

Furnace Creek 508 – October 16-17, 2004

By: Geoffrey Janes

Team Javelina: Geoffrey, Karl, Mike and Kent
Support driver: Rick

After months of planning, training and anticipation, the time had finally come to begin our 508 mile adventure. We arrived at the Hilton in Valencia at around 4:00 Friday afternoon. We checked in with the race headquarters, prepared our vehicles and bikes for inspection, and checked in to our hotel rooms. After inspections, it was off to the pre-race pasta feed. Lots of pasta and lots of people crowded into a small hot room. After dinner we all moved into a larger room for the pre-ride race meeting. We watched a video, watched as five time riders/finishers were inducted into the Hall of Fame, and were briefed on some of the more important rules. Then it was back to the hotel for the last real sleep we would enjoy for the next two days.

Saturday morning at 6:30 Kent was knocking at my door looking for the van key. He still needed to go shopping for some food. I had everything I needed, so I spent the next few minutes getting dressed, packed and ready to go. At 7:00am I went outside to watch the solo riders start their race. What a sight, about 50 men and women ready to conquer 508 miles in less than 48 hours!

Around 8:00am we gathered together and finished packing up the cars and talked over a few logistical details. Karl was busy making last minute preparations for his ride. He would be riding the first stage. Mike and Rick would be supporting Karl on the first stage, while Kent and I would drive on ahead to time station #1 where Kent would prepare to ride the second stage. At 1:18pm Karl rolled into the first time station, located in California City. After an uneventful pass of the baton, Kent left on his stage. A strong tailwind was definitely in the favor of the cyclists. Karl's average was 19.5 mph. Kent would post 20.5 mph average by the end of his stage. After Kent left, we loaded Karl's bike, and Karl and Rick took off to support Kent in his ride. After about 15 minutes, we



realized that Karl, and any other rider who had just completed a stage, should have more time to recover before jumping in a car to follow the rider. So I switched with Karl and rode with Rick the rest of the way following and encouraging Kent in his ride. And what an awesome job Kent did! He climbed his mountain well, and cruised into Trona with little difficulty. In Trona, Time Station #2, Mike was ready and waiting. Kent rolled in, passed the baton, and off went Mike down the road. Karl and Rick took off in the chase vehicle to support Mike, while Kent and I got ready to cruise to the next time station. As we went on down the road, we began passing many of the solo riders who had left at 7:00 that morning. Then, just as the sun was beginning to set, we turned and headed up Townes Pass. Looking up the side of that mountain, we could see a long line of cyclist slowly pedaling their way to the top of this amazing long and steep climb. We passed cyclist after cyclist, slowly turning over their pedals. We passed a guy who was riding in a fixed gear and watched him putting his entire body into every pedal stroke. I don't know how he did it! Some of the support vehicles had speakers on the roof, and they were cranking music for the rider in front of them. We must have passed 30 or more cyclists on this climb. It was an amazing sight.

We reached the summit just as it was getting dark. And now the riders would have an unbelievable descent with 40+ miles and average speeds around 45-50 mph. With only the light on the bike, and the headlights on the car behind them, this would be a super fast ride, in the dark. Just another amazing element in the long adventure on which we had embarked.

Kent and I stopped in Stovepipe Wells for gas, and then headed on into Furnace Creek, home of Time Station #3. We went into the local restaurant and had some dinner, and then parked next to the time station along with several other teams to await Mike's arrival. We had no contact with the other car, so we really had no idea when Mike would get there. I prepared my bike, got dressed, and tried to sleep before

my night time ride would begin. Finally, around 10:00pm, we began to get a transmission on the CB radio from Karl. Mike was about 4 miles out. Time to get ready. I got ready for what would be an unforgettable ride through Death Valley in the dark. It had been a long day of riding in the car. I was tired, but I was also very ready to begin my ride. Finally, at 10:40pm, Mike arrived and I received the baton from him. It took several minutes for the guys to get everything situated in the cars. I couldn't leave until the chase vehicle was ready to go. The rules dictated that at night, the rider had to have a car behind him at all times. We had two other 4-man teams ahead of us. Team Sasquatch had passed through an hour earlier, and Team Falcons had passed through just minutes ahead of us. Once we finally rolled onto the road, I was psyched, but not quite prepared for what was about to happen.

I began pedaling, and realized very soon that I had too many clothes on. It was super hot, even this late at night. The wind was howling. It must have been blowing between 30 and 40 mph. And I was riding directly into it. I just kept pedaling, hoping the wind would let up. I passed several teams, and several teams passed me. Kent and Rick were in the chase vehicle. Karl and Mike were on their way to Time Station #4, my destination, in Shoshone. Only 75 miles, should only take me about 5 hours, so Karl would be setup and ready to ride at around 3:30am.

Kent stopped me and told me to pull over, so I did. It felt good to rest for a minute. I asked how long I had been riding, they said 2 hours! I couldn't believe it! I thought it had been 30 minutes. I asked how far we had gone: 17 miles. The wind was definitely worse than I even thought. So I rested for a few minutes, ate a banana, refilled my water bottles, and hit the road again. I continued pedaling through the dark, with only the light from my bike, and the headlights from the car shining past me. I couldn't see anything except for the road just ahead of me. I could see the flashing lights of other team cars several miles ahead of me. They just kept flashing, and moving steadily off in the distance. I saw something crawl across the road. It was nearly 1:45 in the morning. Was I imagining things? No, there went another one. It was a scorpion. I would see several more over the next few hours. Some were small, less than an inch long. Others were at least 6 inches long. Just crawling back and forth across the road! Kent and Rick saw several coyotes, but I never saw any. We had decided that I would stop every hour for a break. At 1:53am I sat in the car to get out of the wind for a few minutes. Kent and Rick refilled my water bottles, and I ate some grapes. Then back into the wind for another hour. At one of the hourly stops, another team passed and I can still hear his words to me: "When will it end?" That is exactly how I felt! When would it end. Another hour, another stop, and I was starting to feel very tired. The road seemed to be a constant uphill battle. I envisioned my self standing at the finish line with the rest of the team, receiving the medal that only finishers would receive. I pressed on into the night, but I was fading.



Around 4:00am I stopped again to refuel. I needed nourishment badly. I popped open a can of Chicken Noodle Soup and drank it cold, out of the can. It tasted great, and gave me a boost for the next several hours. Finally, the wind began to die down. But the road began to get steeper. My climb up Jubilee Pass was about to begin. It was nice to have the break from the wind. I was actually glad for the change of pace, slowly pedaling my way up the long climb to the top. We passed several solo team cars who were probably sleeping on the side of the road, and the pedaling continued. The air was cooling off, and it felt great. We stopped again. Rick and Kent rearranged the back end of the car so they could lie down and take a nap. I continued the ominous climb to the top. It had to be there somewhere. Team Grizz passed me, and then slowed down in front of me. Drafting was not allowed, so I tried to keep my pace without staying too close to the rider or his car. Finally, I just had to step it up a little to get passed that guy. I passed another car on the side of the road, and heard the sound of someone clapping. It was a crew member from another team, cheering me on. Finally, I reached Jubilee Pass, and enjoyed a short descent. The next climb would be Salisbury Pass. Back to the grind, slowly working my way up the final climb of the day. I thought about Mike and Karl, they must be wondering where I was, I was over 2 hours behind schedule. But they had been hearing the horror stories and people had been rolling through Time Station #4 all night. They realized that it was just going to take a little longer. At around 6:00am, I got passed by the first rider I had seen in several hours. Team Pronghorn, a two man team, had music blasting. I

exchanged a few words with the guy, and then let him head on up the hill. I finally summited Salisbury Pass at about 6:30am. What an amazing sight! I stood by the Elevation sign while Kent took my picture. Now it was just several miles to the Time Station. I began the descent, and Team Agouti passed me. As soon as I realized who it was, I picked up my pace, passed the guy and cruised into Shoshone at 7:10am. After passing the baton to Karl, I laid down in the parking lot and rested for a few minutes. Rick heated up some Cheese and Broccoli soup, which I ate, and then I got into the back of the van and finally went to sleep for about one hour. At 9:00am, Rick and I began the drive to Baker, where we would meet the rest of the team at Time Station #5. The night before now seemed like nothing more than a clouded dream. Everything was clouded, the whole race was beginning to run together. The enormity of what we were doing was really starting to set in. We each still had one more stage to ride until we would be done. Karl cruised into Time Station #5 at 10:47am and Kent took off on his 30+ mile ride to Kelso.

I made a phone call to my youth group at who was meeting at Green Valley Baptist Church. It was about 11:15am. Nancy put me on speaker phone, and I shared some of the details of my race so far with the group. Then we continued on the drive to Kelso



Kelso is a small speck of nothing beside a row of five railroad tracks. There was an old train station, and several mobile homes, and that's about it. I sat in the van and rested, while Rick slept for about 45 minutes in the back. Waiting for the rider to get there was almost as tiring and actually riding! About 45 minutes before Kent arrived, two trains pulled across the road, blocking traffic for nearly 30 minutes. No one could cross the tracks. Only one rider showed up during this time, and only about five minutes before the track was clear again. Kent arrived in Kelso at 1:18pm, and Mike took the baton and pressed on to Amboy, Time Station #7. Kent and I drove ahead to TS #7 and waited for Mike to arrive. Kent and Rick rode support. TS #7 was on the side of the road, next to nothing but desert. They had plywood palm tree cutouts, surfboards and music playing. We passed the next hour or so in anticipation of the beginning of the final stage. I was so tired, only one hour of sleep behind me since Saturday morning, and I had 58 miles to go. Mike arrived at TS #7 at 3:23pm, and my final ride would finally begin. I felt good as I began pedaling toward the finish. I felt a sense of accomplishment, and a sense of duty to the rest of the team to finish strong. The road to 29 Palms had a lot of traffic, and they were flying by. Karl decided to go ahead and turn on the flashers and follow directly behind me, just to help protect me from the other cars. The wind was picking up. It was blowing from the side. Why can't I just ride without wind for once? I continued up the steady slope to Sheephole Summit. I arrived at the top just as the sun had set again. Then I began the descent into the valley that would take us into 29 Palms, where we would finally cross the finish line.

I pedaled for what seemed like hours, 20 miles to go, and it couldn't get here soon enough. Mike and Kent had gone on into town to take showers. They would come back and switch places with Karl and Rick, who would go on ahead and take showers as well. I just kept pressing on, up the never ending road to the finish. I could see flashers ahead of me. Team Puffish had passed us while we were resting on the side of the road. I had to stop several times again, I was absolutely exhausted! Mike and Kent forced me to keep eating and drinking. I was living on water and HammerGel at this point. Then at about 6 miles from the finish, I stopped, just totally wiped out. I sat in the car to try and recover some. A team was coming up behind us. It was Team Agouti! We had been in 3rd place the whole time, and now we moved into 4th! I said, "We can't let them pass us." Kent said, "They just did." So I took a deep breath, got out of the car, got on my bike, and began pedaling. I could not let Team Agouti just pass us like that.

Mike and Kent both knew what I was trying to do. They wanted it as badly as I did. They didn't try to stop me, they only encouraged me to keep eating HammerGel and drinking water. Team Agouti was about one mile ahead, and I could see their yellow flashers looming ahead. I kept pedaling. I was exhausted, but that didn't matter, I just kept pedaling, as fast as I possibly could. Finally we made a left turn, and then a right onto the finishing stretch. I could see two team cars ahead of me. I pedaled up a short but steep incline,



passing another team, I don't know who it was, but it wasn't Agouti. Kent told me to take another hit of HammerGel, I did. I climbed another short but steep incline. I could see another car with flashers. Was that Team Agouti. They looked like there weren't moving. But who knows, my mind was playing tricks on me at this point. I looked down the road and saw another steep incline. When would this end? How much farther? Where was the Finish line? I just kept pedaling. "Geoffrey, take another hit of HammerGel, you're going to need it!" I did, and I kept pedaling. Then I looked over at Kent who was riding in the car next to me. "Geoffrey, that is Team Agouti right there." They were about one block ahead of us. I picked up the pace slightly, that was about all I had left. I began the last climb toward the finish. Kent told me the Best Western, the finish line was half way up this last hill. I pedaled with all I had. Just 50 feet from the driveway, I began to pass the Team Agouti support van. I could hear them yelling at their rider to go faster. He did. So did I. A quick turn into the parking lot, and I got cut off by a pickup truck on my right. I swerved around him and gave one last push to the toilet paper finish line. I had crossed the line three seconds behind Agouti. I just collapsed on the ground as I tried to catch my breath. What a day, what a weekend, what a ride!



We hung around for a few minutes, and received our finisher's medals. We had completed the 508 miles in 36 hours, 1 minute and 55 seconds. It had been an amazing adventure, and the realization of what we had done would take days, maybe weeks to sink in.

After a long awaited shower, and a whopper from Burger King, we began our long drive back home. I got home at 2:30 in the morning and collapsed in bed, still riding high on the wave of what we had done in the last 40 hours.