

Saentis Rundfahrt Ride Report - Switzerland - August 2004

By: Bob and Monica Steenerson

Hi everyone,

Congratulations on the new club.

Monica and I are in Switzerland for the 30th annual International Saentis Rundfahrt, which means the ride around Santis Mountain (say Santis "round fart" and that will be close enough, I think the name was inspired by the sausages and beer they fuel up with at the rest stops, but that's just a guess). The 150 km ride starts just over the hill from the house, in the next town , and goes around the Alp Saentis via a couple of passes then down to the Rhine river to the Lake of Constance and returns through some foothills.

<http://www.saentisrundfahrt.ch/>

A funny thing happened at the Zurich airport when we arrived. We stopped at a food court type of thing and went to share a table, as is the local custom, with a couple who were already sitting there. They watched us roll up with our bike boxes and asked me the (often asked) question; "what's in the boxes"? So I leaned over, looked them square in the eyes and told them "It's Uncle Joe and Aunt May". You should have seen the looks on their faces



when I explained that Uncle Joe always wanted to go to Switzerland and I just couldn't ignore his last request. But then I once again remembered that security is a little sensitive now a days (sigh) and confessed they were bikes and we were going to do the Saentis Rundfahrt with 2000 other people. The man says that I would be doing a public service by writing "Bicycles" on the side of the boxes and I told him that I usually charge money to give people a peek but I was feeling generous today. They suddenly realized they might miss their train and we had the whole table to ourselves (thanks Uncle Joe). Well back to the ride.



The ride starts officially starts from a town community center with no fan fare. Breakfast is served and people just wander out and get on their bikes. Everyone gets a ticket which must be stamped at each of 3 rest stops to prove that they have indeed earned their trophy which is a traditional Swiss cow bell with a large decorative strap. You can elect to save your tickets and get a larger bell, the largest being 7 tickets and is larger than a basketball not counting the strap. Teams often pool their tickets and get one large bell for their club. They may then hang it on a sponsors wall (take note of this P.R. it really works wonders as does club photos in jerseys).

The club that puts this ride on is 100 years old but they lost their sponsor this year and rumor is that a new sponsor will fund another club to keep this classic going. It is billed as a international event and we've seen a

lot of people from Germany and Austria but Monica and I were the only English speakers.

The first hour goes up a long valley through beautiful lush green farm lands



sprinkled with small dark forests and wooden houses and through ski resorts. Then the course turns abruptly up some switchbacks that would rival Alp D'Heuz in steepness. At the top is the first rest stop in front of a Barn alongside the road. The last time we did this ride it was hot and we were laughing at the Swiss that were melting as they crawled up the climb but this year the tables turned, it was cold and the Swiss were laughing at us desert homies.

The downhill are simply scary and we decided to play it safe (i.e. ride the brakes). It's not so much just the speed but the road twists, turns and banks every which way and was wet from a night rain. These Swiss guys just fly on the downhill and they know the maze of roads well. We were stopped once by a Alp Abzug blocking the road. A Alp Abzug is kind of like a parade where the farmers are herding their cows and goats down from the high Alps for the winter. The animals have bells on and the farmers dress in their traditional clothing.

After the final pass the road goes down (and mean D-O-W-N brother) to the Rhine river and the second rest stop where some are eating these big grilled sausage sandwiches with beer, wine, coffee, and smoking cigarettes- all at the same time. It started to rain and after waiting out the worst we

continued down the Rhine. It was cold, wet and at first I couldn't pedal to stay warm because it was a little down hill. I don't do so well in the wet and cold unless I can climb to stay warm, Monica seems to do a lot better but even she struggled. When the weather is good this section is a lot of fun because pacelines form on a wide bike path that goes for miles along the river without much traffic considerations but today it was just a miserable slog.

Eventually the road dried out and I could ride hard enough to get warm but it was too late, the cold had left me exhausted. A group of riders came by at about 25 mph so we jumped on for a half hour or so. These guys were going full blast through the towns. The best I could describe it is like riding in a obstacle course that keeps crossing the L.A. freeway while trying to stay in the pack. Forget about the view and hang on with all you have got (prayer helps).

The final rest stop was in a factory near the Lake of Constance. As soon as we entered the parking lot it started to rain again so we got to wait almost an hour and witness more of the barbarian sausage sacrifices. The rain didn't seem to matter too much to the people and everyone was friendly and having a good time. I felt mighty wimpy.

The final section goes through hills that we normally really enjoy because of its beauty and almost no traffic, today I was so pooped I didn't even look.

At the finish it's fun to see people riding home with the cow bells slung over their shoulders. And the locals smile and wave to you as everyone knows what you just did, it's a classic ride after all.

Ciao, Bob

P.S. Uncle Ruddi (he's a real uncle) wants us to ride with him for the next 3 days over 3 high passes. Ruddi has ridden across the U.S. twice, the last time when he was celebrating his 70th birthday.

Someday, when (and if) I grow up, I want to be just like him.