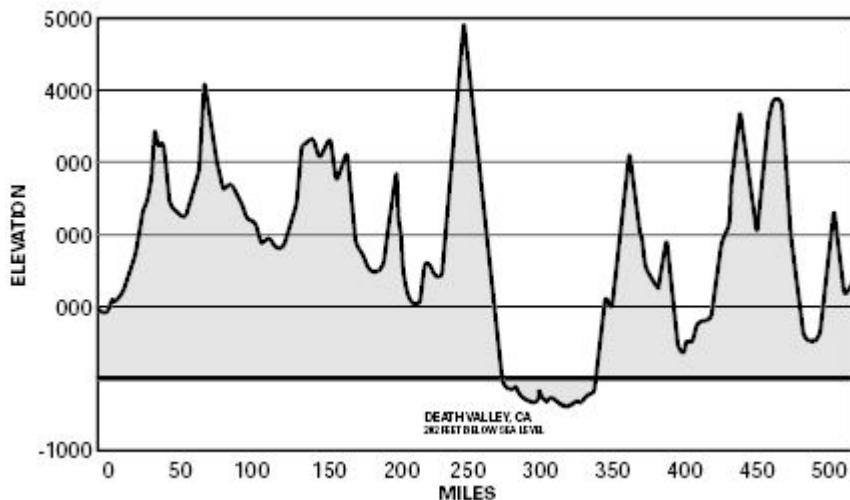


# The 2004 Furnace Creek 508 Bicycle Race Photo Gallery

## October 15 - October 17, 2004 By Janet Osprey Christiansen

Furnace Creek 508, a non-stop 508 mile bicycle race from Santa Clarita to Twenty Nine Palms via California's Death Valley and Mojave Desert, is the world's premiere ultra marathon bicycle race. Produced by AdventureCOPRS since 1990, but founded in 1983 by John Marino, the October 16-18 2004 edition celebrates the 21st anniversary, and 30th edition, of this incredible race.



Furnace Creek 508 is revered the world over for its epic mountain climbs totaling over 35,000 feet of cumulative elevation gain, stark desert scenery, desolate roads, and a reputation as one of the toughest but most gratifying endurance challenges available, bar none. Known as "The Toughest 48 Hours in Sport," the next pages will depict one rider's experience of participating in this event with untouched photos and clever, witty captions. What follows is mostly true....

### I. In the Beginning – the Start Line 6:30 am

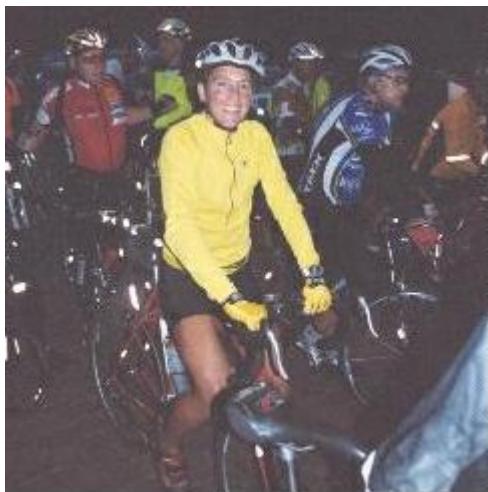
Everyone is cheerful and chatty and buoyant. Nothing hurts yet and it's too early to DNF (does not finish). In spite of the fact that it's too dark to see what you're doing, we get ourselves and our bikes all put together, wave a cheery goodbye to our crew and wait anxiously for the official start of the race.



Which description best depicts the situation above:

- A. Riders wait eagerly for the start of the 508 outside the Hotel Hilton in Santa Clarita
- B. Riders are protesting the lack of recycling materials used in the pasta dinner by blocking the Hilton entrance

- C. Riders have all managed to finish the 508 at the same time!
- D. The weekly 508 club ride assembling.



Rider: Start line/barely light out: "Ooh - I have to go to the bathroom! Guess I'll wait till 9 pm to go..."

Crew: "Wow, this is lots of fun already!"

## II At Last - Out on the Open Road – Day I/Saturday

Still nothing really hurts yet, we're still in sight of each other and not much else is in sight except sand, mountains, and that ever endless stretch of road ahead. The extraordinary joviality of our support crews cheering us on and keeping up our spirits makes Saturday feel like a carnival with colorful vans passing by in succession all morning long and into the afternoon. Riding in excess of 30mph thanks to a hellacious tailwind and comfortable temps, everybody reaches the first 200 miles in record time!



Rider: "Gosh the desert air is so crisp and refreshing. With this tailwind, I'll try to keep it under 55"

Crew: "Wow, this is still really fun! Any more of those 'nilla wafer cookies???"



The road from nowhere to nowhere out in the middle of nowhere...

### III. The Support Crew

The support crew, as shown below, is the backbone of the Furnace Creek 508 race, without which it is not possible to do this ride. They are confined together for 508 miles in the team support vehicle and must provide the rider with everything they need. Towards the end of the 508, the vehicle must creep along behind the exhausted rider at a tortuously slow pace.

Pop Quiz: Identify which is the proper handoff technique below:





#### IV. Townes Pass – Midpoint of the 508 and the Approach of Darkness

Townes Pass at 4950' is by far the hardest longest climb of the 508. Except for the hill before you get to the Best Western in 29 Palms at mile 507.5. The first travelers through Death Valley used Townes Pass to escape from Death Valley. Cresting the Pass, one of them looked back at Death Valley, and said “Goodbye death valley!”, hence the name given to Death Valley. 508 riders today looking down on Death Valley say “Wheeeeeee- 20 miles of 50+mph descending!!!!!! In the dark!!!!!!”

How steep is Townes Pass?



This steep?    Nope...



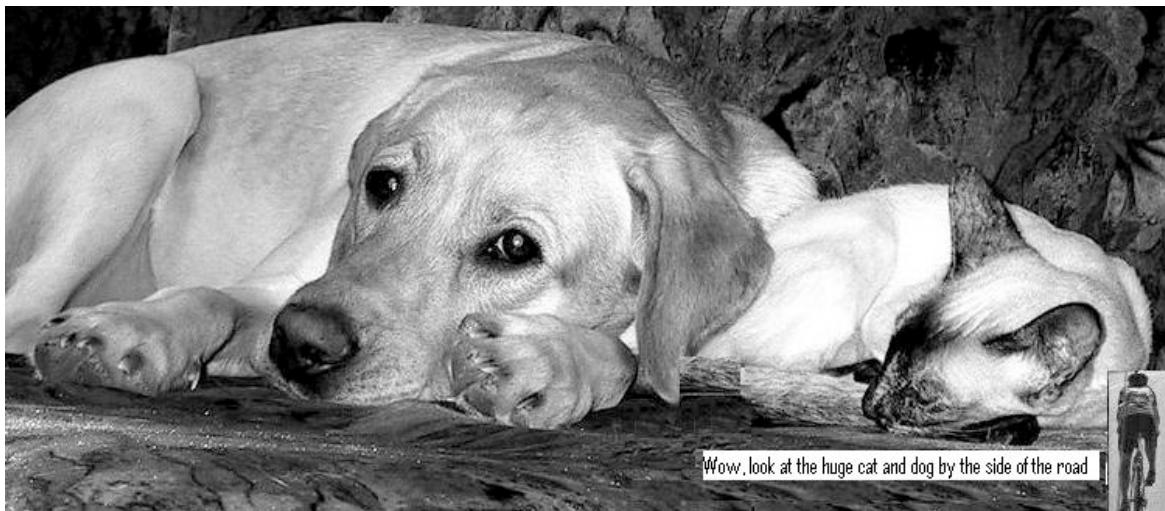
How about this steep?? Nope...



OK , yeah, this's about right

## V. The Blackness of the Desert Night - Who turned out the lights?

The strangest phenomenon of the 508, especially to those initiated to the sport for the first time, is riding through the night. There are no sounds or lights to connect the rider's thoughts to reality. Instead, the *perception* of reality mixes with REM sleep and dream-like images float through the rider's mind. The effect is a lasting sense of mystique of the desert night. Riders often experience hallucinations though not from water or food deprivation, but from the action of dreaming with the eyes open and legs pedaling...



## Day 2 - Sunday from Hell

The rider is now the “other side” of 24 hours of continuous riding. At this point, you wish you had never discovered ultra distance cycling and would like to kill John Marino for discovering this course. Your body is complaining loudly from all quarters; “My body hates me and thinks I should go to hell.” Fortunately, most of us are more than half way done, many of us 60% or even 75% of the way around the course. But alas, the cruel twist of the 508 is that these last 100-150 miles go the slowest.....Heat, wind and pavement that has not been improved since the reign of Julius Augustus Caesar make each mile an adventure in physical abuse.



Can't find a comfortable riding position....



Still can't find a comfortable riding position.



Nope, still not comfortable.

## VI. Expect All Kinds of Conditions in the Desert

Riders can expect anything in the desert, from Thermonuclear winds (or Thermo - “Nucular” winds as GWB says) to extreme heat, even flooding and bone chilling cold.

Below is a demonstration of how to ride through a thermonuclear crosswind by leaning into the wind. The technique is the same at night except there are scorpions and tarantulas running across the road at the same time (October is tarantula mating season). So be careful not to fall off your bike. You should also ride with your eyes closed because of the blowing sand (not shown below).



From left to right:  
10 mph, no problem  
20 mph, lean into the wind a little  
30 mph, lean a lot  
50+ mph knees should skim pavement

This year, most riders were greeted with raindrops and a heavy sky at day break on the approach into Baker...



I'm feeling some raindrops



Wow, that cyclist is really determined to keep going



But the sun finally broke through and the clouds parted in time for riders to bask in the familiar heat of bustling downtown Amboy as shown in the pictures below.

Whaddya mean... "Where's Amboy?"



Rider: Whew, it's really getting warm out here

Crew: Whew, thought we'd never get her back on the bike.



Rider: Man, it's really really warm...

Crew: Glad we're in the van



Rider: Ow, that hurt!

Crew: Hey cool! Take a picture of the lightning

## VII. The Road to 29 Palms - Time for Reflection

Not really. The big climbs are over, and there's \*only\* 30 miles to go! However, like an infinite series, each section of the 508 takes twice as long as the previous section. So in effect, the rider can never reach the finish line in 29 Palms. Ever. Never. However, in between bouts of sobbing and taking the Lord's name in vain, riders will sometimes have a sense of humor and share a joke with their crew. Here is such a moment below:



Which description best depicts the situation above:

- A. Rider is having fun with pretzel rods.
- B. Rider can't remember where she put the pretzel rods
- C. Crew plays cruel joke on rider sticking pretzel rods in her helmet when she's falling asleep on her bike
- D. Rider has been replaced by an Alien Janet. Alien Janet has sucked poor Janet's brain out her ears and is impersonating her voice and mannerisms.



Actual sighting of Alien Janet ...

### VIII. The Last Hill - who put this hill here anyway??!!?!!?!!?

This hill is .7 miles from the finish line. It is not on the course profile, and it should be. It should be stamped with the Surgeon General's warning that attempting one more \$\*&@#\$@# hill is bad for your health. Riders are cruelly deceived into thinking it's a flat ride into 29 Palms. Then they make the turn onto 29 Palms Highway and see this nasty beast waiting for them.



At this time, the crew is giddy with the thought of being freed from hostage situation of being a 508 support crew member. Their faces and bodies are as gaunt, unshaven (even the women) and unclean as their rider's. Running out of patience with increasingly crabby rider, the crew considers whether to smack the rider over the head with a large frying pan to get her to shut up and keep pedaling.

### IX. The Finish Line

However the rider does actually \*finnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnally\* cross the line, and all dissolve into smiles and happy faces. Rider and crew embrace and pose for pictures. Afterwards, rider and crew clean up and go out for pizza. We are very distinctive looking in appearance and get many stares from the other patrons.



Here is my crew all gathered around me (Square Pants Bob). Aren't we a fun looking group?



OK, seriously here is my crew ... Oops – that was 30 years ago. Wrong photo



OK here is my crew. What? Who switched the heads?? Very funny...



OK \*this\* is my crew. And that's me in the middle trying to stop crying....