

PA 600K (the watered down version)

I have ridden a bit with Maile Neel, of the DC Randonneurs, but THIS weekend, we got to know each other on a whole different level... When I ride with people like Mitch Lesack, or Doug Levy, we know each others riding styles, and we anticipate reactions to issues on the road, or whatever else comes up. This weekend, riding with Maile, we established that same sort of camaraderie, and it is always welcome to find that on the road! 600K translates into, for this ride, 374 miles, but Maile and I didnt think that was enough, so we added an extra eight, and we added a couple extra hills.. Just because

This weekend was to be the Pre-ride of the 600K where we would be checking the cue sheet and the road for problems that would increase the difficulty for people riding the actual 600K this coming weekend. Before the ride started, I received an e-mail suggesting that we start the 600 on Sunday due to the horrific weather forecast predicting lightning, hail, wind, maybe a tornado, oh, and rain. Unfortunately, for me, I could not escape from work on Monday, so regardless of the wet forecast; we were going to have to go on Saturday. The first 35 miles were very reasonable. We rode through Hellertown, Bethlehem, and then straight up toward Blue Mountain. The people at the control were very nice to us, and since that particular Turkey Hill was used multiple times during the Brevet Series, after telling them to expect more riders next weekend, we were off.

There are plenty of difficult climbs, and while the climb to the top of the Blue Mountain ridge is not the most difficult of climbs, it really does offer a spectacular view as the Appalachian Trail is crossed, and with broad sweeping turns, a relatively smooth road surface, as well as a long distance for stopping at the bottom, it is one of the easier hills to bomb down. Rolling across the floor of the valley is very peaceful. The combination of the scenic views coupled with the low traffic made for a very nice ride. We saw dark clouds moving in and around all day, but closing in on Delaware Water Gap, the first rain started dropping out of the sky, but it did not start to pour until we dashed into the bakery that was the control. There was a large variety of food to choose from, and since it was pouring outside, we decided to sit and eat. Hindsight being 20/20, knowing what awaited us at the seating area, I believe I speak for both of us when I say that I would much rather have been in the rain without food, and given my love for food, THAT IS SAYING SOMETHING!!

The first thing we received, during the next 20 some odd minute assault on our ears, was a naked accusation of being too stupid to read the weather report, as one member of a couple sitting a couple tables away decided to start a conversation that covered everything from the weather, to gambling, to an intense discussion of chaffing while wearing dress slacks. Fortunately, for me, that question was directed to Maile, EXPERT on mens chaffing while wearing, amazingly enough, dress slacks! While that bit of suffering could easily rank up there with anything we endured on the entire 600K, at least it only lasted 20 minutes! (though, at the time we both swore it was more like 20 hours.)

With the rain gone, we took off, and headed north on the Jersey side of the Water Gap, along the 12 mile rolling (with an upward trend) section to the historic Millbrook Village. The last time I rode to Millbrook along that stretch of road, it was the middle of the night, and about 22 degrees, but I did not spend much time thinking about THAT. The next 20 some miles were well known to both of us, though having been there the weekend before on the 400K, she informed me that they finished paving the road, and it was VERY nice. Fresh Phalt is always welcome! The Hainesville Deli was a short control, a quick fill up, alerting the people of the ride next weekend, and off we went. Oh, I was corrected in my pronouncing of the name of the town Hawley. According to the women of Hainesville, it is pronounced HAW-lee. (Don't forget to make a note of that)

I had taken it easy on some of the descents given that the road was wet, and knowing I would be hitting the Dingmans Ferry Bridge, this descent was no different. Once across, we made our way up to and on Rt 209. Characterized by the long easy rollers, we moved north easily to our next cue that would take us up the ridge. Easily one of the more difficult climbs on the course, the road was quiet, and with the lack of any auto traffic, it made the fact that we were working hard, a little less difficult to deal with. Once across Rt 6, we started going down. Rolling with a definite downward trend before hitting the stretch that took me to the fastest I had been going so far on the trip. A very nice downhill, with broad sweeping turns, the cars could not pass us due to the fact that we were going well over the speed limit! Once in Barryville, we were charged to investigate the River Market General Store where, if it was a good spot, would be used for the control. Well, If in Barryville, Maile and I HIGHLY recommend the almond

brownies, because they are to die for!

Once we left, we headed up the river to cross Roebling Bridge, the oldest suspension bridge, I believe, in the nation. However, as beautiful as that scene was, and as beautiful as the ride up Tow Path road next to the old canal as we headed away from the Lackawaxen area was, and before we made our turn that marked 4 miles to the next control, the sky opened up on us as we were cresting a hill! I sort of ducked down and continued to crank forward, right up until I heard this shout of alarm. Turning around I caught the vision of Maile nearly being blown off of her bike from the wind! Ducking under a big tree (the only available shelter in our area,) the horizontal rain kept blowing on us. I thought of the resemblance to the movie Caddy Shack as I turned to Maile and said: I think the really bad stuff is going to miss us. Punctuated by a horrific kaboom as the lightning came down.. Maile, looking at me, was obviously thinking: Why did I agree to ride with this idiot! Then she started laughing Now I will say that I really did not like the idea that we were standing under a tree with metal screws holding our cleats to our feet as we were standing in the mud with the lightning coming down, but I was correct when I said that the worst of the storm was going to bypass us, because those lightning booms did not actually make it closer than about 5 seconds (however many miles that works out to be..) A couple stopped to see if we were OK, and of course, covered in debris, we both said: Oh we're fine! (I mean what an absurd question... Clearly we are NOT fine!) They proceeded to tell us that there were power lines and trees down up the road a bit, and I asked them if we could make it to the bridge across the canal, and they said that it was OK to that point before we said good by and they took off. Once the major rain was over, we found that our turn was no more than 100 yards away, so thankfully no downed power lines to avoid..

The next control point was dark when we arrived, but not because it was closed, instead, it was dark because there was no power! (Probably had to do with the downed lines, down the way.) We were not far from Lake Wallenpaupack, but that was the furthest thing from our minds at the time. Right then, we were both thinking about getting warm and dry! The Caf  that was the control had no power, but DID have a working grille, so we were able to have hot sandwiches in the form of burgers. Once leaving that control, we headed pretty much directly south, or as directly south as the

roads would permit. The route back to Delaware Water Gap, being direct, is not necessarily that much fun, however, the majority of it was seen at night, so I am pretty sure I am not being entirely fair. We were a little less than 10 miles from the control, when I thought I was hallucinating! I see this car passing us coming from where we were headed, and I swore I heard this Its ME! I continued riding, as it started to occur to me that there might have been some real significance to that, and as I stopped and turned around, I see the car turning around, and it actually dawned on me that I was NOT hallucinating! It was Tom Rosenbauer, RBA Extraordinaire! He had dry clothes, soup, sandwiches, basically Randonneur food This was very welcome, because it was definite that we would be forced to use the secondary control in Water Gap, and that held little appeal for me, having been there once before. So onward we forged, in the relative silence of the night, stopping briefly in Water Gap before continuing on to the south.

It was about 5 miles later that we saw these orange barrels standing in the middle of the road, signifying that the road was closed, so we weighed our options. I informed Maile about the available options, and I was very honest in my opinion of them. (Honesty like that is reserved for the road and NOT the report.) Luck was clearly on our side when we discovered nothing but clear road all the way to the Belvidere Bridge. We were both needing caffeine at this point, and we definitely slowed down from here, through the next control all the way to what we used as the sleep stop in Quakertown. True Luxury is a fresh pair of bike shorts after 400K and/or a thunderstorm! We spent a total of about an hour at the sleep stop, but we both felt rejuvenated, and while I was doing most of the navigating, Maile was making all of the course correction notes. We rode at an easy sustainable pace to the first control, where my only thoughts were of eating and food My eyes spied the firehouse located right next door, and they were serving breakfast, so at that suggestion, (I didnt have to say anything about food twice) We were there! I have to say that the breakfast at the Gilbertsville Fire House was just awesome!

Now the next stage was tough. Meandering around Pottstown through to Morgantown has quite a few short steep crunchers, as well as two long dragging climbs. The down side was that we had a headwind from this point all the way to Blue Ball, in Lancaster County. The upside was the fact that we would DEFINITELY have a tail wind

coming back! We were running up against the clock at both of the last controls before we turned around, but when we did, we gained 15 minutes back out of the first 10 miles of the last 100K, then, on the way back from Morgantown, we had the most awesome tailwind coupled with two long descents! Despite the fact that there were several steep crunchers on this stage, near the end, we managed to gain back an extra half an hour! Also encountered on this stretch was an RBA on a bicycle! Tom came out on his bike, and rode the last 50 miles or so with us! Knowing that we would be having the course designer within punching range, Tom STILL got on his bike and rode with us!

So here we were, at the Turkey Hill next to the Fire House again, only this time, we just grabbed some liquid, ice, and away we went with about an evenings ride to go! Tom routed the course a different way back from the way out, and while there are some hills on it, the roads have much less traffic, much fewer cars driving on it, and much more interesting scenery. Over all, I would not trade this route out for anything. We arrived to the finish at 20:12, and then added the last 4 bonus miles back to the Hotel. After showering and changing into non-cycling attire, Tom Maile and I went to dinner to discuss the route changes and trade stories from this ride as well as others. Up until Friday AM, I was not sure if I would be riding the 600K by myself, but I am very happy to have shared the road with Maile. There is never such a thing as an easy 600K, and riding one with another demented freak is always preferable to riding alone. I want to thank Tom Rosenbauer for designing the series, as well as the courses. Being an RBA is not an easy job, if one does the job properly, and little efforts, like driving his car an hour away from his nice warm home, so he can meet two riders, on a long lonely road, in the middle of the night goes above and beyond. Tom, RESPECT and GRATITUDE!

On a final note, Maile Neel is relatively new to randonneuring, and in a sport with few women, she did not stop to question whether or not she could, she just did! To those reading this wondering if they could ever do this kind of a ride, let me say that you never know what you CAN do, until you stop saying you can't! Keep the rubber side down, and Ill see you on the road!