



Team **Bumble Skipper** at the Furnace Creek 508,
October 7-8 2006

Furnace Creek 508 is considered the world's hardest and one of the most renowned 500 mile race, but it is actually 508 miles long and has about 32,000 feet of climbing in it. This is where my ultracycling adventure started in 2001. IN 2001.. a Bumble Bee (My totem) found herself on the course... really just by mistake... and it changed my life. According to the laws of aerodynamics, the bumble bee is not supposed to be able to fly.. good thing that the little bumble bee did not know that.. I found that totem fitting for me. (<http://www.the508.com/articles/2001/finfrockberge2001.html>) and many times I have been planning on going back.

Finally in 2005... I made my way back. Was not really planning on racing this year either, this 2006 has been a recovery year from RAAM for me. But the girl, Mavis, that I was coaching got injured and my ultimate crew chief, Fuzzy Lee Mitchell, could not possibly foresee to not be there crewing, since it would be his 19th consecutive 508. I decided to race team with my regular tandem partner, Paul McKenzie (totem Muddy Mudskipper-a fish that jumps around in the bottom mud of the sea) So, there was team **Bumble Skipper**, a fish that can only jump around in the mud.. and a bee that is not supposed to fly.



As a common theme for racing with Paul was that we were not in shape and ready. I had been sick all August and wanted to bail out in the beginning of September. Paul got sick the last few weeks before the race, and had no real chance to train. But with the ultimate crew; Fuzzy Lee Mitchell, who was crewing his 19th 508, and Mavis Irwin, who was for the first time in her life, practicing her cheering and could hear herself (Mavis is deaf, and has just recently obtained some limited hearing through hearing aids). We decided to spite the circumstances, and go out and just have fun (we always tell ourselves that). I had been working with calves the whole previous day and the day before we left for the race my calf ranch went bankrupt and I had to move all my calves elsewhere. All my muscles were hurting and I was tired as we drove down to the start.

As we get down to the race check in, Paul quickly points out a couple oozing fitness in their thirties from Denmark, (totem *Gallus Gallus*), "*Those are pro's from Denmark and they look fit, they are our competition*", Paul states that with a somewhat apprehensive look. My pea-size self-confidence shrinks to a pinhead, also realizing that my team mate is mentally in full racing mode. Then he walks up to Team *Red Kangaroo*, (Paul Skilbeck and Andreas Caicedo), and tells them "*We are going to cream you guys soo bad!*" Paul did not know that I had informed Paul Skilbeck that we had been sick the last months, I had been lifting calves the last few days and was bruised all over, and that we were just out to have some fun!

The night before the race we were celebrated for our birthdays... I had jumped into a new decade group and according to Paul's cake, he was 25 again! (who switched the numbers)



Saturday morning. The solo riders start at 7 am and the teams at 9 am. Paul was biking the first leg and rider exchanges were fixed to the check points. I had expected this race to be easier, only needing to bike half the distance with breaks in between. I was wrong. Team racing was hard. It was an all-out effort short of going anaerobic on the bike for a 2.5-6 hours, and then transitioning to horizontal for a few hours trying to recover. At the first check point in California city I finally get on the bike about 1 pm. *Red Kangaroo* is ahead of us. I work really hard on the flats towards Randsburg, hammering up the Randsburg climb where we passed a lot of solo riders, and had I not had my mp3 player, I would have heard my intense rapid breathing for hours on end.



As I get close to Trona I pass *Red Kangaroo*. *Bumble Skipper* had now bridged the gap from the first checkpoint... and the two teams were starting a series of exchanges as the lead changed every leg of the ride. The competition was a really fun friendly type.



Going into Troona



Exchange in Troona - Red Kangaroo in white

As the sun sets Paul biked through Panamint valley towards the infamous Townes Pass. I sang happy birthday Paul (see picture.. he smiles), and then dose off as Paul struggles up Towne's pass.



Paul is not feeling quite well, but still climbing strong. *Red Kangaroo* passes us. At the top of Towne's Pass we have a 16 mile super fast descent, where riders can hit 90 km per hour. Lee tells me to strap myself down in the back as the van swings from side to side, trying to keep Paul's view lit up with the headlights of the car.

A fast switch of riders (we had practiced, it took under 1 minute) at Furnace Creek. and At night the car has the follow the rider at all times, so we had to take on bike down from the roof and put one up, as fast as possible and get rider on road, crew in car, and the off again. I attack Death Valley, the lowest place in the USA... 60 feet below sea level, 45 miles of flats and rollers before the climb up Jubilee and Salisbury. Death valley is deceptive because you can see very far, but the road is winding in and out, and you lose sight of riders ahead too. The stars and the moon is out, and I see a scorpion crossing the road. It is an eerie haunted place and Badwater is a place that sure smells bad! I see 6 blinking lights indicating riders and follow cars ahead. I decide to catch them all. I ask Lee to put on my Swedish music from the 1970s and then hammer through Death valley towards the climbs. I catch the other riders, one by one... and find myself climbing standing up the climbs, feeling strong. On Salisbury we meet a somewhat hurting Kenny Souza (in post RAAM mode who later DNFs), and then we catch *Red Kangaroo* again. At the top of Salisbury I finally catch Reed *Flamingo* Finfrock, my friend who tricked me out to do my first FC 508 in 2001. Reed is biking strong and showing that 60-years is not too old for 508. Then a nippy cold descent... I go into a tuck to increase speed and all my muscles hurt. I always hurt more on descents in long rides than on the climbing section.



Another fast switch in Amboy, and Paul gets to take a relatively short flat pull to Baker. Paul, a true climber, is not fully in his elements, and again *Red Kangaroo* comes zooming past.

As we pull into Baker a minute after *Red Kangaroo* and manage to leave a half minute before them, we are pretty impressed with our transitions. *Red Kangaroo* Andreas comes shooting past me like a rocket going up to a low grade 20 mile climb out of Baker. I just look at him go past... and Paul chuckles in the van, that I did not miss a beat or blink an eye at his shoot-out (Paul just knows that I bike my own race). The climb up Baker is hard... it is not hilly enough to be a hill and not flat enough to be flat. I am not in my elements and have a hard time catching up with Andreas. I know that if I don't catch him on the hill, I will not get him on the descents or on the flats. Halfway up the climb, suddenly *Gallus Gallus* comes by at high speed, the Danish guy riding extremely strong, and we had not seen them for over half the race now. Our team spirits goes into the dumps, I can feel Paul's spirits sink through the floor of the van and dare not make contact with him. I think to myself "Now it is shot, we can't catch *Gallus Gallus* the way that guy was riding, and we can't compete with *Red Kangaroo* if I don't catch Andreas." I tell myself that Paul and I, a recreational unfit 40+ team should not be ashamed to be beaten by a professional 30+ team, but I know those kinds of thoughts are detrimental to my speed.

As I finally crest Baker climb behind *Red Kangaroo*, I am a bit upset with myself for not having switched from my climbing bike with a compact chain ring, to my Titanflex with a 56-tooth chainring. We are several minutes behind at the next transition, and team spirits are low as Paul does the next leg, a short 30 mile leg with one climb. I try to get some rest before my final 58 mile leg. The last rest stop, near Amboy has their usual Hawaii theme and high spirits. I am not quit in the mood, and when they tried to put a Hawaii lei on me, with the sign "I got lei'd at time station 7" I tell them that I am not in the mood to get lei'd right then but the can check in with my team mate.



Headwinds and heat as I attack a 20 mile stretch and then the final 10 mile climb. Going up the climb I suddenly see a tiny little slow moving speck in the hill, and I think to myself *'It must be Red Kangaroo'*... the legs start churning faster, and I start my standing dance up the hill. My bike van pulls ahead to pull out Titanflex for the final stretch. As my team van expects Andreas to crest first, they suddenly see me charging past at the speed of light... I jump between bikes and start cranking up the pace downhill, knowing that I can only stay away or with Andreas if I get really aerodynamic. My aero tuck works and at the bottom of the hill, Andreas shoots past me and I am thinking that there is no way that I can keep up with that guy. But I pass him again saying *'Don't slack of now'* expecting us to challenge each other to the finish. But Andreas has given his all and I pull away from *Red Kangaroo* on the final 22 miles to the finish. Our finishing time was **28 hours 49 minutes**, we broke the course record by 10 hours (or like Mavis so nicely put it, *'We were 14 seconds short of breaking the course record by 10 hours'*). *Red Kangaroo* came in at 29:08 and *Gallus Gallus* had arrived 29 minutes ahead of us.



We were happy with our race, I hugged *Red Kangaroo* and thanked them for such a fun race. So.. not too bad for two untrained old recreational riders. Next year teams... watch it.



Then final note goes to those who kept us going. What can I say about Lee? No better 508 crew chief possible!... and Mavis... her spirits and enthusiasm was so infectious, and every single rider and crew on the course were cheered up by her spirits and screams! Team *Bumble Skipper* lived up to their name!



FINAL THANK YOU GOES TO OUR FRIEND CHRIS KOSTMAN AND ALL THE WONDERFUL RACE ORGANISERS, VOLUNTEERS AND OTHER PARTICIPANTS THAT KEEPS MAKING THIS RACE AN EPIC ADVENTURE!!!