

The 10,000 Mile Stare – 377 days in the saddle

By: Scott McKinney

Yesterday, I hit 10,000 miles biked in "a year." Actually, I required 377 days to tally that amount. I know this because on August 22, 2006 my bike computer odometer rolled 40,000 at about 45 MPH while flying down a long hill on my way to Loon Lake. Fifty-four weeks later, I surmounted the 50,000 mile mark on Labor Day at a school cross walk on an unremarkable side street near my house. I actually sprinted for the line despite 116 miles in my legs for the day. I mustered a small cheer, a weary fist pump and a big grin before dragging my tired, smelly, dehydrated body toward home.

Ten thousand miles wasn't among my goals for the year. In fact I didn't even know it was within reach until I happened to notice my odometer back in mid July. By then, I would have needed to average 350 miles a week on four successive weeks to break 10,000 in 365 days. That just wasn't going to happen. Nevertheless, I picked up my weekly distance, hoping to minimize the gap between a full year and 10,000 miles. Like most audacious goals, this new threshold motivated my daily quest.

On August 22, 2007, I was 350 miles short. So close. By riding an average 6.7 additional miles per week I would have hit the target. How? Take the medium-distance route home one more day each week. Or, finish the Devil Mountain Double and add another couple of training rides when I chose to sit on the couch back in December. Would of. Should of. Could of. By-gones that are beyond control.

So, what is 10,000 miles? It is more than three transcontinental crossings of the United States. It's more miles than some people put on their car in a year. It's about 3,000,000 pedal revolutions. It's an average of 185 miles a week. But numerically speaking 10,000 miles is an arbitrary line. It just happens to be one more than 9,999.

What's extraordinary is not the distance; rather it's the amazing collage of roads, experiences, emotions and people who made that quest memorable – and possible. It was training with buddies who pushed me toward a mark I never saw coming. It was climbing passes high in the Sierra's and hammering up and down canyon walls throughout the gold country. It was riding 15 miles to the start of every group ride then struggling home with eyes sunken into a 10,000-mile stare.

It was bike commuting through four seasons and watching the subtle changes in light at the edges of the day. It was getting to ask, "What high gas prices?" It was saying "hey" to the stranger with a brilliant smile as we passed on weekday mornings. It was rides in the rain if only to drink in the magic after a rain shower when moss on the oaks glows green in rays of sunlight that cut below the edge of the slate clouds overhead. It was rides down the bike trail chasing anything that moved. It was lonely rides home after work on spooky, dark, winter nights when I was the only bike on the prowl. It was rides when I checked overhanging branches for mountain lions lurking in the shadows.

It was a ride when I looked over my shoulder to spy predators of another sort – cyclists attempting to steal my placement in the Terrible Two. It was an epic 191-mile training ride with three of the best double-century riders in the state. It was a training week of 371 miles. It was three and two-thirds double centuries. It was the quarter mile check out roll down the street with a clean bike and sparkling chain.

It was the "ice ride" when pond tops were frozen and a sprinkler left running all night turned a nursery into a gallery of abstract ice sculpture. It was rides to work on mornings when the temperature was 28. It was that infamous, hot day in April when I puked and DNF'ed on a ride that mattered. It was riding 30 miles with Saul Raisen then racing to beat the Tour of California peloton on a short cut from Lake Berryessa to West Sac – a race we won by 45 seconds. It was saddle sores, exhaustion, elation, pride, and punishment received and delivered.

It was seeing cycling through the eyes of my son as he accelerated a skinny-tire road bike for the first time, learned the satisfaction of suffering through a sustained climb, and developed the skills to descend with abandon (OK, we're still working on that part).

This year I traded four wheels for two; carbon for calories; and a commute among the angry masses for an experience doing something really big. I may never ride across the US, but I now know that in 377 days, I could ride from Anchorage to Miami – and back.