

Utah MS 150 June 2005

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Saturday (25 June)

One of the main reasons that I got back into cycling is due to a friend inviting me to ride the Utah MS 150 with him and his brothers. That was a great experience and I have been back for a total of 7 years now. This ride happens over two days in beautiful Logan, Utah. For those who don't know, this is northern Utah, close to the Idaho border. In fact, the first day took us into parts of Idaho. The official ride distance is 75 miles each day, with an optional 100 miles the first day. There are shorter options, but what fun is that? Both days start and end at the Cache Valley Fairgrounds.

The Utah MS 150 is an exceptional event, very fun, and very well organized. I understand it is one of the few MS rides that get bigger every year. This year was no exception. When I first participated in this ride back in 1999, there were around 700 riders. I haven't heard an official total for this year, but it was estimated around 2500 and they expect to have 1 million dollars raised towards MS. The rest stop workers are incredible and by far the best I have ever experienced. You usually can't even get stopped before somebody is offering to give you food, refill your water bottle, and some times even hold your bike.

I didn't feel quite as prepared this year, as I would have liked. As some people know my wife and I are working on starting a Photography business, which has reduced some of my riding time. In the past, I have always done the 100 miles on the first day. This year, I thought I would take a different approach and only ride 75 miles both days, enjoying myself along the way. For a change of pace, the organizers moved the old Sunday route to Saturday and the Saturday route to Sunday, and had us ride them in reverse, which I thought was a great idea.

With so many riders, they start in waves of about 100 riders. I managed to position myself in the first wave, so I got a good early start. I hadn't been riding very long, when a group came along that seemed to be going the speed that I wanted, so I jumped on. They were a group from the Bonneville Bicycle Touring Club. As it turned out, I picked the perfect group and stayed with them until about the last nine miles. I enjoyed talking with the group members and found that they have quite a large membership.

Up to the 2nd rest stop, we were probably averaging around 19 to 20 mph and I felt great. As I mentioned, I was only planning on doing the 75-mile ride, but I was having such a good time with the group that I forgot about the 75-mile turn off. Next thing I know, I saw a sign on the road for the 100-mile ride. Suddenly, oops, I guess I'm doing the century. With hindsight, I can say that doing the century with this group was actually a better choice than the 75 riding solo, as you will soon see.

The route took us north toward Idaho and then traversed its way back south to the start. After about 45 to 50 miles, the wind picked up. (A quick side note about the weather, it was a bit unusual this year with potential scattered thunderstorms in the afternoon.) Anyway, we had to fight a big wind most of the way back. Often times it was a cross wind, so we made an echelon across the road to find some protection. We all took our turns at the front and worked well with each other. There were a couple of times when I really had to push my limits going up hills into the wind. I would have been in real trouble if I hadn't been with the group.

I stayed with the group until the last rest stop. I thought the plan was to skip it, but most people stopped. Another lady and I kept going. I knew I only had nine miles left. We continued on and she took the lead. About a mile and a half later, I just kind of lost it. I couldn't keep up any more.

I had to go into survival mode just to finish the ride. I was trying to keep my heart rate down because it didn't feel so good when it went so high. Well, I made it to the last major turn, which was probably around 3 to 4 miles out. As soon as I turned, a big storm came up with very high winds (probably 30+), blowing all kinds of dirt, rain, and other crap. I didn't think it was going to go away anytime soon, so I kept going as best I could. Despite the fact that I was really tired, I was pushing 90%+ of my maximum heart rate and only doing around 7 mph on a flat road against the wind. It seemed like it would never end and I almost got blown over several times. The descriptive word of the moment was 'brutal'. These are the kinds of moments when experience and determination are the only things that get you through. I was totally wasted when I got to the finish.

I asked myself if I would have been better off had I stopped with the group. I don't think so, because they would have dropped me and I still would have had to finish alone. As with any endurance ride, I had a couple of difficult moments out on the course, and certainly at the end. Overall, it was a great ride. I met some great people, and really enjoyed myself.

Sunday (26 June)

The worst part about riding the day after a long ride is getting back in the saddle, but I have found that it usually gets better after the first 20 minutes or so. I have to admit that I was a little nervous to ride again, after Saturday's experience. However, I set out with hopes that it would be a good ride. The route took us to the Black Smith Fork Canyon, which is a beautiful 16-mile climb up the canyon. This canyon is unique; the wind blows strongly up the canyon later in the day. In the past, we usually hit the canyon late in the day and have to fight the wind coming out of the canyon, which is counter intuitive.

Heading up the canyon, the wind was blowing down, and I was thinking, "Oh great, here we go again". I didn't really start to feel good until about 12 miles into the ride, which was about 2 miles up the canyon. At that point, I jumped on the back of a group to try to get a break from the wind. It helped and I had the strength to hang with them. I followed this group all the way up to the top of the canyon. I was getting excited about coming out of the canyon because I knew it would be with a tail wind. The descent did not disappoint. I had a blast coming out of the canyon. It turned out to be the best canyon ride I have ever had.

Leaving the 3rd rest stop, the route headed directly into the wind. At the end of that leg, the route turned around and headed the opposite direction, resulting in a tail wind. As it turned out, the majority of the rest of the day took advantage of the tail wind and some really great down hills. I really felt like I understood what the pro racers mean when they talk about "riding into fitness". I seemed to get stronger as the day went on and I really enjoyed myself. I don't know why it is, but I have always enjoyed the second day much more than the first. The day finished uneventfully, and I was pleased to have participated in another Utah MS 150 ride.