



A Bird's Eye View of the 508

**Runner-Up, Champ, Crew, and
Why/How-To Perspectives**

A series of reports by Janet Osprey Christiansen



Runner-Up



Four Rookies and a Three Year Old: Team Osprey's Tale

By Janet Osprey Christiansen, 2003 solo finisher and Nancy Dankenbring Award Winner

After getting home from the 508 this year, I wrote off a 'quick' email to my cousin, Dr. Whitney Swan, who is a psychiatrist. I wonder what she diagnosed me with after she read it. But I was not writing it about my own experience, I wrote it on behalf of Team Osprey; four rookies and a three year old. Here's the email:

"Well, speaking of cycling, the Team Osprey crew did ****outstandingly**** well this weekend considering we were all rookies plus one three year old. Not to mention that Carol and Albert are not even cyclists. On top of which we were trying to coordinate two support vehicles as well. It was a heck of a first race for them to be support crew. A few minor glitches in the first part of the race. And a rather ragged time of it the night before the race (race start 7am). We were trying to do the impossible task of getting organized after the Pre Race Meeting (picture the entire contents of van and truck all over the motel parking lot at 10:30 at night). Things smoothed out and no more problems after that though. Not even a missed gear shift or lost water bottle!! Though at one point, I think Carol and Albert were ready to file for divorce. They're ok now.



As it turned out, I started out better than I could have ever dreamed. By the first 24 hours, I had covered 375 miles of the 508 mile course. At Time Station #6 and only 70 miles to go, I was still going strong with most of the total 35,500 feet of climbing behind me. While I was starting to lose some strength I was still riding well and able to eat and drink (and pee) properly. I was 8th overall, including the men! And with so many vans and people on the side of the road whistling and clapping when each rider went by, I was as high as I have ever felt during a race.

Then we hit the 'Valley of Death' coming off the summit of Granite Mountain in the midday heat of the southern California desert. Or I should say, the Valley of Death hit me, chewed me up and spit me out. I nosedived spectacularly over the next hour. It felt like my skin and clothes were on fire. The sun beat down on all the riders and crews who had the bad luck to hit this part of the race in the 100+ degree heat. Somehow my crew, who had slept a combined three hours themselves, held it together as I fell apart. They did everything they could think of to help me, but my system just quit on me. At 30 miles to go, I was crying inconsolably. Carol, angel of mercy—who could believe we are related—kid sister, massaged my legs and got me back on my bike to continue on in that heat. Debi, my best friend, cycling pal, and crew captain, was also incredibly patient having suffered in an un-air conditioned vehicle all day long too. By now everything hurt, and I was no longer going to win, or have a fantastic bike time. But I kept going for them. And we finally crossed the line at 8:45pm, for 37.75 hours. Janet, stop pedaling now. I don't think Chris Kostman ever saw anybody so unhappy to cross the finish line.

Funny thing is, I did better than I expected to (goal: 40 hour bike time), even with my demise in the V.O.D. So having dried my eyes, and calmed down, I was soon very happy and thankful that my crew talked me into finishing the race. And so my rookie crew, including little 3 year old Christian who stroked my face and consoled me at my lowest point, saying "Janet is sad" (Man that little boy has uncanny sense of compassion!), came through BIG time. And we enjoyed the rest of the weekend, no regrets. The other riders and their crews at the 508 are the best people you could hope to meet. There is no race or event I have ever been to where people go out of their way to help and encourage each other. I think Carol and Albert were really surprised to experience this, and guess what??? They want to do this NEXT YEAR!!! Janet is not so sure. Has to figure out how to deal with those fireballs of hell coming out of the sky, bouncing off pavement and incinerating the rider."

OK that's my tale. See you all soon!



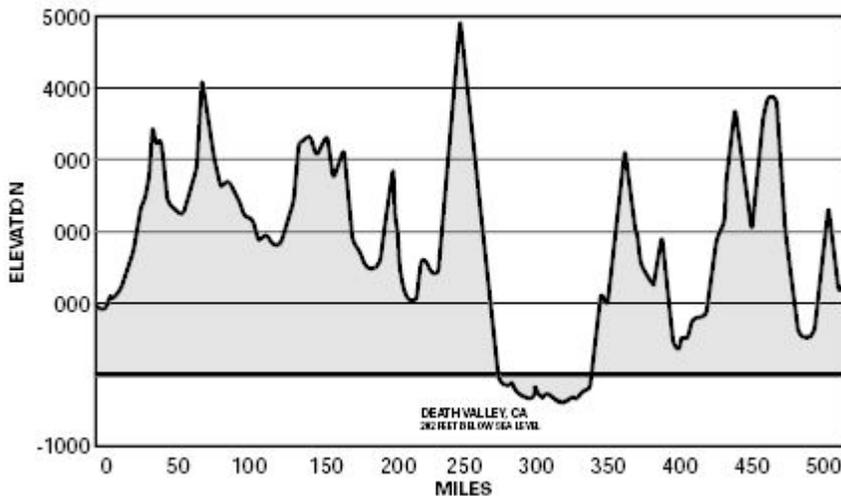


Champ

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

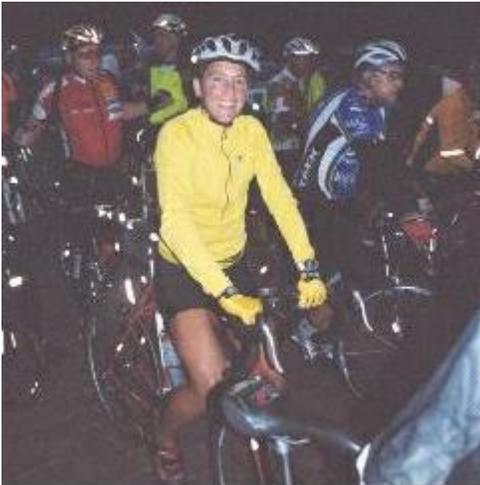
Everyone is cheerful and chatty and buoyant. Nothing hurts yet and its too early to DNF (does not finish). In spite of the fact that it's too dark to see what you're doing, we get ourselves and our bikes all put together, wave a cheery goodbye to our crew and wait anxiously for the official start of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



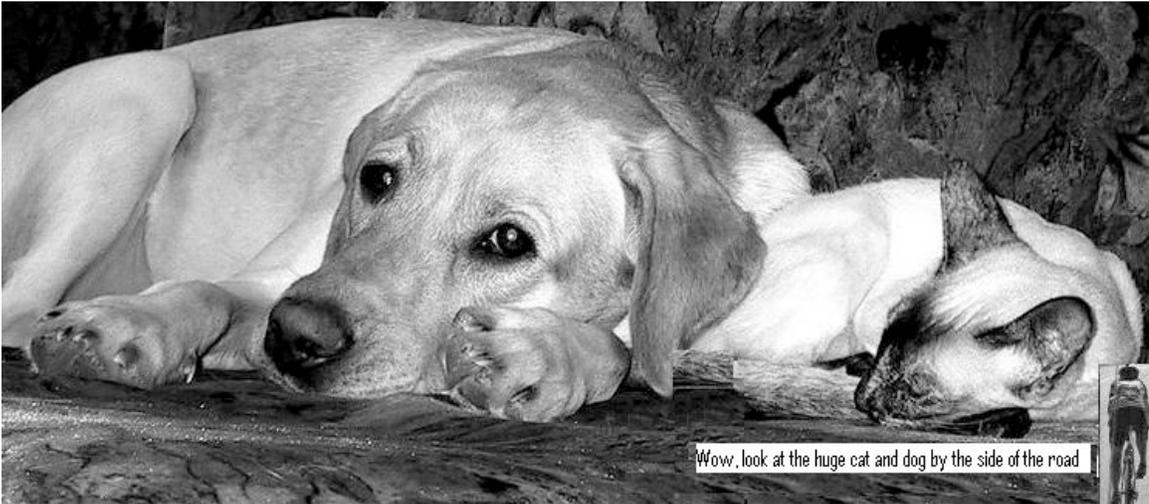
How about this steep?? Nope...



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 - "Nuclear" 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...





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 *finnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnally* 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....



Crew



Presenting The 508's First Woman Fixie Rider: Ms. Archeopteryx, or Something like that!

By Janet Osprey Christiansen

I confess: I really did not think our rider would be able to complete the 508. Considering that she's pretty young for ultra endurance events (only 23 years old), has never been to the desert let alone done a cycling event in such an arid climate, and lives in a city which is snowed/rain in about 80% of the time I thought the odds were pretty long. Hubris of the young, I figured. Not burdened with self doubt like us baby boomers.

I cannot of course relate the experience of doing the 508 as a fixie, nor even tell you what Ms. Archeopteryx endured to get through it. Only she can. But as one of her crew member I can make these observations:

First, the obvious question: What the h*** is an Archeopteryx? I quote Ms. Archeopteryx, Professor Emeritus:

"It's Archaeopteryx, dammit. And it was the earliest fossil discovery (found in 1861) that demonstrated an evolutionary link between dinosaurs and birds. People argue somewhat over whether it's actually an intermediate form, or 'missing link,' or not, since by some definitions it's really a bird already."

Oh. Moving on to less obvious questions: What on earth possessed her to consider riding a fixed gear for 508 miles over 35k elevation through some of the harshest terrain in the United States (does 508 miles not seem hard enough as it is??) I suspect the following are the primary causes:

- She doesn't like multi-speed bikes—so many moving parts, too much time to clean them!
- She read Sam "Seal" Beal's Tall Tale from 2004 and got hooked on the notion of trying the "almost impossible."
- Not having a car, she rides around Boston day and night, in the middle of winter on snow, ice and potholes—now there's adventure! It goes without saying that two days after the 508 she was commuting back and forth to work but rumor has it she might have relented and used a multi speed machine.



Notwithstanding my earlier remark about "hubris of the young," it was obvious early in the 508 she had researched into ultra endurance ride experiences from other fixies and applied what they have learned. Like wrapping towels around your bars and using a Gelco saddle for the worst road surfaces (e.g. once out of the Hilton parking lot). That lessened the hardship, at least a little tiny bit.

Less apparent was her game plan. Instead of peeling out of the Hilton parking lot and screaming thru the first five time stations, only to take 12 hours or more to get to the last two (kind of like yours truly, Ms. Osprey), Ms Archeopteryx applied a sensible regimen including generous rest stops (up to 1 hour) and short naps in between.

Not realizing she had it pretty well figured, I started fretting to the other crew that her chances of finishing in the next 24 hours were slim and none. The first 24 hrs into the 508 we were, I think, about fourth to last, and had scarcely covered 250 miles. We were far back of the rest of the field. On a positive note, she was at least very steady if a bit conservative in pace (~14mph) and showed no signs of mental or physical breakdown.



Leaving Baker a little before 6pm Sunday afternoon the crew decided we had to get really strict about time off the bike in order to reach 29 Palms by 7am. But it turns out she was way ahead of us. The legs suddenly started turning up the after burners, and it was all we could do but marvel at her relentless pace up the 21 Mile, Granite and Sheephole Passes. It was easy to forget the *extra* discomfort for a fixie of riding on bad road surfaces or having to spin 100+rpms down every descent watching her ride instead of coasting and recovering. If she was suffering she sure hid it well. I think she only stopped once to switch chammy lube regimens (Bag Balm, a technology developed by Vermont farmers and their dairy cows (“Mooooooo-Do you have to rub so hard?!?”)).

The highlight of the whole 508, besides finishing of course, was the sprint off she had with the other fixed gear rider in this year's 508, Sabertooth Salmon. She caught and passed him on Granite Hill, then had to relinquish her lead while the crew had to fiddle with a technical problem with the bike. She caught and passed him again on Sheephole. Only he suddenly streaks past her and we could see him saying something to her as he passed by. It turns out he was challenging her to this sprint-off. So now they both go 'supernova' up a steeper section of Sheephole and both crews are waiting for them to collapse in lactic acid-precipitated rigor mortis/end organ failure. She doesn't. Hmm. Slows a little, and resumes her climbing rhythm. Poor Sabertooth Salmon blows up after his erstwhile impressive burst of speed, and was last seen falling farther and farther back...

This is not to say that there weren't some, well, bumps in the road, so to speak along the way. Like the crew navigator (ah, I think it was me) sending her the wrong way on Neutralia Ave (oops) right before TS #1. Or watching her suddenly lean over her bike and paint the side of the road with regurgitated V8 juice on the way to Baker. Here Ms. Archeopteryx recovered nicely and was back on her bike within 20 minutes. At none of these times did she lose her composure (the same could not be said of the author) and was not once impatient or grouchy to the crew, although she did nearly break my ankle with an errant water bottle toss in the early going. “Hmm, I don't think she likes me very much.”

Both my 508 experiences reduced me to tears, temper tantrums, and nearly giving up at one or more points along the way. Photos of me at the finish line reveal to me what I will look like after a nuclear holocaust. In contrast, Ms. Archeopteryx looked like she was in the middle of one of her weekend club rides, maybe a little bit of dark circles cresting Townes Pass Saturday nite. I swear she looked better with each passing hour Sunday evening into Monday morning. Never once complained, cried, or swore. I only saw her grimace at the head winds at the top of Johannesburg Pass and the summit of Townes Pass.

The crew in turn made every effort to supply her with whatever she wanted, and did whatever we could think of to make this happen. We played Italian 17th Century Baroque music on the van speakers at 2am, gave up our cozy sleeping positions so she could nap, served up her specially brewed Boston coffee without helping ourselves to any, and performed stunning athletic feats on the side of the road during leapfrog support to keep her inspired. Jake, her boyfriend, crewmember and Michelangelo of the photojournalism world took Life magazine quality shots of rider and desert landscape for posterity. OK that's my plug for our crew. Way to go, crew!

We even performed ritualistic sacrifices to the Death Valley gods to spare our rider impossible heat and wind conditions. And they delivered. But with four hours to spare, and plenty of energy reserves at the finish, I am not sure Ms. Archeopteryx needed this dose of good fortune. Chris Kostman made her sprint up the driveway at the finish twice till he could get a decent video clip which no doubt we will see at next year's pre race meeting. Each time she obliged, I think getting quicker each time. She actually wanted to wait up for Sabertooth Salmon to cross the finish line. Fixed gear solidarity I guess. Unfortunately her exhausted crew bailed out on her.

She emailed me a couple days after getting back home to Boston. Remember, she does not own a car or have a driver's license so she really *has* to ride everywhere. She did admit she was a bit tired Wednesday coming home from her job.

So what is the key to such a splendid 508 debut? OK you read this far so I'll tell you. She drank a lot of this frothy 'dreamsicle' flavored stuff called Perpetuum. Turns out a lot of people like it. I, um, well moving on...what is next for Ms. Archeopteyix? Graduate school (music), outdoor concerts, and maybe another 508-like adventure somewhere down the line.

So I guess Bostonians don't think much of our coffee out here...





Why/How-To Perspectives



Guide to the Furnace Creek 508 for Women Less-Than-Brazenly Self-Confident ("FC Guide for WLTBSC" for short)

By Janet Osprey Christiansen

Whether you secretly long to prevail in ultra cycling events, or simply need something extraordinary to reach for, Furnace Creek 508 is an opportunity like no other for endurance cyclists. Surprisingly, the turnout for women is very low, or at least it was in 2003 (only three solos). Yet at double centuries, brevets and the like, I see many strong, strong-willed women toe up to the line and finish. Maybe all that is needed is a little encouragement. After all, I myself initially balked at the prospect of trying to do something as extreme as 508 miles in 48 hours till my Planet Ultra friends fed me a little encouragement and made me believe I could do it.

So stop reading here if you really don't want to get talked into doing the 508.

Too late. You will now get talked into doing this thing.

Training

Without much further ado, let me start out by saying to consider Furnace Creek, you should be fairly confident with doing double centuries, including some of the more difficult ones. Heartbreak, Tour of Two Forests, and Mulholland are good examples. Don't worry about absolute killers like the Santa Rosa Terrible Two. Nothing like that at the 508. Training wise, you do *not* have to become a road rat and train 400 miles a day. I only did one 22-hour ride a month before the 508. That was a bit light, as I would prefer to do two or three long rides of 22-30 hours. However, I did an Ironman in late August, so my schedule was a bit cramped for training for the 508 in seven weeks. It's also not necessary to train in the desert and ride in 129-degree heat and searing sun. But make sure you have "field" proven strategies for handling strong sun and very warm conditions worked out.

Support Crew

OK, now the next hurdle is putting together your crew. Like me, you probably are not plugged into the ultra cycling crowd, at least not yet. So you don't know who to help you do this. Here are some hints. Friends and family are often the best crews, even if they do not know how to fix a flat or have never done any cycling themselves. There is very little opportunity to actually do any bike techy stuff anyway. If they can read a map, follow a script and—above all—stay awake for a long time, they've got great crew potential. I created scripts and schedules for my crew to follow along, separate from the 508 script, which included when to eat, change clothes, change bikes, put on more sunscreen and take out my contact lenses. (DON'T keep those suckers in more than 12 hours in the desert!!! Desert dry air will really hurt your eyes.) So don't worry about not having a super-experienced crew. The most important thing is that they really care about you and can put aside "crew stress" to make sure you keep going.

You can (and arguably should) consider being on someone else's 508 crew before actually riding the 508. This way, you get "lots" of experience without beating up your body and using up resources (\$\$'s, time). Hopefully your rider will be willing to return crew support favors, or you can ask other crew members to help you out. Either way, after crewing for someone else, you now have a much better idea how to ride this course and how to set up your crew!

Bodily Desecration

I think women might be less enthusiastic to desecrate their bodies ultra-cycling style than men. The most important bit of advice I can give you is to do a couple of ultra-long training rides, including a 24-hour ride. Ideally, get your crew out there for the last few hours of such a ride so they know what you are like when you are mentally dulled from fatigue. MAKE SURE your crew has some experience riding behind you at night and know how to hand off water, food, etc. from the side of the road and from the passenger side of the van. It's not too hard, but don't wait till the 508 to learn on the job.

Another aspect of doing a trial long ride, is finding out how good your equipment is. When I did this, I found out very quickly that I needed to upgrade my cheapie \$25 shorts—which had worked fine for doubles—to the Ultra and Micro Sensor shorts. Very expensive but worth every dollar.

I will address some specific vulnerabilities below decks, and what worked well for me.

Saddle Discomfort

Aside from bringing along good shorts and saddle for the 508, I scheduled "hygiene" stops every five hours or so. During that

time I cleaned things with Gold Bond Medicated First Aid Wipes. It can be any type of wash cloth. The idea here is antiseptic. Might sting/burn a bit but it's only temporary. Then apply Gold Bond Medicated Body Powder to the "stern" and for the mid and aft sections a quality cyclist's lubricant like Chamois Butt'r. The Gold Bond stuff is in any pharmacy or supermarket, and the Chamois stuff you can search for on the Internet. I find Body Glide or Vaseline Petroleum do not work very well.

Ahhh. Now the saddle feels better. I also changed shorts about every 12 hours since that's roughly a double century ride (and because I don't have enough good shorts to change more often). Shorts changes take a long time. At night it will be cool and your legs will get cold, especially if you are at the top of Town's Pass. So make sure your van is organized to change quickly.

Here is how I dealt with the bumpy bad roads (e.g. the second half of the course). I would frequently get out of the saddle and pedal a minute or so. If you stay out of knee-mashing gears, your knees should be ok with this. Mainly it allows the chamois area to breathe a little, have increased blood flow, and takes the pressure off for a little while.

So you do all this stuff and you think you will get by scot free from the usual 508 rider discomfort. Nope. By the second day of the 508 you will experience chafing no matter what. But don't get too uptight. You're way better off than if you had not taken these protective measures. Also, your chafing and soreness doesn't generally get worse beyond a certain point. And whatever happens down there, it will heal pretty fast. This is one time women have less physiological liability than men. I have heard absolute horror stories of things happening to men since most of their "stuff" is external. No need to elaborate here. Despite my many trials and tribulations of the last stretches of the 508, that was one area that was not bothering me so much.

Nutrition/Food

I cannot imagine eating 400-600 calories an hour while cycling and not throwing up. But a lot of guys swear by this. I was fine with about 250-300 calories with a couple of meal stops (e.g., dinner and breakfast) that coincided with a shorts change (kill two birds during one lengthy stop). I recommend lots of non-sweet snacks since I guarantee you will get sick of hammer gel. I still cannot face Apple Cinnamon Hammer Gel. I was happy with baked potatoes (hold the butter and sour cream please!) and tuna sandwiches. Easy to eat on the bike too.

One thing I did NOT do was to watch my sodium intake (regrets, regrets!). I ended up developing hyponatremia. It took me weeks after the 508 to figure this out (I read an article about it in the RAAM cycling bulletin). This can easily happen because typical cycling foods (e.g., sports drinks) do not have a lot of sodium.** No need to be morbid on the subject. Since it is hard to quantify your exact needs during the 508, here are two simple rules that work for me.

1. Watch out for nausea. Eat a stack of saltines or a big ol' burrito with cheese immediately.
2. Eat a stack of saltines or a big ol' burrito with cheese anyway if you're wondering what to have for breakfast in Baker or middle of the night snack in Furnace Creek or top of Town's Pass.

The symptoms of hyponatremia include bloating (because you are actually over-hydrated), and not sweating (if it's daytime, the sun will feel like a branding iron on your skin). Plus you will start to become very fatigued. This is hard to detect, because if you are going to be fatigued—at least by 300 miles of riding, keep on taking electrolytes every hour. This is something your crew should keep track of: whatever food you eat, electrolyte capsules, and sports drink and when. By Sunday, they will be able to make better judgments than you will on how much you should be taking in. So they will end up "nagging" you on this. LISTEN TO THEM!

Dealing with the Menstrual Cycle

Guess what? Mine started at the top of Townes Pass. I discovered this while changing my shorts. #*\$&@#\$^*@&^!! But as it turned out, it scarcely had much of an effect on my riding. To be honest, menstrual cycles (and PMS days) are most disadvantageous for short, high intensity events like 10k running races, 40km time trials etc., etc. But for longer events, since you have to pace yourself anyway, the effects taper off. So don't obsess over this. Just remember to bring lots of Ibuprofen.

Not Keeping up with the Jackrabbits

I am the slowest starter in the history of cycling. I think if I turned my bike around backwards I would get out the starting gate faster. No question men have a built-in power advantage. Power is defined as the amount of work done per unit time (e.g., bursts of strength). But power will do you little good in ultra cycling. Except to look good out of the starting gate. As far as I am concerned, the jury is definitely out on whether guys have more "strength" than women. I don't wish to turn this into a Battle of the Sexes. Strength is rather vaguely defined, but as far as ultra cycling is concerned, good strength implies sustained power over longer periods of time. I think women have a certain advantage here. Mainly our hormonal profiles (surprise) change levels much less dramatically than men's from hour to hour. In my non-expert opinion, I believe this reflects the simple observation that guys seem to be designed for bursts of power whereas women are designed to be like the Energizer Rabbit (it keeps going and going and going...). So the jackrabbits that blow you away up San Francisquito Canyon while chatting and riding effortlessly may be doing only 3 mph up Town's Pass! And only 10 miles an hour on the road to 29 Palms. Of course they might be doing 20 mph too, which has been known to happen. But not very many riders can claim this feat! Moral of the story: if you think you are way behind everyone, consider that this may be because those behind you have quit or had to abandon. When most people find out you did the 508, they won't ask what place you finished. I have yet to have anyone ask me that. They will likely be awed that you accomplished such a feat.

Other Rider's Crews

The great thing about the 508 is the other crews will always cheer you on and may even lend a hand (I mean we all have to survive out there, right?). I got separated from my crew for a stretch of miles in the beginning (we got in sync later on). While they were frantically trying to find me, other crews very generously gave me water and food till I hooked up with my guys. I told my crew to always help another rider or crew in trouble. So you do have friends out there. And they will really enhance your 508 experience! Experienced riders and crew are always willing to answer your questions and give you helpful advice. My crew was pretty nervous at the start of the 508, having never seen the start of any race with riders, vans, officials all over the place. So I told them to find a nearby crew, tell them this is your first 508, and ask if it's ok to follow along behind them for the initial miles till the congestion thinned out a bit.

There is an Abundance of Interesting Articles on the 508 Web Site

Reading these will enable you to learn from other riders/crews mistakes as well as benefit from their experience. They may also keep you up at night. So try not to read them at bedtime. Most of these articles will be written by guys but they are not "that" different when it comes to handling sleep deprivation, fatigue and general 508 stress.

So now you are out of excuses to pass on the 508. Start planning early (June, July no later). I think I put more effort in preparation than training for the 508. But I love planning things out. It will be your hidden advantage if you do it right! If you want to email any cycling 508 questions or suggestions to me, or tell me I am an incredible dope (Nahhh, don't do that), please feel free to drop me a line at jchristi099@san.rr.com.

*** See "Water and Salt Intake", L. Weschler; Ultracycling, Jul-Aug 2003 Vol 12 No. 4 for complete discussion of fluid and salt intake during (very) long rides.*

