

2004 Furnace Creek 508 - By Jim "Shrike" Kern

5AM always comes early and today was no exception. We had, however, 1.5 hours before I was to be on the bike rolling to the starting line and I felt that it was a generous amount of time (it was). I ate and had coffee first thing, then got bike clothes on and took the bike downstairs and tested it around the parking lot. Just before 6:30 we topped off tires and the front valve stem failed. Things were less leisurely at that point, but it was addressed and I went over to the start where last announcements were made.

We rolled off after the anthem was played and I was determined to stay in the front half of the pack this year. Last year I started in the back with a 31 lb bike and felt I was being left behind with every hill we hit in the first 4 miles. This year I was riding a 20 lb bike and was in better shape. No problem staying in the pack, and the first climb, San Fransisquito canyon (3500'), was very comfortable. Came out into the rollers, took my first handoff at the 25 mile mark, and was really enjoying the morning.



We hit the Antelope Valley and everyone seemed to have a good pace. There were some favorable winds starting up, and that lifted everyone's spirits, and speeds. Some more



climbing before Oak Creek Road (right turn) to Mojave. The new Carbent recumbent was cruising 40-50mph on these easy descents and I went past the right turn since I navigate by Lemming and there were no other bikers or support vehicles in front of me at that point. I quickly discovered the error and turned around to get back on course. Passed California City Time Station (mile 82) at 11:14 in 20th place and felt that was a great place to be and 25 minutes ahead of last year's time.

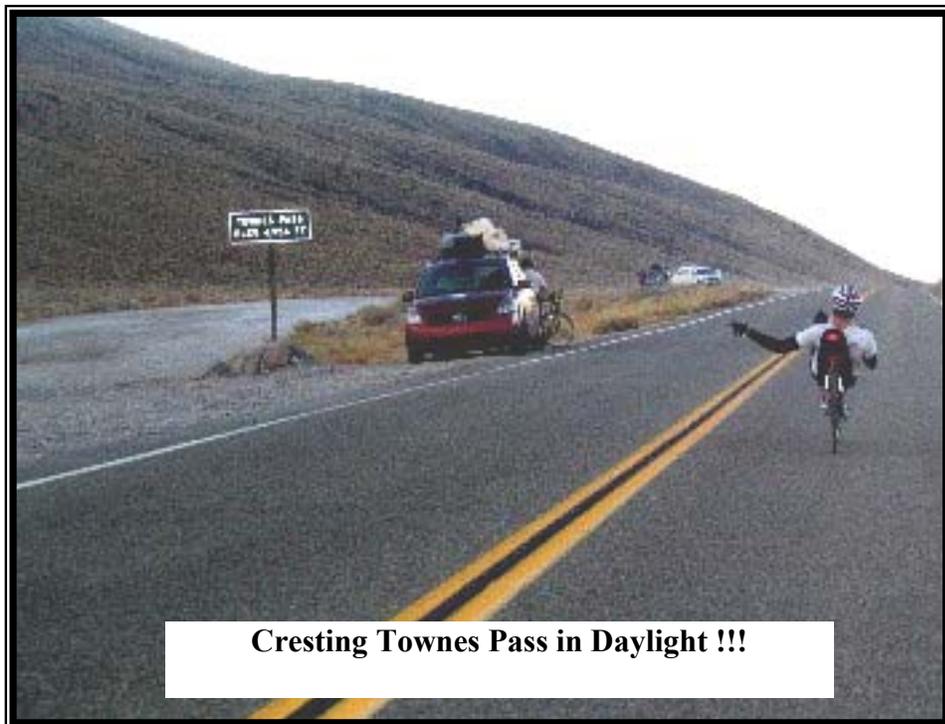
Continuing north with stronger, but favorable, winds we headed toward the Johannesburg climb and subsequent descent into the Searles Valley, Ridgecrest, and Trona. Average speeds were great even though I had 1 shoe change and 2 pee stops.

The crew was superb in staging handoffs in 3 steps - pills/electrolytes first followed 200' later by water bottle and 200' later by a new Hammerflask. Recharged in under 15 seconds. Veterans of RAAM and 508, this crew knew their stuff!



Went through Trona Time Station (mile 152) at 14:15 which meant our speeds averaged 21mph. The next 50 mi took 2 hours. There was one last climb outside of Trona and the descent was difficult as it was technical with strong, gusty crosswinds. I kept it under 45 mph on that one. Back down to the rollers that precede the 3800' Townes Pass climb. We made good time toward the Highway 190 junction and climb into Death Valley.

We made the junction at 16:15. Upon turning right we took on a serious crosswind for the big climb. This recumbent, though low, is difficult to handle at slow speeds under these circumstances and I was getting a workout trying to simultaneously keep it out of traffic and off the guardrail. Pleased to have accomplished both, we crested at 17:45, ate, drank, set up lights, changed shoes, and started down the other side. I'm really glad David got some video footage of what it is like following a bike at over 60mph since, as a rider, all I have to do is



Cresting Townes Pass in Daylight !!!

keep the wheels on the road and would never have known what the crew are putting up with! We had ample light for the descent into Death Valley and the start of what was to become 'Headwinds from Hell'. I had a front flat just past Stovepipe Wells. As we fixed it, 5 bikers passed by and I wanted to get back on the road so bad that I was ready to chew rocks. I had a ginger ale, instead, before getting back on the bike. Though we were moving slow, I was feeling good and was able to close in (slowly!) on each of the riders who had passed me. The last one was at the Furnace Creek Time Station (19:57).

We stopped for just long enough for me to put on a dust mask and for Phil to take over



driving. We were in 5th place when we left and we could see 2 or 3 sets of blinkies (blinking lights) out there in the dust driven haze. The only thing I was thinking (well, almost) was to keep the heart rate around 135-140 and to recognize that we were all out there facing the same 35 mph wall of sand. In addition to occasional comments and jokes some welcome distractions out there on the road were several rather large scorpions, one small sidewinder (going sideways), and a couple of coyotes.

It was unbelievably slow, but after passing a few more people, including our friends in the Python gang, we started the climb out of there. It was just before midnight and that hill couldn't have come soon enough! As we were out there an official said we were 40 minutes from the lead rider, Tweety-Bird, which just lit a fire under us. We sped up to 7 mph at that point (from 6.5 mph!), I took a couple more puffs of the Albuterol, had the mix with a water chaser (salt, electrolytes, amino acids, and ibuprophen), and a bit more caffeine Hammergel. I was a little out of breath at a heart rate of 135, so I dropped it down a little (bad sign). The short descent between the Jubilee and Salsberry climbs was a welcome respite for my feet, which had been swelling some, as usual, and feeling hot. Salsberry climb was slower as I was coughing a lot and not keeping my heart rate up. Working hard on the descents to try to keep the average speeds up, we rolled through Shoshone at 2:28 but I was out of breath with my heart rate around 120. We crested Ibex pass and after the descent started another easy climb. I really wanted to at least get to Baker before taking a break and deciding what to do, though I sort of knew that this was going to be a foreshortened version of the 508.

I was now out of breath and coughing red stuff. I couldn't even keep my heart rate at 108, so I finally stopped. We talked about it for a couple of minutes, and then loaded up the bike. It was 4:25 and we were 27 mi from Baker at mile 354. The crew (the best on the planet, by the way) was so good that they kept me from tearing out my lungs in disappointment of this turn of events. In consolation, though, it started raining 5 minutes after we took off. The diagnosis is still pending (as of 29 Oct), but I started treatment for pneumonia after getting x-rays Tuesday AM.



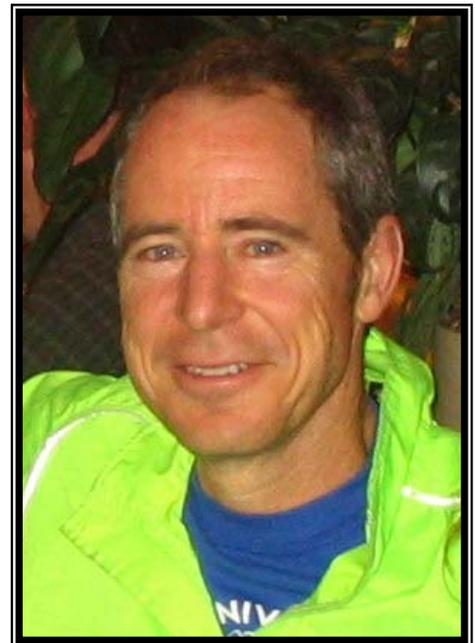
It was really great to hear Tom (daddy long legs) made it, and that Graham (python), after all his ills, made it as well. ...And the Sun Dragon team of Nicole and Margee kicked butt! Amazing, actually, that so many of the 'rookie' riders made it through this one. Congratulations to all who pulled through on this 'Mother of all 508s' ride!

Special thanks to a great crew
David Bradley
Peter Morrissey
Phil Plath

and to Chris Kostman for hosting this event
www.the508.com

and to Dave Karcher for sending out his new recumbent
for a 'trial by fire' test
www.carbent.com

Fuel - Perpetuem and espresso hammergeel
endurolytes
Branched-chain amino acids
table salt 1/4 t per hour average
average calories per hour 400 daytime, 300 night time
average salt per hour 640mg daytime 400mg night time
average water per hour 31oz daytime, 27oz night time



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