

Steve Scheetz

In my short cycling career, I have had the privilege of riding with some of the best athletes in the world, in some of the most difficult events devised.

Starting at the end of July, 2002, I started to make rapid progress. Weighing 250LBS, I had a difficult time sitting in the saddle for a mere four miles! However, with hard work, a strong sense of will, and an instant love for the sport, I was able to ride my first metric century within 3 weeks, but my riding did not stop there. After that ride, training took place in all sorts of weather. I trained so that I could put together my first century ride. (100 miles in one day.)

From the beginning riding was a learning experience. I started my riding on a Lemans Centurion, “steel is real,” bike that was sitting in my closet since the early 1990’s, and almost instantly, I tried to find ways to ride further and faster. My first course of action was to build my new bike from the wheels up! This took some time, because I knew nothing about bicycle components. Not realizing the difficulty that my size added to the general equation of bike building, my goal was to build the lightest bike, as inexpensively as possible.

This process created a light bike, but in riding it, it was found that some components were not necessarily the best for me.

In 2003, I started USCF racing, and it was during my first race that I noticed signs that the wheels I built were starting to fall apart, and after destroying the wheels that I built, (I created them to be as light as possible, not realizing that they would be too light for me,) I invested in another wheel set that would be stronger and more durable if noticeably heavier. Over the course of that year, I finished my first double century ride, while training for the races. (In hindsight, the very idea of attempting to train for the two VERY DIFFERENT types of events is ridiculous.)

2004 is the year that I discovered ultra-cycling. The year started with me building another bicycle, one which would be better suited for longer distance riding. I discovered that wheel building was an activity that was enjoyable, particularly when I was trying to write a paper for one of my business courses but had writer’s block! I used my equipment well, and in the winter of 2003/2004, I dropped a dramatic amount of weight. I went from

230lbs, near the end of the previous racing season, to 190lbs, a weight that I feel strong and comfortable riding long distances.

During the course of 2004, my training partner, Doug Levy, and I rode and finished the Jersey Double, finishing in the top 10, and on the following weekend, we finished the Nightmare Tour, of Lancaster County, with over 13,600 feet of climbing in the 200 mile option, top 10 also. Two weeks after that, we went to Markleyville, California, and rode the Death Ride. We were among the small group that finished the optional 6th mountain pass. During the rest of July, I took it very easy, but in August, I began to build for the Furnace Creek 508. There was nothing in my life that could have prepared me for this, given my lack of experience for this type of riding, but I went out and tried my best. Despite the fact that I did not finish, I DID set some personal records that helped me to move forward. For example, the first double century of the course took us to the bottom of Townes Pass 207 miles in to the race. 11 hours and 10 minutes beat my previous time record by an hour and a half! (If anyone is wondering, there was over 4,000 feet more climbing in this double century than my other fastest timed double.) At the time I DNF'd, I finished with 330 miles, and that was the most miles I have ever done at one time.

This is not an excuse, but everyone who was in Death Valley on the night of that race will tell the stories about the brutal 40MPH headwind that we all struggled against in Death Valley. I will finish my thought about Furnace Creek by saying that I am not finished with that course, and I am going back to the desert October 7, 2006!

2005 was another year of firsts. I began my riding year with a century ride on January 1, and my training partners, Mitch Lesack, who finished 9th at Furnace Creek in 2004, and Doug Levy, were both with me. This past year, we decided that our main goal would be Boston Montreal Boston. In this endeavor, we all worked solidly for the next eight months. During our Brevet Series, we finished strong, and were dubbed by our fellow Randonneurs as "The Pennsylvania Express!" On the 600K, we had horrendous conditions regarding the temperature and humidity. I will not say that it was difficult; I will say that only 10 of the starters actually managed the feat of finishing. My group lost one member, Doug Levy who is RAAM qualified, at the halfway point due to breathing issues. At that point we gained a member who rode with us through the night, and on the

second day Mitch Lesack and I managed to gain a new member, Judson Hand, when Mike Martin decided that he needed to take a nap. Through the 106 degree temperature with 95% humidity we rode and managed to finish 3rd in 37:44, time limit was 40 hours. The hard work did not stop there, within only two weeks; I finished my 9th double century, for the year, and after that I started to taper for BMB, though it was not actually planned that way. Life seemed to get in the way of training in the last few weeks of July, so I was unable to do any long rides until August. At that time, I discussed some long ride options with Mitch, and he told me that it was a bit too late to be thinking about riding that kind of distance given the proximity of BMB, and I took his words to heart given the fact that he did BMB several times. So the week of my first BMB rolled around, and I was both excited and apprehensive. I set a goal for myself to finish in a certain time, but when that goal became impossible, it did not stop me. I just took my time and made a more enjoyable experience out of BMB! I finished in 80 hours, feeling happy and relaxed. Upon realizing the impossibility of my time goal, there was no pressure, and I formed friendships that I hope will last for many years to come!

Now, having finished my first BMB, more than 500 miles of which were ridden alone, I know where my weaknesses are, and I know where my strengths are. With over 12,000 miles logged in for the year, and 12 double century rides, 2005 was the best training year I have had so far.

2006 was a strange year. Our randonneuring group lost its RBA, and the new one, while not yet tried, was unsure if he was going to be able to have the 400K and 600K actually count for BMB qualification. That was in February. I e-mailed the event coordinator and asked if we could still ride BMB if we were unable to have our results recognized by RUSA, and when she said "NO," I changed my plan for the year to include a second trip to the Desert for another ride through Furnace Creek. I did the full series, achieving a second "Super Randonneur" designation, (it turned out that the 400K and 600K did count for qualification, but I decided against doing BMB given the proximity to the Furnace Creek race.)

In 2007, I intend to work on completing 3 full qualification series for Paris Brest Paris, and after that, I intend to be solo RAAM qualified in 2008 with the intent to race in 2009.