comparison to those in front of us.

Not long after we turn around, we see lights from behind. Apparently the others came to a similar decision. By the time we got back to the route there was no missing it. The single bikes had caught us and were swarming everywhere. We figure this little side trip cost us 30 to 45 minutes.

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<sup>1</sup> Human Powered Vehicle – in this case a carbon fiber faired recumbent tricycle.

Our original plan was to ride on without stopping until we reached Villaines La Juhel but Lisa relented on a “quick” warm up and food stop at Mortagne Au Perche. We left an hour later – for some reason she is still complaining that I make her stop too much. There were very few riders in the cafeteria and everything was clean. This was the last time things were uncrowded and clean at a control for us on the ride.

After riding through the night with the rain, we were happy to reach Villaines La Juhel. Everyone and everything inside and out was soaked. There we saw Kevin Main, the RBA from San Luis Obispo series who told us that we were doing well. This pleased us as we are typically being told to hurry up. We joked about the rain as Kevin tried to dry out his passport that looked like it just came out of the washing machine. We all handed over wet money to pay for our food.



We continued on with deliberate speed and pretty much kept to our plan of stopping infrequently, and when we did stop, only for a short time as far as I am concerned and for what seemed like constantly stopping and taking forever as far as Lisa is concerned. Lisa was consistently trying to push me through the controls faster. I, on the other hand, like to hang out and eat.



The weather all day was intermittent showers with wind. I do not recall the road ever being dry so even when it was not raining, water and mud was flying in spite of our full fenders and we were not drying out.

Coming into Tinteniac I was getting grumpy which is a sign that I am low on food or sleep or both. Thankfully this was solved at the control and we were on our way again.

When we pulled into Loudeac after 25 hours, an hour longer than our reasonable prediction, we were concerned about falling behind so early in the ride. The dormitory was full. It was raining cats and dogs, we had no hotel reservations and we were confronted with what we thought would be our worst case scenario. We stuck to our plan as best we could. We took a shower, changed into dry clothes and tried to sleep in our bivysacs. Well actually – bivysac as we both crammed into one – a big advantage of liking to sleep closely with the person you are riding with. The big mistake we made

here was trying to sleep in the same area as the RUSA bag drop location. I had brought my iPod and fell asleep quickly, but Lisa was having a hard time as it seemed more and more people were showing up. We were nowhere near the last ones in like we had thought we were.

After a couple of hours she wakes me up to tell me that she is not getting any sleep. OK I am up...

In retrospect since we arrived at Loudeac in fairly good shape, we should have just gone on to Carhaix after a quick food stop and slept there. Depending on how we look at it we feel we lost two to four hours in Loudeac because of this decision.

We hop on the bike and start riding. On one of the first climbs out of Loudeac I feel nature calling. We pull off on a side road, only to be met by two women, at who knows what time in the morning, inviting us to stay at their farmhouse, another example of the incredible support from the French people. We decline thinking that we have already blown our time for sleep in Loudeac. About an hour later we realize the foolishness of our decision when on a climb Lisa announces that she needs to stop and sleep. We stopped in the driveway of someone's house. Another rider had already been there and left an emergency blanket. We used the existing blanket as a ground cover and covered up with one of our own. Tempting fate, I stupidly did not set an alarm. We woke some time later toasty warm with a gaggle of riders climbing by. That stop proved to be our best sleep stop on the ride.

We rode on and it seemed to be an endless journey to Carhaix due to the hills that did a very good job of slowing us down. On the way out of Carhaix the cloud cover broke and the sun finally showed up and we were riding with a good group when Lisa's seat post bolt broke. Our (soon to be old) tandem does not fit exactly, and her seat is set as far back as it will go, putting a lot of leverage on the seat post. Thankfully I was prepared for this with spare parts and tools, but we were bummed to lose the group that we were riding with.

On our way up and over Roc Trévezel the sun came out a little more and the wind increased. The fact that the sun was out was a real mood lifter. The wind, while in our faces, was nothing like riding into a Santa Ana wind and we thought at the time – it would be a tailwind soon. And so it was with some joy that we pulled into Sizun a picture postcard French country town, on a nice sunny day for a bite to eat at a small café. While in Sizun, we found Tom Milton within the large crowd of riders there. Tom was one of our spring Fleche members and is the maker of the Selle Anatomica saddles<sup>2</sup>. I tend to eat a little too fast



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<sup>2</sup> Want to have a little romance in Paris after PBP? – make sure your female riding partner is on a Selle Anatomica – minimizes the destruction of the female “parts”. Both Lisa and Pam swear by them.

for my own good, and I finished before Lisa or Tom. They were eating and chatting. I on the other hand was finished and feeling a little sleepy so I decided to lie down on two chairs and rest my eyes for a moment. I wake up about an hour later. Lisa and Tom are still chatting away like they have all the time in the world. I am having a panic attack as it seems like the place that was teeming with riders when I went to sleep is now deserted. I mention my concern and my response from the two of them is “oh yeah, we better get going”.

The ride into Brest is fun for us as it is generally down hill and we find that we can go downhill fast. There is a bit of a stinger to this section, however, as the last bit into the control is up a very steep hill. I am sure it is not very long but after 600 kilometers more hills are looking like mountains with 30 mile climbs. On the way up, we pass the remnants of what appear to be a head-on collision between a bike and a car. Scary stuff.



While in Brest we meet up with Linda Bott, also from our club - Channel Islands Bicycle Club. We also see Paul Johnson. Paul seems to be doing well, but Linda is complaining of knee problems. I am certain that if it were not for her knee issue, Linda would have been far ahead of us by this time.

With a fairly quick turnaround at the control we start back to SQY. After the only junk mile or two of the entire course, we were back out on bike friendly roads climbing up to Roc Trévezel. We played tag with another mixed tandem team from Seattle, Max and her captain, whose name I think was Peter.

Somewhere between Roc Trévezel and Carhaix, Lisa struck up a conversation with another rider in her broken French. The other rider however soon said that his French was not so good, and knowing that we were American, was expressing frustration at the language barrier. Lisa asked then him where he was from and he replied Spain. She responded in her fluent Spanish, and that sparked a several hour conversation. I

personally found this to be quite enjoyable even though I could only understand about 40% of what Lisa was saying and, with his Castilian accent, practically none of his, but it was like listening to a talk radio show about the cultural differences between France, Spain and the US. I found it fascinating and the miles flew by. After a while the hills separated us from our Spanish, single bike riding friend, Mercurio.



Somewhere near the Carhaix control on the way back it started to rain again. By this time, everything was full of mud. Our supposed tailwind had turned into what felt like a cross/headwind – bummer, headwinds both ways.

Somewhere between Carhaix and Loudeac we passed by Linda Bott, on a climb no less. Those of you that have ridden with Linda and us now know how much pain Linda must have been in for us to pass her on a climb – lots o' pain. We decided to ride for a while with Linda and backed it way off at the top of the hill. We coasted for just a bit downhill and then pulled over to wait for her. We got off the bike. The bike was literally on the edge of the pavement and we were standing on the shoulder of the road, what there was of it, in the mud and grass. About the time that I was starting to think that this grass needed some more fluids, a truck was passing on the other side of the road. Just as the noise from the truck reached its peak, I felt something slam into my shoulder on the side away from the road. I had no idea what hit me, I just knew something did hit me, and what ever it was hit Lisa too. With the sound of the truck diminishing and my eyes adjusting to the darkness once again I realized that a rider must have been blinded by the truck's lights and ended up running off the road to our right. Lisa was hit from behind but saw him go end over end into the ditch next to us with his bike on top of him, after he went over her. The ditch was full of vegetation, which I believe broke his fall somewhat, but he was not moving or responding for a moment or two. Lisa, being an occupational therapist that deals with frequently brain injury, was very concerned about him. I went into the ditch to check on him but he came to rather quickly and got up. We got his bike out of the ditch and some other French speakers, we assumed that were his friends showed up and put him on his bike and they all rode off together. We were left asking each other what the heck just happened and assessing injuries when Linda showed up.

I think there are a couple of lessons here. One, don't pull over on a downhill unless you absolutely have to. And two, invest in lights that enable you to see the road in the conditions you are likely to encounter. The rider that hit us was at least three feet off the road when he hit us. I am very thankful for what used to be Lisa's single bike brevet light, a Light in Motion, Arc Li-ion Ultra. It was not able to keep someone else from hitting us, but one could only imagine what would happen to us if we were the ones that ended up in the ditch. Our light set up of a SON with an E6, a Cateye 1530 and the Arc Li-ion was very expensive in comparison to other setups, but cheap in comparison to a French hospital stay. Riding a 1,200 kilometer ride is dangerous enough without stacking the odds against you with crappy lights. Skimp somewhere else if you have to, get some good lights. Given the rate of change in lighting and battery technology, by the time PBP 2011 rolls around they will probably be able to power aircraft landing lights with one AAA for the entire 90 hours. This is one area where newer is better.

We rode with Linda on and off to Loudeac. When we reached Loudeac, it was pouring rain. This town of 10,000 or so people must really love cycling as the riders of PBP increased their overnight population by more than 50% and the strain on the infrastructure was obvious. Everything was overwhelmed. Fortunately for us, beds were available in the dormitory.

This time we decided to skip the shower and use babywipes for a quick clean up while changing. Unfortunately, we only packed spare shorts, undershirt, socks and jerseys, and had to put all of our wet outer gear back on. We were instantly all wet again. Having changed what we could, we went to the dormitory where we were shown a mattress and given a wool blanket. In spite of the dormitory not being heated and us being all wet the wool blanket kept us warm while we slept. I must apologize to the organizers in Loudeac as I am sure I left a strong aroma there.

On the way out of Loudeac I started experiencing extreme pain from my saddle. Some Nupercainal made a big difference.



The ride from Loudeac to Villaines-la-Juhel was a slog when it started, primarily due to the heavy rain. The rain diminished when the sun came up but hung around intermittently all day. I remember being somewhat jealous at one point passing an HPV whose rider had placed his jacket on top of the opening in the fairing and was sleeping on the side of the road and appeared to be dry and warm while on his bike.

Much of the day was on tandem friendly roads and we made reasonable progress and had opportunities to chat with people from Italy to Alaska. We arrived in Villaines-la-Juhel in good spirits knowing that we were going to finish this ride.

After checking in, we decided to change clothes. After grabbing our drop bag, Lisa asked one of the two RUSA volunteers if we could change in the cab of their truck. He said to her, ok. We hopped in and started to go about it, trying to keep it as clean as possible. The windows soon fogged up so Lisa was not concerned about baring her rear end to the world. What made this experience memorable was the smell. My shoes have been wet from the start and so were my feet. This created an environment perfect for a bacteria and fungus orgy which when combined with wool socks, created an aroma that was enough to gag a maggot. If it had just been my feet I maybe could have done something else about it, but everything smelled. I smelled bad. Lisa on the other hand smelled like a rose after a summer shower in the French Countryside. I was a little embarrassed by this, but really did not know what to do about it other than to formulate a plan to air out the cab of the truck the best we could before we left. Just as we were finishing up the other volunteer jerked opened the door and asked "what the hell are you doing in here?" After our explanation we immediately vacated the cab, and feeling like we had been just chased off did not stick around to air it out. All I can say at this point is that we are very thankful to have been able to use the cab to change in, and truly sorry for the pollution I left there.

After leaving our drop bags and saying thank you to the RUSA volunteers, we headed off to the cafeteria where we found Lone Star Randonneur Gary Smith who was riding PBP for the sixth time and his wife Cathy who was working just as hard providing support along the way.

After dinner we decided to catch a little shut eye on a bench in the cafeteria before going and Cathy said she would wake us up when it was time. Again we are very thankful to those who worked so hard and made it possible for us to finish this ride.

Riding with someone else for 1,200 kilometers is difficult. Each person has their ups and downs and very rarely do these waves of energy and emotion match. On the rare occasions when they do it can be either really good or really bad.

We left Villaines-la-Juhel with Dan and Pam of the Lone Star Randonneurs, who we had met in SQY before the start. It was funny to hear some of the grumbling and mumbling emanating from them. Lisa and I have gone through so much together that it seems to me that we are always *the* couple that is snipping at each other. After 1,000 kilometers of being wet, dirty and tired, we were all out of our comfort zones. (Before judging us too harshly, take your significant other out on a similar ride and see how well you do. If you can finish the ride without killing one another, you have found your soul mate in my opinion.)

As we left Villaines in the rain after being stopped for a while we had all put on jackets and other rain gear. I geared up well. Lisa was getting a little frustrated with me at this point, as she had told me several times during the ride that I was over dressing only to be ignored and then later irritated when I forced her to stop when I needed to take off a few things. Well, I was getting hot on the first climb and starting to sweat my brains out, but I was hoping that the top would come soon so I did not have to listen to her tell me I told you so when Pam announced that she needed to stop to take off her jacket. I immediately supported her excellent suggestion at which both Dan and Lisa were exasperated. On the other hand Dan and Lisa were consoled by the fact that someone finally understood what they were going through.

Later on it was amusing for me to listen to Lisa and Pam debate whether I or Dan was worse to ride with and who would get the better of the other in a trade. Pam thought that Dan needed a nap as he was grumpy, and Lisa just figured I was incapable of getting anything into my thick head for consistently over dressing after each nighttime stop. I guess since I had not said anything in a while, they must have figured that I must have fallen asleep, did not have ears, or something. I imagine taxi drivers feel the same way sometimes.

After a while the undulating terrain did what it always seems to do to us and single bikes, separating us from Dan and Pam.

At the bottom of a fairly fast descent we came upon another tandem couple. I can not even remember if they were French or German, which tells you how out of it I was at the time, but I do remember that they had done London-Edinburgh-London and several other impressive rides together on the tandem. It was interesting that they said that THE most important factor in being successful on such a ride as a couple on a tandem was getting along. Strangely enough, we knew this already.

A little later while riding on our own, I asked Lisa about a funny feeling I was getting through my left foot that seemed to be transmitted through the timing chain. I was thinking that she was wiggling her foot or something. She responded by saying that she thought it was her cleat coming loose. Ok, no big deal, I have an extra set of cleats and the tools necessary to handle that – we can wait until we get to a spot with some lights I think to myself. Less than a minute later, she casually announces she thinks it is the crank arm that is coming loose. This was like the crew on Apollo 13 casually transmitting, “Houston – We have a problem”. Crank arm! I have no spare parts, no tools for crank arm problems! What do you mean, Crank Arm!!! Crap!

Upon inspection, for what ever reason the stoker’s crank arm on the timing chain side was coming loose.

Our PBP bike was a mid-90’s built tandem with an original crankset. Ok, I should have replaced it, but it seemed to be in perfect working order before we left and I had just replaced the chainrings. The age of our crankset was soon to create big problems. The biggest of which is the fact that the bolts on the older Shimano cranks that attaches them to the bottom bracket is a standard head 14mm that is recessed into the crank arm. If it were the newer model with the Allen bolt I would have been able to tighten it up with Allen wrench on my multi-tool.

What was required at this point was a 14mm socket with a ratchet or breaker bar. I had an adjustable wrench, but its jaws were too big to get a bite on the bolt head due to it being recessed in the crank arm. I did have a Leatherman multi-tool however, with a pair of needle nose pliers that could reach in and turn the bolt. As you might imagine, however, the amount of force that could be applied to the bolt while using the pliers perpendicular to the direction in



which they were designed to be used, due to the bolt being recessed, was not much. I was able to apply more force by using my adjustable wrench on the jaws of the pliers, but I knew that I could easily break the pliers this way.

Based upon my foggy memory, Dan and Pam show up in the midst of all this and we ride together for a short period of time but we soon realize that there is nothing that they can do and they go on ahead. At this point we feel like the pioneer family crossing the old west with a wagon train when their horse breaks a leg, very alone and concerned that we are not going to see the Promised Land.

We soon realize that the probability of anyone on the ride having the proper tool was remote, as even I did not bring it on the ride. I did bring one with me to France, but left it in SQY thinking it to be extreme overkill to bring it on the ride. It is late at night; I have no clue as to where I am, let alone a place where I can buy a 14mm wrench.

I am not too concerned about my ability to fix it, but I am very concerned that I will have enough time to fix it. I come from a family that makes the actor on MacGyver look like a joke. (I have never actually watched the show so maybe I am wrong.) I am the least mechanically inclined of my two brothers and father, but then again I am just faced with a busted bicycle. One of many anecdotes that I can relay about my family vacations is the time that we were about half way down the Baja Peninsula and one of the front spindles broke on the Baja Bug our friends were driving. After retrieving the wheel from a nearby lagoon, we considered the situation. We were about a day away from the nearest paved road/town and two days away from any place likely to have the part to fix it. We had spares, but they would not work on this particular buggy for reasons I can't remember. My dad ended up hooking up some jumper cables to the car battery and using some welding rod that we brought along in case we got to a town with a welder, but no rod (things like that used to happen in Mexico – best to come prepared). He put some soot from a fire on a pair of sunglasses and with these tools arc welded the spindle back on. The front wheel of the car stayed on all the way back to the US. I could go on for days with stories like this, but I digress.

We limp along, insufficiently tightening the bolt with the pliers wrench combo, riding for five or ten minutes and repeating. I am getting very concerned that the square taper is becoming enlarged and rounded which will make the crank arm difficult if not close to impossible to patch with the amount of time that we have available.

Getting frustrated by our limited progress and with a town on the horizon, I decide to go for broke as with the current rate of progress, we are not going to make it anyway. I tell Lisa that I am going to tighten the bolt as much as possible, hopefully solving the problem, but that this will break the pliers in the process and that we will be completely without tools to turn the bolt.

Snap!

This works great – for about twice as long as our typical cycle of riding, stopping and tightening, except we now have no tool.

We continue along riding with her left foot off the crank arm. While all the force from me is transmitted through the timing chain to this arm, the lack of any side to side motion

from her left leg seems to help slightly. This works about as well as you might think it would – not real good. Try riding some day uphill with one leg off the pedals to get an idea of how fast we were going.

Suddenly, a miracle occurs. Some French cycling fans are passing out coffee and biscuits along the side of the road at what ever ungodly hour it is by this time. We pull in and try to explain our problem. Neither Lisa nor I have any idea as to how to communicate what our problem is and no one there speaks English. I point to the bolt on the crank arm and motion with my hand and I get a look of understanding from one of the men at the stop. I feel as if my ass just got pulled out of the fire. He indicates 10 minutes, something we do understand, and he leaves in his car.

He returns with a socket set including the all important 14mm socket and ratchet.

Another American who has stopped says to tighten it up as much as I can as I can not possibly break the bolt – based upon his experience working in a bike shop. I respond in the affirmative, but as a person that has busted more bolts than I care to admit to by over tightening them in the hope of keeping them from vibrating loose while off roading in Baja, I know that he is wrong. When I got back home and was putting on the new crank set, it said to use 60 ft. lbs. I may be a long way from my prime bench press days of 275 lbs, but I sure as hell can put way more than 60 ft. lbs of force on that puny crank arm bolt. I apply as much force as I dare – significantly more than 60 ft. lbs and hope that our problem is solved.



The crank arm seems secure, but I do not want to be without tools again and I offer to purchase the tool from my new best friend (I never asked him his name – who ever you are, Thank You). He indicates that it is his only one and does not wish to part with it. I was prepared to pay around \$100.00 for the tool that I can pick up at Harbor Freight Tools for around a \$1.50 but I could not communicate this and in no way wanted to be an ugly American to my fabulous host. We thank him profusely and

we are on the road again.

After about twenty minutes I hear the dreaded message again from Lisa – it is coming loose.

We limp along as best we can, babying it as best we can to not enlarge and round out the square taper so much that it can not be shimmed.

Checking our mileage from the last control and comparing it to the route profile we had along, we estimated that we were getting close to the control in Mortagne Au Perche.

With a steep hill to climb and about five kilometers to go, she instructs me to go on without her. I protest, saying that I do not think it is the thing to do for me to leave her, the mother of my children, alone, somewhere in the middle of France at who knows what in the morning. She responds in such a way that makes it clear that I am to get on the bike and get to the control and fix it as she has no intention of DNFing at this point. Yes dear.

I ride on alone. The bike handles poorly without her but with the diminished weight I do not feel the wobble from the crank arm. I give it all I got. I pass multiple single bikes on the climb into the control. Upon reaching the control, the small crowd cheering riders coming in stops cheering and suddenly gasps of *Abandonee* become barely audible. I don't have time to explain, even if I could, so I ride in and seek out the mechanic.

In the meantime, Lisa is now jogging, uphill, in road cycling shoes with Shimano SPD-SL cleats to the control. The first thing she notes is that without any lights (even her map light was in my camelback) it is very dark out there. So dark that she even has trouble staying on the pavement. She was very concerned that a rider coming up on her would run into her as she had no lights on her, so she came to yelling out *Attention!* as they appeared.

The other riders were very confused by seeing someone obviously riding PBP between controls without a bicycle. Not knowing what else to say to them she simply told them "gran problem avec bicyclette". You don't say...

Apparently her jogging did not bother one French rider that passed her that was obviously hallucinating. From what she could understand, he was saying something along the lines of "they are all going the wrong way", "they don't know where they are going, only I know where to go". He was weaving so severely she thought he would soon be running off the road, but he kept on going.

Upon finding the mechanic's station, my hopes of spare parts and tools were quickly dashed. The "mechanic" was in the heated area selling spare inner tubes, light jackets, gloves etc. and was wearing a very clean white sweater. When informed of my problem through an interpreter, the man in the white sweater guided me outside to the mechanics tent where he looked at some nearly empty boxes that contained a few cables and a derailleur or two but nothing that even remotely resembled a crank arm, where upon he shrugged his shoulders and frowned. Translation – you are screwed pal.

Ok – Plan B.

How about a 14mm socket?

More looking at the same empty boxes, the same shrug, the same frown.

Crap!

I am left to myself in the mechanics tent.

Lisa shows up, and quickly runs off to get some food while I use my few remaining operating brain cells to plan my next option.

Sitting there somewhat stunned by the experience, a fellow rider with a heavy accent asks me where the mechanic is. Thinking that he is French, I explain to him the situation that the real mechanic is likely at home in bed (how dare he sleep at 4:00 am!) with his tools.

He expresses his frustration that his bike is not shifting well. This is no big deal and I fix it for him by turning the barrel adjuster.

I then ask if he could do me a favor, and help me find a 14mm socket by translating for me – to which he responds – “I can’t speak French, I am German”. Crap! Ok I am obviously not thinking too clearly – if I ever do.

Lisa soon returns with a plate full of food.

I tell her of the situation. I need a 14mm socket, a ratchet, and some aluminum foil for a shim, and she says ok and leaves me with the food.

I am alone in the mechanics tent, privacy for the first time since starting PBP. I have absolute confidence that Lisa will show up with the necessary tools and parts soon – she is truly in her element on this one.

My most sublime moment on PBP was sitting in the mechanics tent while looking at the crank arm and eating haricots and mashed potatoes. It was strangely relaxing knowing that there were no demands upon me other than to eat at the moment.

Sure enough, before I finish eating, she showed up with the required tools and shortly after with the foil.

She learned from a volunteer interpreter how to say 14mm socket in French and then proceeded to ask just about every local person if they knew how to get their hands on one. Success came when a man led her down a dark alley to his car and pulled one out of his trunk. (This made her a little nervous, but she has also treated patients whose brain injuries were from a drive by shootings and the known South Central Los Angeles gang members were concerned that the other guys were coming back to



finish the job during her therapy sessions. So I suppose it is all relative to other experiences.)

She went to the kitchen assuming that aluminum foil would be an easy one but this was not to be.

The only foil to be found was part of a bag liner to a box of cereal, and that was foil coated plastic.

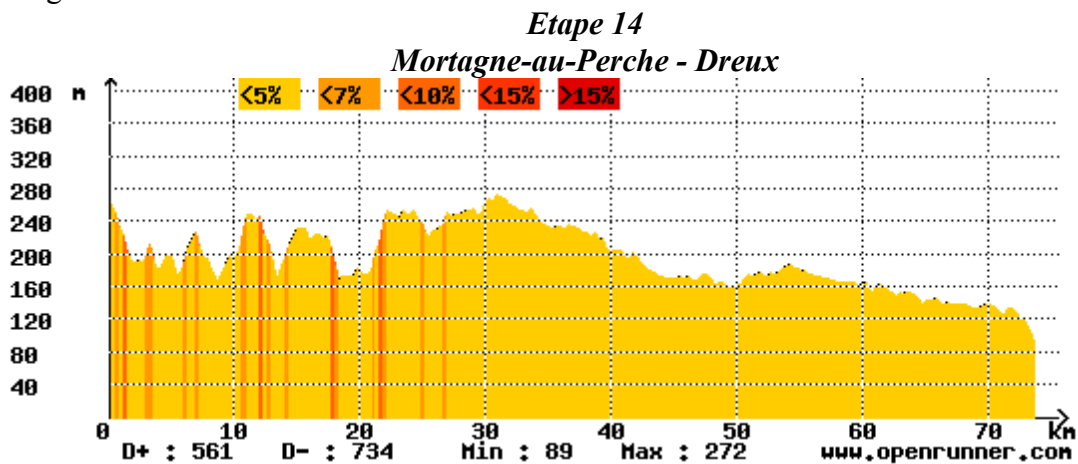
I was concerned about the plastic bit – but on the other hand, figured it may work better, either way I had no choice. I reassembled everything, offered to purchase the tool – no luck.

The crank arm seemed very secure and seemed to seat well with the foil shim.

Off we go. Well, not yet.

Lisa's cleats were completely worn out from her jog. I replaced them quickly, but when we were on the climbs out of Mortagne Au Perche, we soon realized what time it was.

We would have to smoke the next section to make it before the control closed for us. Having the possibility of DNFing PBP after all we had been through at this point put a little panic into our system and we started griping at each other to pedal harder and faster. (She started it... Honest.) Knowing that getting into a full blown argument would eliminate all hope of finishing PBP on time, I change tactics, sue for peace and beg for forgiveness.



Having looked at the stage profiles many times on my computer at home, I knew that if we had to make up time on a stage, the one coming into Dreux was the one to do it on. All we had to do was get out of these damn hills and onto the 1% downhill grade that lasted for about 40 kilometers into Dreux.

After what seemed like forever, we finally get out of the hills and we start putting the hammer down on the slight downgrade. We begin rapidly passing individual riders and

small groups. All of the other specials, that started earlier than the single bikes, are either DNF or way ahead of us. A Frenchman that was about as tall as Napoleon caught our rear wheel. With our limited ability to communicate, he asked if it was ok to stay in our draft even though he could not pull for us. We told him to enjoy the draft as it was going to waste otherwise. We also told him what our control time in Dreux was and that we were trying to make it, he first responded with "it's impossible" (in French) but a moment later he said maybe... if we go fast.

We continued on, passing increasingly larger groups of riders as they collected themselves together on the seemingly flat road. We had collected a fair size group of riders behind us when we came upon Dan and Pam. We took a quick breather at the back of their group, but told them that we had to motor given our control time.

We kicked it in gear and moved to the front and Dan took up a position directly behind us announcing to the group of twenty or so people that he was our domestique. At this point I was focused on getting to Dreux on time, nothing more. I don't think that we were going that fast, but with the advantage of the tandem on the flats we were going faster than any of the single bikes could hope to maintain. After a while, I was beginning to fade and told Dan that we needed a break.

At that moment, the most wonderful thing happened. Dan, in his Texas drawl, started yelling out to the peleton we had been pulling for miles by now to "take one for the team!" and to "get up there and pull - these people need to make their control time in Dreux". His down home Texas drawl and the message he sent with it to the European group of riders we were towing brought as much of a smile to my face then as it does now. This was absolutely the highlight of my PBP.

No one volunteered and we were going to have to back it off when suddenly the little French guy that we had been pulling for about twenty miles by now showed up. He expertly positioned himself and provided us with a much needed break and proved himself to be as strong as an ox. After his pull and a few others from less expert riders, we were ready to go again.

We went to the front again and hit the after burners. I was feeling like Hercules, I figured it would not last, but we were not that far from Dreux and we might just make it on time.

About this time a camera car from France 3 television came along and stayed on us for a couple of minutes. Most of the footage got edited out, but we did make it on French TV for a moment and we were able to see it on the internet. Very cool.

Not much later we pull into Dreux, with six minutes to spare. Wow what a great ride. I get to sit down, get something to eat and take a nap right? "No!" is the answer from the stoker. What do you mean no, I am hungry, I am tired, I need a break. "We don't have time" is the response. This sounds strangely familiar to me and our 1,000 km on Vancouver Island where I forced Lisa to ride on despite her desire not to. As they say, payback's a... well you know what they say about payback.

After a quick check at the mechanics tent on the crank arm bolt and a re-supply of food, water and cola to be carried on the bike we were off.

Dan had told us before the ride, the higher the highs the lower the lows. I had the high and I was about to suffer a serious low. As much fun and strength as I had from Mortagne Au Perche to Dreux I was suffering and weak from Dreux to SQY. My rear end suddenly seemed to scream out in pain. I had no energy. All I wanted to do is lay down. Put a fork in me – I am done. Fried to a crispy crunch. Toast! I do not know how else to say it.

Lisa would not have any of this – we are not going to DNF now! Pedal faster!

To add to my misery, the final run in to SQY was a grand champion route in the French tradition that winded its way through every town and village between Dreux and SQY to celebrate our success of finishing PBP. It was truly a beautiful route, and I am sure if I was riding for the day in and around the area it would have been a wonderful ride – but I wanted to get to SQY and get off this %^&\$^&! bike! Screw French tradition, my butt is killing me and I am tired! It had been overcast all day but it had not rained – yet; naturally it started raining. Then they had signs out that said 20 kilometers to go and after about 18 kilometers came a sign that said 10 to go. Are these people trying to kill me! Are they on drugs? Can't they figure out that I am in pain here and that I want to get to SQY? I still swear that they had us going in circles in the towns. I truly believe we went by the same intersection twice in different directions. It was very clear to my stoker that I was not happy about the situation and she made it abundantly clear to me that my happiness was immaterial and that I was to continue with all my strength or else.

We finally arrive in SQY and when slowing down to navigate the narrow plywood ramp over the curb to the final control, Sandra Summers popped out of the crowd, followed by Larry Bott and Roger Macomber. Sandra and Roger had completed PBP in 2003 and it was their presentation of the ride to our club that inspired us to ride it in 2007. We



quickly were directed to the control to check in. Lisa got off the bike and ran ahead, while I brought the bike down to the control. On the way I was met by Susan Jacobson, the stoker of another tandem couple that we rode many of the Santa Cruz brevets last year with. She mentioned that they had DNF'd and then asked me how it felt to finish. I responded with a blank stare. Inside of me, however, was a welling up of emotions that was nearly uncontrollable and it was all I could do to manage from breaking down in tears. Then like a wave

from a warm summer swell in Malibu, the realization lifted me up and washed over me; we had finished – with time to spare no less. All my pains suddenly disappeared.

After checking in we went back to the area where our club friends were waiting for Linda Bott to come in. A woman with a camera interviewed me and asked that since I had finished, if I was ready to throw the bike away – I responded by saying that I was thinking of cutting it in half. Not long after we saw Dan and Pam go by and we gave a good cheer for them. Someone gave me a sandwich that I inhaled and moments later I found a nice patch of dry concrete that proved to be quite comfortable to take a short nap until Linda showed up.

By the time we met everyone from our club for dinner a couple hours later, we were already planning on what to do differently in 2011. We will cut the bike in half, but to put on couplers to make it easier to travel with. If we are able, we will be in Paris in 2011, ready for PBP and hoping to better our official time of 89:25. I hope to see you there. The depth and breadth of experiences and emotions you find on the ride make sure you know that you are alive and living life to its full measure.

The morning after the ride we had to get up early to pick up our two youngest that were being escorted by our oldest to the airport in Paris. But that is another story.

