



You Enjoy a Challenge?

Randonneuring: The 2010 Florida 1000K

By: Paul Rozelle

Paul Rozelle has completed five 1200-kilometer Grand Randonnées (two of them on a fixed gear) including the 2007 Paris-Brest-Paris and has twice qualified for The Race Across America. Paul currently lives in St. Petersburg and races for 66 Fixed.

What do you do when a century is no longer challenging? Take up randonneuring.

For the uninitiated, “randonnées” are organized, long-distance, self-supported rides, between 200 and 1200 kilometers long.

The sport is over 120 years old -- the Tour de France traces its origin to the Paris-Brest-Paris 1200K Grand Randonnée, which was first held in 1891. With the next edition of the Paris-Brest-Paris in August 2011, PBP is the oldest on-going cycling event in the world.

To ensure riders stay on course, they must pass through “controls” or check points located along the route about 40 miles apart. The rider carries a “brevet card,” on which information is recorded at each control, proving passage through that point within the time limit.

“Self-supported” means no SAG, no team vehicle, and no support outside the controls. Also, the clock runs continuously, whether you’re riding, resting, or broken down. It’s no wonder professionals stopped racing PBP in 1951, deeming the event too difficult.

Randonneuring is not, however, traditional bicycle racing. Although there are time cut-offs (for example, a 200K must be completed in 13:30), all riders who finish within time are listed alphabetically, with no special recognition of the first finisher. The sport promotes and encourages camaraderie in lieu of competition.

Obviously there aren’t a lot of 1000K events; it’s a long way to ride a bike in the required 75-hour time limit, and safe to say not a lot of riders involved either. Also, there isn’t glory in a 1000K, you do this ride because you want to. With a little luck, you may get a pat on the back from the event organizer and a cold beer. But complete a 1200K, especially PBP, and you get serious recognition of completing one of the most renowned cycling events ever, a cool medal and finisher’s jersey. Lets RIDE!

The Florida 1000K divides roughly into three days: 255 miles the first day, 200 the second, and 165 on the third. If you keep a good pace with minimal stops, you may build up enough of a time cushion to recharge with a few hours’ of sleep each night. On Day 1, the route runs north from the start at Indian Harbour Beach to New Smyrna (mile 77) and Palm Coast (mile 128), then turns inland to East Palatka (mile 160), Seville (mile 199), and Tavares (mile 255).

The route travels south for all of Day 2. The riders climb Sugarloaf Mountain Road and the hills west of Lake Apopka with nearly 300 miles in their legs. They then trek to Clermont (mile 290), through the Green Swamp to Haines City

(mile 339), Avon Park (mile 394), and finally hit Lake Okeechobee at mile 455. The next civilization is sixty miles away in Hobe Sound, so most riders sleep in Okeechobee before continuing on.

The route finishes by exiting the Everglades on Kenner Highway and then travels the spectacular Gomez/Beach Road into Jupiter (mile 523). It then turns north for the last century, along the Indian River and on the barrier islands and stopping in Ft. Pierce (mile 569) before finishing, 621 miles after the start, back in Indian Harbour Beach.

Forty-one riders from as distant as San Francisco and as close as Melbourne lined up for the mass-start at 5am on Friday, October 14. Anthony Parsells, whose plan was to finish in 40 hours with no sleep, along with John Preston, set a scorching pace that had the large lead group cover the first 77 miles to New Smyrna Beach in under 4 hours.

Hamid Akbarian of Boca Raton and I quit the hammerfest at that point and instead enjoyed a casual breakfast. We knew we would see most of the lead group again later in the ride: they wouldn’t be able to ride fast for long eating only gas station food.

Hamid and I would ride the entire event together. In randonneuring, having a riding



companion who can make you laugh with hundreds of miles in your legs as well as do yeoman's work at the front is critical. Hamid is not only Superman on a bike (he had just completed a 1,001-mile event in Italy with a 130-hour time limit), more importantly he's hilarious and always in good spirits.

As the day wore on, we reeled in other riders and had a good-sized group through the Bulow Plantation Ruins Historic State Park, including brothers and riding partners Brian and Robert Kennedy. Sharing the road with the thousands of Harley riders out in force for Biketoberfest was entertaining and helped pass the countless miles. Turning inland, with the wind now at our sides, provided relatively easy riding to Tavares, where we arrived at 11:30p.m. and enjoyed five hours of sleep.

The forecast was for 10mph tailwinds all day and everyone, besides me, was excited. Did I mention I was riding a fixed-gear bike requiring constant pedaling? Flat terrain and tailwinds on a fixed-gear can be rough: you get locked into one position and one cadence on the bike, which heightens the discomfort inherent in riding hundreds of miles. With this in mind, I savored the hilly terrain through the chain-of-lakes region. Climbing Sugarloaf Mountain Road at sunrise, with 270 miles in our legs, was one of the highlights of the trip.

By late afternoon we were riding quiet roads through the ranchland and citrus groves of Highlands County. US 98 took us to the lake and our second overnight control in Okeechobee, but not before we stopped at a general store a few miles outside of town for an ice cream and a Coke and chatted with a local who bid us adieu with, "Be careful; there are a lot of drunk rednecks out there." No kidding.

After throwing down breakfast (PB&J at 4am), we rolled out. We had easy pre-dawn riding to Hobe Sound, arriving in time to join the local club riders for breakfast at Harry

and the Natives. The rest of the day was uneventful – flat riding punctuated by gorgeous and frequent water vistas. The most distressing moment came when we discovered that a pizza joint right on the beach in Sebastian Inlet did not sell beer. WHAT? We were close to the finish and feeling celebratory so a liberal dose of ice cream quelled our disappointment.

Properly fueled, the final 20 miles on A1A passed quickly and we arrived at the finish, 61:35 after we started. Fortunately, there was ample beer to quench our thirst while we celebrated the arrival of other finishers. Of the 41 starters, 33 finished, including the only female finisher, Judith Longley of Orlando (who came in two hours ahead of us).

Sound like fun? If you can ride a century without feeling trashed, then randonneuring is doable. To prepare for a "brevet," take Eddie's advice and "Ride lots." Training rides over 100 miles are not very useful; a large aerobic base is. Intervals will help increase average rolling speed, which gives you more options on a long ride: you can either finish faster or have more time for rest en route. The longer the ride, the more mental toughness matters than physical conditioning. Remember, tackling distances like this happens the same way as completing a mid-week club ride: one pedal stroke at a time.

You can find more information on randonneuring at <http://rusa.org/>. Locally, rides are organized in Central and South Florida by Tim Bol <http://floridarandonneurs.com> and in Gainesville by Jim Wilson <http://gainesville-cyclingclub.org/brevet/brevets.html>

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